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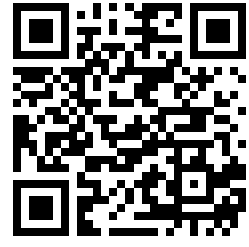

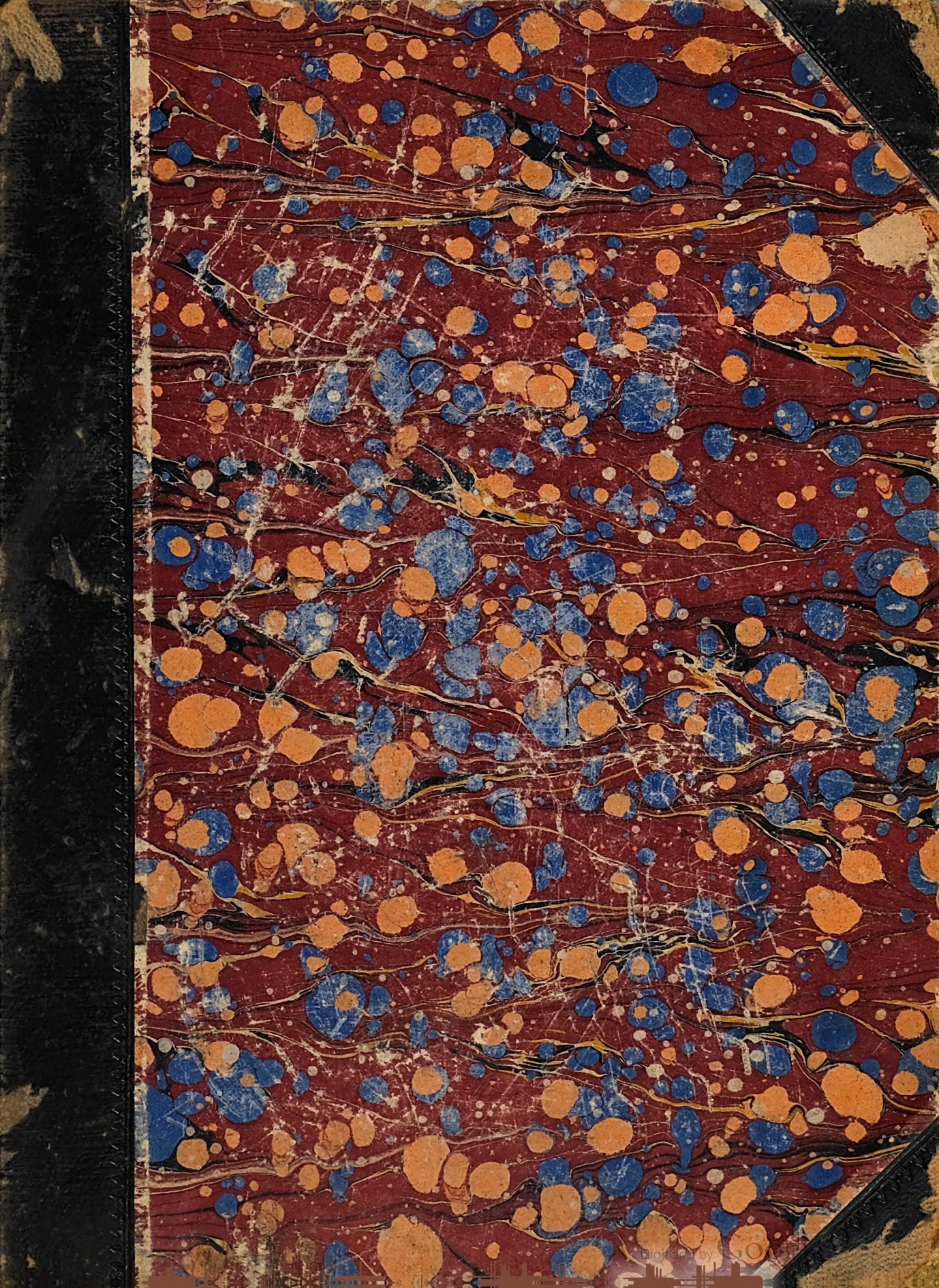

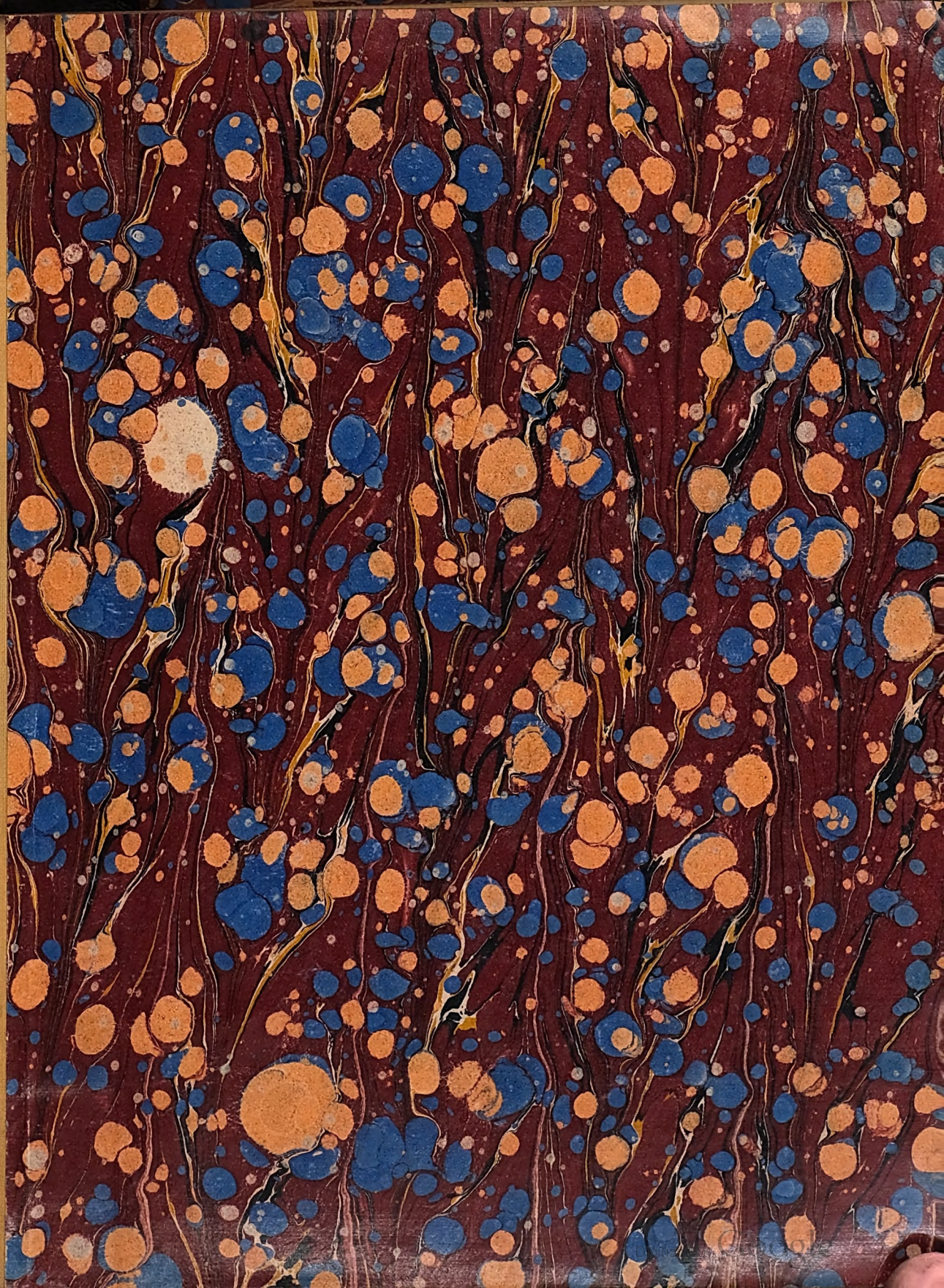

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No. 705.) Week Ending July 5th, 1902. (Price One Penny.

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(A Thrilling Incident from our Powerful Story, "THE OTHER WOMAN." See first page.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 705.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending July 5th, 1902.

THE OTHER WOMAN.

A Powerful Story of Love and Hate.

Complete Short Story.

CHAPTER I.

A Basket of Strawberries.

"AND I say he's making a fool of you, Diamond—well, Miss Abbot, if you like that better—as any young swell can make a fool of a girl who happens to be out of his own class. White hands and smart clothes and a little flattery count for a lot with a woman, but they won't mend a broken heart or take the place of a comfortable home and a wedding ring. Your precious Mr. Garner will end by jilting you, as sure as my name's Dick Pascoe, and then you'll be sorry you didn't snap at me."

There was an unmistakable interruption, the stamp of a small, firmly-shod foot upon the plank floor of a green-painted, low-roofed verandah in which the speaker sat by a bamboo table, over a crumbled roll and a half-empty tea-cup.

"If you should want anything else, Mr. Pascoe," he was told, "perhaps you won't mind ringing, I—we are rather busy this morning."

"That's a fib, that won't satisfy me," retorted Richard Pascoe ungallantly, breaking a piece of sugar and flinging the fragments at a group of sparrows that were pecking about the verandah; "there's not a customer on this side of the house and won't be till Garner—confound him!—comes back for his usual eleven o'clock second breakfast and flirtation. Why can't you be honest and confess that you hate the sight of me?"

Diamond Abbot fingered a cluster of drooping carnations at the bosom of her black silk blouse; a faint flush stole into her cheeks, crept to her temples, and vanished under the loose curls of her brown tresses.

"I—I don't hate the sight of you, Mr. Pascoe," she answered, "but I do wish you wouldn't worry over me so much, and wouldn't be always—always sneering at Mr. Garner. If you had ever noticed his hands you would see that they are as brown as a berry, and he isn't a bit particular about his clothes being smart; at all events, when he is working down yonder. He doesn't seem to care what he does to hurry the men on—that is, he didn't before the strike broke out and stopped the works altogether."

Richard Pascoe looked over the hotel verandah to where, at the further extremity of its sloping lawn and dusty shrubberies, the shallow waters of the Dene swept by on their way from the port of Coldharbour to the sea, past the mouth of the sandy creek near which the hotel stood. A great trench bordered the flat shore of the river, shut off from the stream by an embankment, surmounted by a temporary railway, which was carried across the creek by a wooden viaduct built upon piles.

In the trench itself long rows of contractors' wagons, filled with excavated earth, baked in the mellow June sunshine, and steam "navvies" idly extended their steel jaws towards the walls of the cutting. But the men that should have been toiling like busy ants in the huge bed of the unfinished Coldharbour Ship Canal, were lounging by the hundred about the narrow streets of Port Skillion, the works depôt of the Coldharbour Ship Canal Company, whose operations promised one day to restore to Coldharbour itself something of its old prosperity. Beyond the canal a few coasters tacked inward along the dangerous channel of the silting-up river, and vast stretches of tawny sand gleamed wetly in the sun.

"Ay," said Richard Pascoe, getting up from his seat after a moment's apparent consideration of the prospect; "our friend Garner hasn't spared himself the last month or two, I grant you. No wonder; Sir James West, the chairman of the company, is a sort of patron of his, and Kenneth Garner has tumbled to the fact that Sir James has a pretty daughter. Lilian West is a splendid creature—all red-gold hair and creamy complexion. If the canal is a success Sir James will be an immensely rich man—he has bought a lot of land in Coldharbour and the canal should double its value. 'Brilliant young engineer—financier's beautiful and only child'—it will be quite a Society romance."

He was glancing covertly at the girl beside him. Diamond Abbot had grown very pale and she drew her hand sharply from the flowers at her breast. Her tormentor went on deliberately as he paid down the amount of his bill upon the table.

"You didn't suppose there wasn't another woman, did you," he added with a harsh laugh; "in cases like these there always is and it's the other woman that wins. Consider the difference between Miss Lilian West, of Berkshire and Mayfair, and little Diamond Abbot, of the Port Skillion Hotel, a local belle and licensed victualler's daughter."

Richard Pascoe lighted himself a cigarette and puffed at it deliberately.

"By the by," he continued, "Sir James is in Coldharbour at present and is coming over to meet the strike-leaders, I believe Miss West is to be with him. So get a glimpse of her if you can, and then you can tell me what you think of your rival. *Au revoir*, I must get back to the Canal office and keep my subordinates in order—the strike is demoralising even us clerks."

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Diamond was galled into anger by his insolent air of patronage.

"Mr. Pascoe," she exclaimed desperately, "I don't believe a word of what you say about Mr. Garner, and what is more, I don't believe you believe it yourself. You would only like to."

And with this downright, if slightly incoherent declaration, she moved away. The chief clerk strode after her, his face crimsoned by a sudden passion. It seemed as though Diamond's chance arrow had unexpectedly hit the mark.

"Very well, Di!" he cried, hoarsely, "stick to your infatuation if you choose. But mark me, it will bring you no luck, no luck!—nor will it bring any to Kenneth Garner, either."

Not pausing to witness the effect of his grim prophecy, he swung round, and descending the steps of the verandah, hastened athwart the lawn of the hotel towards the road below.

Diamond gazed after him abstractedly—she was pondering his reference to Kenneth Garner and Lilian West.

"It wasn't true," she said to herself; "I know it wasn't true!"

"What wasn't true?" demanded a cheerful voice. Diamond turned. A young and masculine figure—tanned, athletic and set off by a big Panama and a breezy grey suit—stalked on to the verandah. Diamond smiled brightly.

"Good morning, Mr. Garner," she answered; "I was just thinking, and I expect I spoke aloud without meaning to. Will you have anything to eat with your coffee this morning?—you went out in such a hurry I hadn't time to ask."

Kenneth Garner tossed his hat on to a chair, deposited by it a tissue paper package and clasped his querist's hands.

"My second breakfast is a fraud, Diamond," he responded; "it serves merely as an excuse for a chat with you. But how formal we are to-day!—you will have me saying Miss Abbot next, and I understood distinctly that I was to be allowed 'Diamond.' What a queer little name—shall I ever get used to it? And yet you are a jewel among women."

Diamond released herself gravely. "That is a compliment I am quite accustomed to," she assured him; "my name provokes everyone to it. And you haven't told me if you want anything with your coffee or not."

"Coffee be—hanged!" ejaculated Kenneth Garner; "I'm in a tearing rush this morning, and must dispense with it. Sir James West, the chairman of the Canal company, is coming down this afternoon to see the strike-leaders. But I didn't forget your flower, and a better one than yesterday. I was really ashamed of those carnations, they were half-dead when I gave them to you."

He caught up his hat again and took out of it a half-dewy, open rose, dripping and pink as a girl's first blush. Diamond accepted it with a murmur of delight; Kenneth availed himself of the transfer to repossess himself of her hands.

"You can't guess," he whispered, "how happy it makes me to see you wear my flowers, Diamond, I—I wish you wouldn't take a single blossom from anybody else."

Diamond laughed coquettishly and would have slipped away without answering. But he detained her gently.

"There," he said, "I have no right to ask that. Yet do me a favour. Let me see you fasten my rose at your breast."

With fingers trembling irrepressibly, Diamond obeyed him. Kenneth Garner relieved her of the deposed carnations and laid them in his pocket-book.

"Since you have worn them," he observed, sentimentally, "they shall not be thrown away. And, now," he added, "I must recollect that I am here more or less on business. I want to bring Sir James here for a cup of tea about four, after the conference with the strike-leaders is over. Talking is a dry job and it will be a dusty drive back to Coldharbour in Sir James' motor-car."

He reached to the package he had laid down and unfastened it—it contained a basket of perfect strawberries, large, ripe and of a costly variety.

"A lady will be with us," he said; "Miss West, Sir James' daughter, so I took the precaution to order these from Coldharbour. She is fond of fruit." He glanced at his watch.

"By Jupiter!" he cried, "I must beat a retreat. Good-bye—see that I sustain my reputation as a host with Miss West and her father."

Diamond looked at the strawberries as he went out by the way that Richard Pascoe had gone.

"So these are for Miss West," she remarked; "and he knew that she likes them. I—I wonder if Miss—Miss Lilian is very pretty."

She crossed the verandah and entered the empty sitting-room of the hotel. As she did so she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror, slender, dark-eyed, a little pale, with the rose-bud, a touch of colour at her bosom. She put up her hand, as if to take it away, but left it where it was.

"If I could really doubt him," he said to herself; "even for a minute—I should deserve it to be true."

CHAPTER II.
"Mr. Pascoe was Right."

"I believe, Mr. Garner, that even my pet Bond Street tea-room must yield the palm to this quaint old hotel. Henceforth I shall pity you no longer. Here have I been imagining you vegetating in a muddy wilderness, waiting for the end of this stupid strike, while you have really been living in clover. Don't you think, papa, that Mr. Garner is guilty of obtaining sympathy under false pretences?"

Lilian West put down her tea-cup and leant back in a comfortable wicker lounge-chair. She was a tall, good-tempered, smartly-dressed blonde—the late afternoon sunshine glistened in her yellow locks and made the folds of her filmy muslin gown like gossamer. Her father—a big-limbed, corpulent, grey-moustached Englishman—smiled at her tolerantly.

"I can't say," she was told, "that Mr. Garner has ever tried to excite our sympathy. On the contrary, he has always been rather enthusiastic about his quarters. By the way, what a pretty girl that is waiting on us!—do you know, Lilian, I almost begin to suspect Garner's enthusiasm."

Kenneth Garner intervened—hastily—"I fancied, Sir James," he remarked, "that I had successfully cultivated the reputation of a man too absorbed in an arduous profession to spare time for the worship of beauty. Indeed, I understand that I am reported in some quarters to be nothing less than a woman-hater."

Sir James West wiped his long moustache and showed an excellent set of white teeth.

"I suspect that Lilian has her own opinion as to that," he chuckled.

Lilian laughed—a laugh with an odd inflection in it—and rose abruptly to gaze over the verandah railing at the dusty and deserted works of the canal.

"Are you wiseacres ever going to put an end to this provoking strike?" she said, evasively; "I want to see the big ships go up to Coldharbour as they used to do when I was a little tiny girl."

Her father coughed and his broad British face set sternly. "By Monday morning," he answered, "we send in fresh.

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hands to take the place of the strikers, unless they go in themselves. The leaders have forty-eight hours to consult their men."

Lilian studied the great trench and its bordering embankment. "They say," she murmured, "that the men have threatened, if you send in your fresh hands, to wreck the works. How—how would they do it?"

Sir James frowned. "Pierce the river-wall, perhaps," he rejoined, "and drown out everything in the canal-bed, or any other piece of wanton mischief that occurs to them."

His daughter gasped. "How wicked it would be!" she said, "and how un-English, wouldn't it?"

"It would, Miss West," agreed Kenneth Garner, "and so we must trust it won't be done. But we are taking every precaution. The embankment is well guarded, and I patrol it myself after dark on a light engine."

"But if they blew you up too," exclaimed Lilian West.

Kenneth Garner snapped his fingers carelessly.

"They won't do that," he replied; "I believe that they have a sort of weakness for me, on the whole."

Lilian came to his side as he sat at the dainty tea-table.

"You won't run any foolish risks, Mr. Garner," she said bravely; "I don't think my father's obstinacy is quite worth your life. If I had my way I should give the strikers their extra shilling, or whatever it is, and let the canal go on. Wouldn't you, Mr. Garner?"

Sir James pushed back his chair and rose also. "You don't comprehend the difference between profit and loss, my dear child," he told her, "and the company's engineer has to acquiesce in the view of his directors. Well, Garner, I think we'd better be off, for I dine in Coldharbour to-night with the Mayor. I'll just see if my motor is all right—the oil gave out and my mechanic has been ransacking the neighbourhood for more. You must run over to Coldharbour in it with us and tell me how you like it."

He walked off the verandah through the open windows of the hotel, turning to glance back rallyingly at the two he was leaving alone. Lilian West drew nearer to her companion.

"It works beautifully," she said, "the plan, not the motor; didn't you notice how the dear old thing tried to chaff us?"

Kenneth Garner sighed. "Yes," he admitted, "but I don't relish it, Miss West. It—it isn't quite fair to him. Of course I am yours to command, yet if—if it hadn't been you who persuaded Sir James to give me the chance of my life, I don't believe I ever should have consented—to—to——"

"To play the chivalrous knight to the lady in distress," concluded Lilian; "well, you have begun it now, and you may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Come on, I hear the coughing of the motor, so they've got it going again. We can cut through the garden, can't we—what a quaint, charming place this is!"

Kenneth Garner gave her his arm as they descended the wooden steps that led to the lawn, and they made for the front of the hotel side by side. When they had disappeared round the projecting angle, a little figure crept out of the room that opened on to the verandah, glided to the railing and looked over. It was Diamond Abbot.

"Mr. Pascoe was right," she said brokenly; "he is only amusing himself with me. It is Miss West he really loves."

She sat down in a niche of the verandah and buried her face in her hands. For some while she stayed thus—silently, hopelessly wretched. Suddenly a voice reached her ear—a voice husky, suppressed, and yet familiar. It came from a ramshackle arbour, on a lower level, that communicated with a bar of the hotel affected by its poorer patrons, and entered from a back street. Diamond peered through the railings and the creeper-covered roof of the arbour beneath.

A trio of men occupied the latter, lounging over empty pipes and glasses, and smoking clay pipes. Two were rough, corduroy-clad navvies, the third a fellow in a dirty top-coat and slouch-hat. It was his voice that had reached her, and he was still speaking.

"Why have I a grudge against this Garner?" he growled, "'cause I'm an honest working-man and he got me the sack off the canal, that's why. And if you want to know, it's him that's stiffening Sir James's back not to give you follows what you're asking. Once get him out of the road and you'll have a chance of scoring. Besides, it'll show them that you mean business and won't spite yourselves as much as wrecking the canal. I'd do the job myself, only I want help, and it's precious little I'm asking you to do. Is it a deal, or is it not?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then a muttered assent. An emptying of glasses and a shuffling of feet followed, as the three took themselves off out of the arbour.

Diamond's heart was beating wildly. In spite of its assumed hoarseness and affected vulgarity, the voice that had attracted her attention was that of Richard Pascoe, and the square, strong form of the speaker—though disguised—was his.

Something evil was going to be done, and upon his instigation—something that threatened the safety, even the life, of Kenneth Garner. And it was Kenneth Garner whom she had just pronounced guilty of the greatest wrong a man can do to a loyal and loving woman.

CHAPTER III.

"Let me Say we are Betrothed."

"S-s-t! you fools! put some more grease on that saw, can't you? It's shrieking like a stuck pig, and the wind's not all that high."

The two dark figures thus roughly addressed ceased their labour. They were perched upon the stout beams of the little swinging wooden viaduct which had been built across the mouth of the wide creek near the Port Skillion Hotel in order that the miniature bay might remain open for traffic till the canal was practically completed. Over Port Skillion, the canal bed, and the vast, sandy stretches of the river, brooded a windy summer night.

"See here, mate," grumbled one of the toilers, with an oath, stiffening himself and wiping the perspiration from his brow with the back of a knotted fist; "who are you to be ordering us about like this? Tackle the job yourself if you're not satisfied—it's a danged dirty business, and I wish I was well out of it."

Their critic crawled forward over the wooden lattice-work, over which ran the metals of the contractor's railway, and bent down to take the end of a long, two-handed saw, pull it from the beam into which place it had bitten, and rub it with a lump of tallow. The man he had displaced, as if ashamed of his momentary spasm of conscience, went to the other side of the beam and helped to operate the keen tool. When it had severed three-quarters of the log, the chief of the two stopped.

"There!" he said, "that's the last, the weight of the engine will do the rest—Kenneth Garner will not make another round of his blessed embankment, I'll bet. Now be off, and remember, it's penal or the gallows for any man who breathes a word of this. The whole place is watched, so be careful how you go—we've not been a bit too quick—there's the moon. Mind, you idiots, and don't step on those sawn timbers—a touch will finish them."

He slid down between the beams, imitated by his assistants,

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just as the silver disc of the summer moon rose above the cloud masses behind Port Skillion.

"We'd better choose different ways," he told them, "so's not to render ourselves more conspicuous than we need. I'll go west, you can go east. Good night to you, and remember, a still tongue makes a wise, and especially, a safe head."

Agile as a cat, he swung himself from one part of the woodwork to another, moving in the direction of the nearest point at which the viaduct joined the embankment. A broad shaft of pallid light fell momentarily athwart his features from the drifting moon—they were those of Richard Pascoe.

His two allies growled a hoarse farewell and vanished in the gloom, while Richard Pascoe pursued his devious course. A faint sigh, like a heavily drawn breath, arrested him and he glanced up, straining his vision. Above him, crawling from sleeper to sleeper of the railway track, was the form of a woman. He dragged himself closer and peered at her. With a start he saw that she was Diamond Abbot and that she was looking down at him.

"You!" he whispered, shrinking back in astonishment, "what are you doing here, curse you?"

Diamond Abbot gazed at Richard Pascoe with a curious determination in her eyes. "I am going to save him," she said, "I heard you plotting in the arbour at the hotel, and as I could not find him to warn him I followed you—I have followed you for hours."

Richard Pascoe pulled himself up fiercely. "Yes," he exclaimed desperately; "the more unlucky you! I would have killed him because he stood between us, and now I shall have to kill you to save myself from the law."

He gained the elevated track at a bound and jumped towards her.

Diamond sprang to her feet and fled—in the direction of the spot at which the almost severed beams of the bridge still bore the weight of the metals and sleepers. In the windy gloom Richard Pascoe forgot his bearings and pursued her recklessly.

Headlong she darted down the line, springing from plank to plank as if she had been crossing a stream by stepping-stones. Under her, at the piles of the viaduct, the river lapped and sucked, and behind her came Richard Pascoe, with murder in his heart.

Unconscious of her exact peril, Diamond sped over the dangerous spot—in safety; her almost childish weight was too trifling to break through the last fibres of the severed beams. Suddenly a rending noise arose; there was a rumble, a splash, and twelve or fifteen feet of timber and metal collapsed at her back. With it had disappeared a reeling human figure—Richard Pascoe had fallen into his own ingenious and fatal trap.

Amazed, yet vaguely comprehending, with a thrill of pity, the catastrophe, Diamond stopped. While she hesitated, another sound reached her, the peculiar clanking of an engine running without a load to steady it. A star of light was nearing her along the embankment. She knew it for the headlight of the engine upon which, since the strikers had become threatening, Kenneth Garner had patrolled the all-important river-wall.

Horrified, yet galvanised into action, Diamond sped towards it, springing from sleeper to sleeper across the open water of the little bay, and calling, in broken girlish tones, a desperate warning.

A bronzed face glanced suddenly from the cab of the leisurely moving engine — a face that showed stern and anxious in the moonbeams and the yellow glare from the fire-box of the locomotive. An instant more and the engine had halted, dead — upon the brink of the fallen span. Diamond reached the metal step, gasped, tottered, caught at a strong hand, and fainted—to be drawn up into the arms of Kenneth Garner.

* * * * *

"Don't touch me!" said Diamond, indignantly, late that same night, as she lay on a sofa in the sitting-room of the Port Skillion Hotel, alone for a few moments with Kenneth Garner; "as if I didn't know all about the—the other woman."

The engineer stared at her. "The other woman, Diamond!" he exclaimed; "what in Heaven's name are you dreaming about?"

"I am not dreaming," faltered Diamond; "you love Miss West and you were only playing with me. But I couldn't help trying to save you, though I do wish that terrible Mr. Pascoe hadn't been killed."

"My dear little girl," answered Kenneth Garner, astonished, "you are talking in riddles, Pascoe killed!—myself in love with Lilian West!"

Diamond shuddered and lowered her voice. "The man that fell through the broken bridge," she said, "the one that was managing it all, was Mr. Pascoe—I recognised him at once. He—he was trying to revenge himself—on—on you—because he—fancied I cared for you. That was why he had disguised himself and tried to induce some of the men to attempt your life. It was he who told me about your being fond of Miss West. I said at first I didn't believe it, but—but afterwards when I had seen you and her together, I had to."

Kenneth Garner strove to grapple with the amazing piece of information he had just received.

"My poor Diamond," he said; "Pascoe was either lying outright, or else deceived, yet he came near the mark, for though Lilian West will never marry me, more than one person, including her father, supposes us in love. I have lent some support to that rumour—at Miss West's wish—she is devoted to a young soldier whom Sir James dislikes and while he suspects her of a passing interest in me, he relaxes his vigilance in another quarter. But this is a ghastly story about Pascoe. I am afraid it must all come out, too, which is worse. You—you must let me say we are betrothed, it will make things easier for you. Then, if you choose, we can break it off quietly."

Diamond covered her face. "You may punish me that way, if you like," she said, "I deserve it."

Her lover gathered her into her arms.

"You foolish child," he said; "as if you had not proved yourself a heroine. My life is not mine now, it is yours, to do what you like with."

"And what about Miss West and her soldier?" asked Diamond, some time after.

Kenneth Garner shrugged his shoulders.

"I know Sir James better than his daughter or he himself does," said the engineer; "he will relent—before his Lilian's heart is quite broken. Besides, he will be in great good humour for the next while. The strike is over—in a day or two we shall all be at work again upon the canal. Before the first ship goes up, my darling, you shall be Mrs. Garner."

R. Norman Silver.

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A Man, Two Maids, and Some Money.

Telling of the Transference of both Love and a Fortune.

MADGE sat before the drawing-room fire, apparently lost in thought. The cheerful blaze leapt and sank in the grate, casting audacious gleams amongst her wavy brown hair and dimpled mouth. Her eyes, so far as they were visible amongst the shadows, seemed to be troubled. But shadows, doubts, troubles, and everything else vanished in an instant when the door was flung wide open and a visitor strode into the room.

"Jack!" she cried delightedly, and with just a quiver in her voice—"Save me from my loneliness. Come and sit by the fire. How are you?"

"Going strong, with land in sight," he answered, cheerfully.

"Mabel is out in town."

"Oh, that's all right. It's you I want to see to-day, Madge. Shall I sit here?"

"Yes, anywhere." But she pulled her own chair back amongst the shadows as she spoke.

"You and I have always been good friends?"

"I suppose so—I hope so," she stammered.

The earnestness in his eyes deepened. He forgot the chair he had selected so carefully a moment before, and sprang to his feet.

"Look here, Madge," he blundered affectionately. "Dear old Madge, you and I have always been like brother and sister, but—I want—I hope——"

"We've been friends—and we are now—don't spoil our friendship," she whispered, with a sudden shrinking from her expected happiness.

"I want to be your brother in reality if you will have me."

"Jack?"

"Mabel accepted me last night," he said, "and I've come round now on purpose to tell you, although probably you already know all about it from Mabel. No? She's too shy. She's most bewitchingly shy," he added. "Shall I light up? Or will you draw your chair nearer—you look so lonely somehow in that dark corner."

"No, don't light the gas. I'm all right here."

"You know it isn't like an ordinary engagement, Madge. I mean you're not going to lose a sister but to gain a brother. And we'll keep a special cosy chair by the fireside—by our fireside—for you."

He continued in this way for another few minutes, and then he became vaguely aware that something was wrong. He felt just a little annoyed at the lack of interest in his love affairs shown by Madge. As a rule she was kindness and sympathy itself. The thought of these two qualities swung his mind in an instant round to Mabel. What a difference there was between the two sisters! He bade her good evening in a somewhat hurt tone and left the room.

Then she sank upon the sofa. The little brown head fell pitcously amongst the cushions and the bright eyes filled and overflowed. Two or three minutes later the door was opened again and a tall, loosely-built girl entered the room. Her face was attractive with that sort of empty prettiness which attracts a man for six months and estranges him for a lifetime. This was Madge's step-sister.

"Whatever's the matter?" she asked carelessly, and then, without waiting for an answer—"Has—have you had any visitors?"

"Jack has been here," said Madge steadily. "He has told me of your engagement. He's only just gone. I hope you will be very happy together."

"Naturally," simpered Mabel affectedly. "He's a good old boy though he's rather too much in earnest about me. But I'll soon cure him of that after we're married."

Madge looked at her in horror. This was not the spirit in which *she* would have considered Jack.

"You don't seem a bit pleased," said Mabel pettishly. "Did you want him yourself? Everything seems to go wrong to-day. That library book was out again, and now as soon as I get home you look at me as though I had committed a murder. You are not a bit nice to me."

She flounced angrily out of the room. And Madge stared with tear-dimmed eyes into the heart of the fire and found that pity for herself had given place to an all-absorbing helpless pity for Jack.

* * * * *

Apparently life in lodgings did not suit Madge. She had spent six weeks in one of these "Homes from Home," and already the bright eyes were dull and spiritless and the roguish dimples had retired, disgusted with their new environment.

Soon after the announcement of Mabel's engagement her step-father died very unexpectedly, apparently without having made a will. As Madge was only the daughter of his first wife Mabel inherited everything. The latter at once assumed a patronising air towards her elder sister, mortifying her independence in every possible way, until finally—

"Finally, here I am," said Madge dolefully, embracing in one disgusted sweep of her hands everything in the dingy little room. "And if I don't find some work very soon—I wonder if they have to wear a uniform in the workhouse—a sort of pauper dress so that nobody can mistake them for human beings—I didn't leave my address with Mabel because she didn't care about it—but Jack might have—he said——"

She began to struggle miserably with her tears. Just as she was about to throw up the sponge and have a really comfortable cry, a sudden rat-tat at the door startled her into some degree of composure.

Then Jack strode swiftly into the room. Madge sprang forward, but stopped as suddenly, and shook hands.

"Good morning, Jack," she said, in an off-hand manner, and then winked energetically in a vain attempt to recapture a tear that glittered upon the fringe of the little brown eyes. The truant having obtained his liberty tried to keep it, but at the very commencement of his explorations he fell head over heels and splashed right upon Jack's hand.

The latter, who knew something of the ways of women, discovered a sudden interest in some books that stood upon the table.

"'Landor's Imaginary Conversations,'" he said, with a long whistle of surprise; "and Potter's 'Antiquities of Greece,' Upon my word, Madge, you only need 'The Master Christian!' and your classical library's complete."

"They were left by my predecessor," said Madge. "How is Mabel?"

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It was Jack's turn to look gloomy now. "I haven't seen her for nearly six months," he said. "Do you know our engagement is at an end?"

"I had not heard," she said simply.

"Don't sympathise," he laughed. "I must admit that my vanity has suffered more than any other part of me. Indeed, I think you and I are suffering from the same cause—your step-father's money. But what have you been doing in the last six months?"

"Looking for some work to do," she said miserably. But her tone was not half so gloomy as before.

"Looking for work!" he echoed. "Why, Madge, I know of exactly the thing. Now just listen to me." He drew his chair a little nearer to her own. He dropped his bantering tone and spoke with simple earnestness. "Do you know, Madge, I'm very pleased that Mabel terminated our engagement. We were not suited to each other. And I've been rather puzzled since then, because, instead of being troubled by thoughts of Mabel, I've spent a great deal more time in wondering how somebody else was getting on. Somebody with curly brown hair and the dearest little bright eyes you ever saw——"

"You said you knew of a situation for me?" she said stubbornly, and yet afraid to look at him.

"Can't you guess what situation I meant, Madge? I want you to spend the rest of your life making me happy. That seems a very selfish way of putting it, but you've only to say 'yes' to a question I'm going to ask you and the thing's done. Will you be my wife, Madge?"

And then she managed to speak, and said "no" a hundred times over, but meant "yes" two thousand times. And she beat her little wings against the prison of happiness in which he sought to hold her.

"No, no, Jack," she cried. "It can't be! It's utterly impossible."

"Do you love me, Madge?"

Something in his eyes forced the truth from its hiding-place, away down in the warmest corner of her heart.

"Yes," she whispered. But if she had spoken it twenty times as softly he would still have heard.

"If we love each other," said Jack sturdily, and sticking to his guns like a man, "what can keep us apart?"

"I'm too poor, Jack. I'm living here in these miserable lodgings and can't find any work to do——" She took out her purse and emptied the contents upon the table. "Fifteen shillings and twopence—and a penny stamp—and there is threepence-ha'penny on the mantelpiece and—and when that's gone, Jack, I shall have to go into the workhouse, and wear a horrid grey dress with broad arrows all over."

"But, my dear girl," expostulated Jack, keeping serious with difficulty. "You will not be asked to find any money. Your place is to provide the goodness and the daintiness and the moral qualities—I'll see to the financial side——"

"A letter for you, Miss."

The landlady entered the room so swiftly and unexpectedly that they had scarcely time to lean back in their chairs and look unconcerned. She backed slowly out, eyeing them with ill-concealed curiosity. Madge tore off the envelope, and read the contents eagerly. Then she waved the letter jubilantly above her head.

"Jack!" she cried. "Listen to this. It's from a firm of lawyers in the City, and they say:

> "Dear Madam,—The senior partner of our firm recently died after a long illness, and on going through his private papers we found a will, duly executed, and bearing the signature of your step-father recently deceased. As you appear to be the sole beneficiary I shall be obliged if you can make it convenient to call here. Perhaps Wednesday next, the 21st inst., will suit you for an appointment.
>
> "I have also written to Miss Mabel Bannister, now in possession, suggesting the same day and hour.—I am, Madam, your obedient servant, John Soames."

"Isn't it splendid, Jack?" she cried. "You see the money originally belonged to mother—who was his first wife, you know, so that I have a better claim to it than Mabel has."

"Is it much?" said Jack gloomily.

"Is what much?"

"The money," still more gloomily.

"About four hundred a year."

"Then you won't want me, I suppose." He took up his hat from the table. "This is the second time that blessed money has jiggered me," he added savagely.

But Madge flew to his side in a moment.

"Jack! You dear, stupid, old fellow! You don't suppose it will make any difference, except indeed, that I can—I can say 'yes' now."

It was a most wonderful circumstance that none of Madge's ribs were broken by the energetic way in which Jack hugged her.

"But perhaps——" he said presently.

"Don't you think——" she cried simultaneously.

"After you, Madge."

"Don't you think we might allow Mabel to keep, say, two hundred a year, at any rate until she marries?"

"And if she doesn't marry," said Jack heartily. "She might have it as long as she lives."

"But, of course, after—when anything does happen to her it would revert to—to——"

"To us—to you."

"If we are alive, yes. But if not—it should go to——"

"To our heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns," quoth Jack, gravely.

* * * * *

Of all the solicitors' offices in London, that of Messrs. Thurston and Soames is undoubtedly the mustiest, the fustiest and the dustiest. From these particulars it will readily be understood by the intelligent reader that the firm in question have a very good business indeed and are exceptionally trustworthy and honest.

Jack and Madge found their way to this office on the appointed morning. Madge felt a thrill of importance as she entered the room, but was somewhat chilled by the matter-of-fact way in which the office boy motioned her and Jack to a seat.

"Miserable little wretch," she whispered indignantly to Jack.

"Positively, his legs are so short that he has to climb up to his high stool."

"He didn't seem much impressed," agreed Jack. "But perhaps he's used to beneficiaries."

The entrance of Mabel cut short the discussion. Jack and Madge rose and greeted her without a trace of bitterness, but she sniffed scornfully at seeing them together, and passing forward, requested the boy to take her card to Mr. Soames. He clambered down from his stool with some difficulty, and disappeared into the inner room, without, however, closing the door behind him.

"There's anuvver of them there come," they heard him say.

"Ask the two ladies and the gentleman to step this way," said another voice suavely. Next moment the boy reappeared at the office door.

"Yer've got to come in," he said, jerking his thumb towards the inner room.

Mabel walked in first. Jack and Madge followed humbly. Their business did not take very long to transact. Mr. Soames read the will, which was very short, and in which everything was left to Madge.

Evidently the letter to Mabel making the present appointment had not contained this information, for her face whitened and her mouth twitched in sudden passion when she heard the news.

"It is most unfair—it's abominable," she cried angrily. "I don't believe father ever made that will."

"I can assure you, Miss Bannister, that he did," said the lawyer quietly. "And, in fact, his action is merely simple justice, for the whole of the money originally belonged to his first wife, the mother of Miss Madge."

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The copy will cost you one penny, and may bring you £10.

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NEXT WEEK'S NUMBER, BY THE WAY, WILL BE A SPLENDID ONE. THE COVER DEPICTS ONE OF THE MOST PATHETIC SCENES POSSIBLE TO CONCEIVE—A WOMAN DENYING HER OWN CHILD,

and the story embodying the incident is of intense interest and power.

Altogether, next week's number will be worth twopence in itself. But there's no need to pay twopence for it—only one penny. You get two copies for twopence—one to keep for reading, and one to make £10. . . . . . .

"I thought the matter over after reading your letter," said Madge, placing her hand affectionately on Mabel's shoulder, who, however, shook her away angrily, "and I want you, Mr. Soames, to draw up a paper making over to my sister two hundred pounds a year until she marries, and if she remains single, for as long as she lives."

"I shall carry out your instructions with great pleasure," said the old lawyer, tapping a very handsome snuff-box and then leaning over the table towards Jack: "May I have the honour, my dear sir?"

"Delighted," said Jack, looking exactly the reverse, for he loathed snuff.

In the meantime, Madge led poor Mabel—who had certainly had a very trying morning—to a chair beside the fire. But Mabel, after looking up at her with eyes full of mute entreaty, suddenly burst into tears and hid her face upon the elder girl's shoulder. Whereat the old lawyer produced a huge red silk handkerchief which he applied to his nose, a conjunction that resulted in several prodigious roars and snorts.

"Bless my soul and body!" he cried, taking Jack by the arm and dragging him bodily out of the room. "I do believe that young rascal of a boy is smashing the furniture or breaking the windows or something."

But the boy was sleeping with his head upon the hard wooden desk, and upon his dirty little face was a placid smile of immeasurable content.

Frank Wall.

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The Masked Singer

The Tale of a Strange Adventure and its Sequel.

Sydney Dalton walked aimlessly through the dingy streets of the neighbourhood into which he had unconsciously wandered after having delivered his lecture on the discoveries he had made in electrical science. It is not given to many men to make themselves famous before the completion of their twenty-seventh year, and it was undoubtedly a great triumph to have been invited to address the members of the Royal Institution at a Friday evening meeting.

That was the previous evening, and on this, Saturday night, he had left his study for a breath of air after many hours of research. When he had a difficult problem to work out, he always preferred a walk—unless, of course, actual experiment was necessary—because he could think better while walking. He had wandered on and on, not noticing whither his ungoverned feet were taking him, until he was recalled to himself by the sound of a street organ and a woman's voice. To his amazement he saw that he was in a poor district and close to a group of rough men, women and children gathered in front of a small handcart, and two persons, a man and a woman.

The woman was commencing a fresh song, the man turning the handle of the piano organ which produced the accompaniment. Rousing himself, Sydney Dalton listened with rapt attention to the singing.

It was not the song that appealed to him, it was the voice. He was a judge of musical sounds, part of his researches having been devoted to that subject, and the ring of that voice—*timbre*, musicians would have said—was altogether unusual in a street singer. The song was one of the latest musical ditties, and it earned the enthusiastic approval of the admiring crowd, that was plain enough, but Dalton half closed his eyes and gave himself up to a study of the musical tones that came pealing forth.

The song was finished, and there was a shout for another. Dalton opened his eyes to gaze at the singer, and for the first time noticed that she wore a mask.

"Strange!" he muttered. "Why did I not observe that before?"

He could not answer his own question, yet that answer was not far to seek. When a man is so thoroughly occupied with one subject, as Dalton was, his faculties are abnormally sharpened in that direction and become duller in others, so that the most noticeable things are missed unless they are directly in the line of study.

The woman responded to the call with an old-fashioned song, which, in its way, appealed to the crowd as much as the newer production had. Curbing his natural bent, Dalton gave his undivided attention to the singer and her companion. It did not take him long to discover that, notwithstanding their poor garments, the pair were of gentle birth; the man's features betrayed the fact, and the figure, bearing, and general appearance of the lady—he called her that in his mind—afforded equally incontrovertible proof of a higher social position.

"Genteel poverty!" So Sydney Dalton explained it. "Still, it is a pity to see two young, able-bodied people take up this method of earning a livelihood. They are too refined. Why do they do it? H'm! Perhaps the poor young woman has some deformity of features; hence the mask. But the man looks able enough."

The man's face showed great anxiety, which was another novel trait. Organ-grinders, as a rule, exhibit no anxiety concerning their womenkind, who can generally take care of themselves.

The accompanist appeared to be concerned at the presence of Sydney Dalton; he shot several inquiring glances at him, as the young scientist gazed fixedly at the singer, and altogether he seemed to be feeling very uneasy.

That song also came to a conclusion amid a round of applause, and the singer made a collection among the crowd, holding a little tin cup into which the appreciative might drop a copper. As she moved among the rough crowd, the man followed her movements with increased anxiety, and twice appeared to be on the point of leaving the organ in order to stand by her side. As the cup was held out to him, Sydney dropped a sixpence into it, and received a grateful "Thank you!"

"Why do yer wear that kertin over yor face?" queried a coster, who was having a few minutes' rest from attending to his stall in a street near by. His wife was doing the work.

The street singer uttered a silvery laugh, but made no reply. When she reached her companion's side, he whispered something in her ear, and they both took hold of a shaft of the cart, and began to move on, not, however, till the young woman had shot another glance at Dalton.

"Oh, I say, yer must give us another!" cried the coster, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and speaking with a show of indignation. "Yer must earn the money! If yer don't work it out, yer ought ter give it back!"

There were other cries of "Gi' us another!" The singer halted, but her companion urged her on. The public is fickle; pleasure and contentment soon turned into annoyance and dissatisfaction. An indignant chorus arose, and the coster threw half a potato, picked up from the gutter, at the departing couple. The man's face flushed hotly, and in a moment he was at the rough, and had floored him with a blow from the shoulder. Other members of the crowd surrounded the organ-grinder, who well knew how to use his hands, but Sydney was diverted from his purpose of interfering to help him by the sight of a drunken fellow strutting up to the street singer and trying to lift her mask.

In his college days Sydney Dalton had been numbered among the athletes, and, although study had rounded his shoulders a trifle, and he was out of form, he could do more than the unskilled roughs about him. He bowled the drunken fellow over with a neat lunge and, hastily whispering to the singer to pull the handcart away if she could, responded to her intreaty by going to the rescue of the man.

The two soon gave a good account of themselves, but it would certainly have gone hard with them had not someone raised the cry of "Copper coming-!" The mob dispersed with commendable celerity, but the cry must have been a ruse on the part of some well-intentioned individual, for no policeman was to be seen.

The organ-grinder seized Dalton's hand and thanked him in a few well-chosen words. The singer also expressed her gratitude briefly, but warmly, and the two hurried away with their organ.

"That was a curious adventure!" mused Dalton, as he wended his way home. "The hands of both of those street musicians were white and delicate, and I'm certain that they are not accustomed to manual labour. What does it mean? And how on earth did I come to wander so far from home? I can't walk back—too far in my tired condition. Must take a 'bus or a cab!"

Sydney Dalton could not get that voice out of his ears; it seemed to haunt him, and he tried to reproduce it with his new singing arc lamp. In the meantime he was invited here and there, and became a well-known figure in aristocratic

receptions, for the aristocracy always like to entertain men who have made, or are making, a name for themselves.

Three months passed, and Dalton found his researches somewhat hindered by attendance at this or that institution or gathering, and by invitations to fashionable parties. He was paying the penalty of greatness. He became better acquainted with the doings of Society than he had ever imagined possible; you are bound to hear rumours and gossip of all kinds when you take part in social functions and are buttonholed by two or three magnates in the course of one evening, and have to chat to ladies on various subjects. He was in danger of forgetting science and becoming a man about town.

Only a select few knew that Prince Alexander of Altenburg, who was spending the summer in England, was on the look-out for an English wife. Sydney Dalton was one of the select few, the details having been imparted to him by Lady Merton, sister of a well-known politician, to whom he had been introduced at a reception at which the Prince was present.

"The Prince is a pleasant young man," her ladyship had said, "and as you are aware" (which was not correct, but Dalton did not betray his ignorance), "he stands a very good chance of becoming the reigning Prince of one of the Balkan States. The affairs of that Principality are decidedly unsettled." She forgot that she had not mentioned the name of the State. "Well, he is anxious to have an English consort, and it is an open secret among some of us that he is here for the purpose of making a choice. You won't breathe a word, Mr. Dalton, I know! He has a fortune, so is not particular about money; but he wants a woman with certain qualifications, and I must say he is hard to please! It is most desirable that he should carry out his intention, because of the result of such an alliance when he becomes the reigning Prince. You can easily understand that a wife's influence would be great, and our Government desires to have that influence on the side of Great Britain!"

Dalton thought it would be a good thing for the British Government, but he did not care much whether the Prince married a British noblewoman or a Chinese. However, he heard more about the Prince, and at length had the honour of being introduced, for the Prince was scientifically inclined, and had heard of Dalton's remarkable discoveries.

It was about a fortnight later when Dalton made his way to the house of a nobleman just outside the Metropolis, but far enough away to be almost a country seat. This nobleman was giving a garden-party in honour of the members of an international congress that had met in London, and invitations had been sent by him to a large number of leading lights to meet the members of the congress, and so show the foreign gentlemen how British science could do them honour.

Here Dalton met the Prince, and here he met his mysterious street singer once more. A semi-formal concert was in progress in the great hall of Lyon House, and the Prince and Dalton were chatting near the entrance when the sound of a voice, singing a plaintive, old-fashioned air, made them both stop.

"A splendid voice!" remarked the Prince, his countenance lighting up with pleasure and pride.

"Yes!" rejoined Dalton absently, his mind reverting to that scene in the East-end. "Who is she? I could not find out, and, of course, I could not ask her to show her face!"

The Prince stared at Dalton, who was too deep in his recollection to observe that he was, apparently, talking nonsense.

"Science is sending him cranky!" was the inward comment of the Prince. And, finding that Dalton was still absorbed, he slipped away.

"Grand voice, isn't it?" asked Lady Merton's brother, the politician, coming up to Dalton a moment later. "I expect the Prince has left you to get near her. You know, my sister told you, that he—eh? Well, his present choice, between ourselves, is Lady Headland, and he is rather gone on her. Sings well, doesn't she? He is fond of singing. She will suit him, although she is too full of fun just yet, not stately enough. But that will soon come to her!"

"Oh, yes, certainly!" said Dalton, feeling that he must say something. But he was devoutly thankful when the politician went to talk to someone else.

Dalton entered the great hall, and stood just inside. He saw the singer, a lovely young woman, and he recognised the form. By her stood the organ grinder, turning over the music for her. Dalton's eyes were riveted on the pair; he was sure of their identity, but he could not understand.

"I was too late! I went to offer her my services." It was the Prince, with his pretty foreign accent. "What makes you look at her so, Mr. Dalton?"—rather sharply, this.

"I cannot persuade myself that I have not seen her before, Prince," replied Dalton.

"That is not surprising!" observed Prince Alexander, with just a touch of sarcasm. "She is one of the beauties of the season."

"I have seen her out of the pale of Society!" retorted Dalton nettled. "I'll swear that she is the masked street singer, and he is the organ grinder!"

At that moment the organ grinder turned with a smile from the piano, but the smile died away and a troubled look appeared on his face

"Why d'yer wear that kertin over yer face?" queried a coster from behind.

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as he saw the Prince and Dalton together and looking at him with strange expressions. The change did not escape the Prince; he turned to Dalton and asked him to explain his strange words.

If Dalton had been a politician he might have scented danger; but being only an unsophisticated man of science, with mind and body steeped in electricity, so to say, he blundered on.

He told the story of his Saturday evening adventure, and told it graphically.

"And you are sure of the identity of those itinerant musicians?" queried the Prince. "Positive! Well, well! How curious! Ha, ha!"

The Prince excused himself, and Dalton, satisfied at having vindicated his sanity from the slighting reflection cast upon it by the Prince's sarcastic remark, strolled out into the spacious grounds. He was soon joined by the gentleman whom he had recognised as the organ grinder.

"We need no introduction, do we?" he remarked frankly. "I know now that you are Mr. Sydney Dalton, and perhaps you know that I am Lord Renton, cousin to Lady Headland, who was playing and singing just now—and the other Saturday! At least, she was singing then and I was playing the accompaniment, and we were both playing a part!"

The young fellow spoke lightly, jestingly, but he was troubled, and the cause was soon made apparent.

"I saw you talking to Prince Alexander inside the hall, Mr. Dalton. Did you—I hope you did not—that is, I suppose you mentioned to him that you had seen us with——"

"Yes, I did!" replied Dalton simply. "He wouldn't believe it at first, but I convinced him. I could not be mistaken in that voice. I have been trying to reproduce the *timbre*. What is the matter?" This question came in response to a groan from Lord Renton.

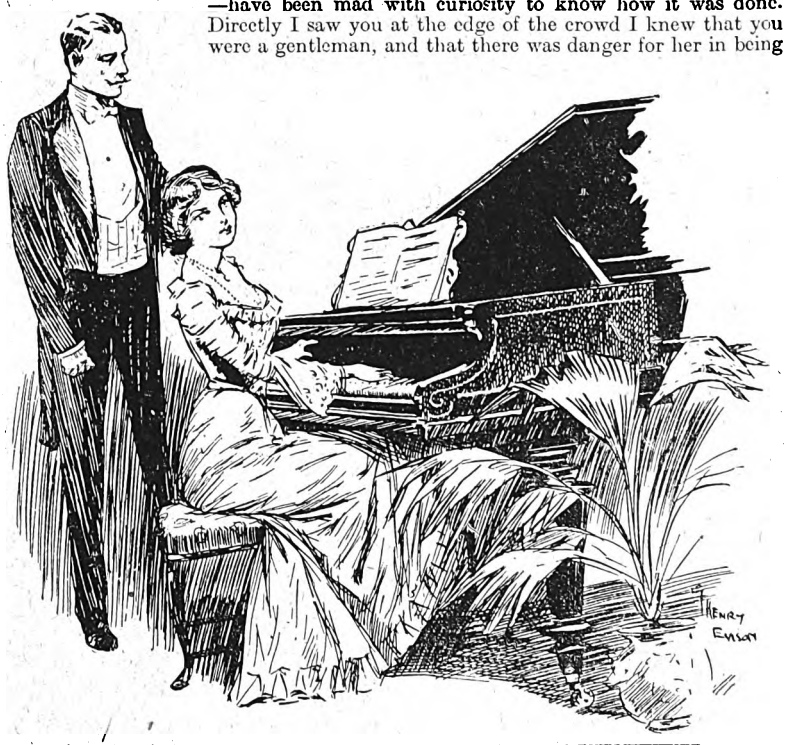
"I am afraid that you have spoilt a happy marriage and upset a grand diplomatic *coup*, Mr. Dalton. I was constantly in fear of disclosure. I was certain that the escapade would come to light! Well, it cannot be helped now!

"I'll tell you all about it," he continued. "There was a grand Society bazaar in support of a charity, I forget which it was. Royalties gave articles of their own making or sums of money. My cousin, being one of the season's beauties, was asked to contribute; she had no article of her own make, and her family is not well off, so she could not make such a show of giving as some of the others could. Then she said that to give money when you have a lot is not charity. Charity should cost you something. But if you have no money, you cannot give it, can you? So she declared that she would give money earned by herself, and the idea caught on. Everybody wanted to know how she intended to earn it, but she said nothing.

"She insisted that I must help her, and, as we have been more like sister and brother than cousins, I agreed. She kept the affair a secret, but a day or so later—on the Saturday, in fact—she sent a note and a bundle to me and asked me to don it, and meet her at a certain spot at half-past eight that evening. As soon as I saw the contents of the package, I guessed the truth. She intended to play the part of the street musician and I was to go with her.

"I called on her and tried to dissuade her, but she would not listen. If I did not care to go with her, she said, she would go alone, and get some fellow to drag the hand-cart. I couldn't let that happen, so I had to go. I met her, and found that she had a mask. I took her into a neighbourhood where the people have no great imagination and are accustomed to oddities; they might be rough, but they would not guess that the mask hid the face of a beauty of the season!

"I was in an awful state of anxiety all the time, fearing that some insult would be offered to her, but she was in the height of spirits. She is a bit of a tomboy, and liked the fun of the thing. She will steady down in time, of course. Well, the Prince was getting fond of her, and I am positive that she is in love with him; but I fancy it will be all off now. She knows nothing of the diplomatic side; it's a case of love. But you have told the Prince, and he is a great stickler for dignity. And I must admit that there was no dignity in that affair, although there was no harm in it. We got a good bit of cash, and handed it over, and since then our friends—and enemies—have been mad with curiosity to know how it was done. Directly I saw you at the edge of the crowd I knew that you were a gentleman, and that there was danger for her in being seen by one who might meet us again in our proper circle. Mr. Dalton, I don't wish to be rude, but I wish you had devoted yourself entirely to science instead of dividing your attention between science and Society!"



The masked singer was at the piano, and the organ grinder was turning over the music for her.

"So do I!" exclaimed Dalton heartily. "Can I do anything? Oh, here comes the Prince!"

"Ah, here you are, Lord Renton," said the Prince with feigned heartiness. "I have been looking for you to say goodbye. I have just bidden adieu to your charming cousin, whose lovely face will, I trust, never be *hidden* from the eyes of admirers. I must return at once. Adieu, my lord. Adieu, Mr. Dalton; I hope that science will not lead you astray again!"

A moment later he was gone, Lord Renton had set off in search of his cousin, and Sydney Dalton was vowing that he would eschew Society.

"A man of the world would not have made that blunder, I suppose," he said to himself. "That shows that one can learn many things even outside the laboratory!" **Geo. Day.**

Aphrodite of the Trout Stream.

A Charming Little Fishing Romance.

"My friend John Stuart Mill remarks——"

"Oh, never mind John Stuart Mill. What did he know of love?"

"As much as his nature was able to contain."

"Exactly, and Cupidon and John Stuart Mill do not go well together."

The speakers were two gentlemen standing on the bank of a pretty trout stream, on the flashing, darting waters of which through the over-arching boughs fell crimson patches of the setting sun.

The younger, a bright, handsome man of about four-and-twenty, was whipping the stream for a final bite; while the elder, near fifty, with a fine face and grizzled hair and beard, leaning against a tree, was putting up his lines.

"You asked me once," remarked the latter, "my definition of love. I'll tell you—a thing that enthrals man, debases him and sells him into slavery. A thing that renders some men idiots—others philosophers."

"And you, Walsingham, are of course of the latter," laughed the younger.

"And you, my dear Chesson, of the former, exactly."

"Thanks."

"Is it not true? You come here fishing; you catch a glimpse of a slim figure, a pretty face. From that moment you become idiotic; you declare that an angelic being has deigned to descend to prosaic earth; you rave, and for days have haunted this stream, in hopes again to see this houri—some pink-cheeked milkmaid."

"No milkmaid, my dear philosopher. But how is it, man, you never married? I will not believe you have reached nearly half a century and never loved."

"Married!" repeated the other, with an abrupt laugh, "and you have heard my opinion of love."

"Just so. Shall I tell you my definition of a philosopher? One who, having enjoyed the follies of life himself, would later instruct others under a cloak of wisdom."

Harry Chesson, laughing, strolled farther up the stream.

Matthew Walsingham looked after him thoughtfully, then drew a long breath, as he murmured:

"Perhaps he does not guess how near to the truth he is. Did I ever love?—did I?—would I could say no."

Just at that moment a cry of alarm sounded in the air. It was a young, fresh, feminine voice, and came from some little distance down stream.

Matthew Walsingham sprang erect. Harry Chesson had also turned; but the elder, in hastening in the direction had the advantage.

For a moment he could see no one, neither on the banks nor on the stones in the stream. He already had slackened his pace, when, just where the boulders formed stepping stones across, and where the eddying waters were deepest, he beheld something floating, like a portion of a woman's dress.

A few seconds brought him to the spot, when, to his horror, he beheld, lying in the bed of the stream, between the rocks, a young girl!

She was motionless, as one dead; her face, of a delicate beauty, was pale and still—her eyes closed—while the water carried her hair like threads of gold about the moss-covered boulders.

To jump down on to the boulders, raise the girl on to his shoulder, scramble out, and bearing her to the opposite bank, lay her down, was with Matthew Walsingham, the work of a very brief space. The girl gave no sign of life—she seemed as if dead.

The cause was apparent in a discolouration of the temple, which had been struck in her fall.

Perplexed, alarmed, Walsingham was kneeling, chafing the small hands, when a quick, startled cry from Chesson, who now ran up, caused him to raise his head.

"What is the matter?" he ejaculated, half irritably.

"It is she?" cried the young man, throwing himself on his knees. "Oh, Walsingham, for Heaven's sake, say she is not dead!"

"She—who?" was the sharp demand.

"She for whom I have been waiting, watching—she whom," his voice trembled and sank, "I love!"

"Pshaw!" but his tone lacked its habitual cynicism. "Far better help me to restore the poor child. It is evident she slipped on the wet moss, and in falling struck her temple. Had we not been near, she surely must have been drowned."

Harry Chesson's brain swam, his heart felt sick at the idea. Reverently he put the long, wet hair from the pale cheek; trembling, he chafed the brow, the hand he held.

Abruptly he drew back, colouring, half confused, as one detected in guilt. The girl's eyes—clear as crystal, blue as violets—had opened, and, after wonderingly regarding Walsingham, had wandered to him.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she whispered faintly.

"Pray do not be alarmed," said Walsingham—Chesson could not speak. "You slipped on the stepping-stones; that is all. We were near to help you. All is right now."

Her recollection was returning.

A vivid blush dyed her cheek.

"Ah, I remember! Thank you very much!" she murmured in confusion, trying to rise.

Walsingham aided her; Chesson stood aside. He noted her confusion, and guessed she could accept aid better from an older than a younger man. Yet how he envied his friend!

Rising to her feet, leaning against a tree, she shivered.

"You must get home at once, young lady," said Walsingham, gently. "Your dress is wet; I fear you will take cold if you remain still. Can you walk with assistance?"

"Oh, yes, I can walk even without," she replied, quickly. "I am better now," trying to press the water from her clothes. Then, fixing her eyes upon them with a glance neither forgot, she added: "I know I owe my life to you—indeed I am grateful; but—I cannot think of words now to thank you!"

"Oh, let us defer thanks until later!" laughed Walsingham, to put her at ease. "We must think of dry clothes first. I trust you do not live far away?"

"No, quite near."

"Will you try to get there? We will accompany you."

"Oh, indeed, I would not trouble you. There is no need!" she exclaimed.

But when she made an attempt to move, she had to admit there was, and accepted Harry Chesson's arm; for Walsingham, stepping back, had signed him to advance. He had even done him a greater kindness. He left him to have a *tête-à-tête*.

"I will go back and collect our fishing-tackle," he had said. "We will meet at the inn."

His friend had given him a look that said as plainly as words:

"I'll never forget this. You have made me your debtor for life!"

Then they two went along the banks among the ferns and tree-trunks; while Matthew Walsingham, re-crossing the stepping-stones, returned to where they had so hastily abandoned their rods, gathered them up, and strolled to the inn.

"If ever woman looked worthy a good man's strong love, truly she does," he reflected, as he went. "But did ever woman yet?"

It was nearly an hour before Chesson rejoined him. His step had a greater buoyancy, his eyes a clearer light; a smile was on his face.

"Well," said Walsingham, sitting in the window seat without his pipe: "'Prithee why so gay, fond lover? Prithee why so gay?'"

"You may laugh," exclaimed Harry Chesson, brightly. "Cynic as you are, you will confess that she is beautiful—worthy a life's devotion!"

Walsingham shrugged his shoulders.

"An Aphrodite, arisen—not from sea-foam, but the eddies of a trout stream."

"Nevertheless beautiful, old man. A wager — thou Diogenes—thou shalt be converted to a pleasant, kinder thought of woman and Ænone shall convert you."

Matthew Walsingham looked quickly round.

"Ænone!" he repeated. "Ye powers, what a name! So you have discovered Aphrodite?"

"Her mother called her by it. Her mother, who, hearing her daughter's story, prays you to accompany me to her cottage two hours hence, to receive her thanks, or——"

"Absurd! Or what?"

"She is so grateful, that if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must come to the mountain."

"Not if I know it," exclaimed Walsingham starting up, "A scene in this rustic inn! A weeping, grateful parent—and, shall I add, a match-making mother."

"Say what you please. I am too content to care. Only you will come with me, Walsingham?"

"Yes, I do not mind. I'll go to take care of you, my poor friend, after brief reflection," in a serio-comic tone. "Now let's have done with the subject, Romeo, until we start. Remember I am not a lover, and need dinner."

When through the soft summer evening twilight, the two started for the cottage, Walsingham half regretted that a curiosity he would not confess had urged him to give the promise he had.

Outwardly cynical, inwardly kind, generous, he hated to be thanked. Still there was no avoiding it now.

"What is this lady's name?" he asked, abruptly.

"I do not know. How, in the joy and the alarm, could I ask it. But she *is* a lady."

"And the father?"

"She is a widow; and has been very beautiful. There is the cottage."

It was a simple thatched dwelling, rendered pretty by roses and honeysuckle, and if not absolutely bespeaking indigence, showed small signs of wealth.

"My friend," remarked Walsingham, sententiously, "when poverty looks in at the door, loves make his bow at the window. You would prove an excellent catch to Miss Ænone."

"Possibly," exclaimed Chesson, gaily, as coming under the porch, he tapped lightly at the door. It was instantly opened by the widow herself, a slim, fair-haired lady, attired in plain, dark garments.

"Oh, you have come!" she ejaculated in a soft, sweet voice. "How kind of you, gentlemen! Pray enter. My daughter is lying down; I feared the chill, so kept her in her room."

Walsingham cast a whimsical glance at his friend, whose gaiety had at once, he knew, sunk to zero, as they followed the lady into the parlour. It was plainly adorned by those little touches, and books and flowers, which speak both of refinement and taste.

On the table stood a lamp. Reaching a chair, the widow turned to bring it for her guests, when her eyes rested on the face of the elder, who stood in the full light. Harry Chesson saw her expression change to amazement, blended with terror. A cry burst from her lips, she ejaculated:

"Matthew Walsingham! Oh! Heaven be merciful to me!"

Then she dropped on the chair, her face bowed on her hands, as she heard her friend's voice, huskily tremulous:

"Laura Greenlees! Here!"

Then a hand was put on his arm, and Walsingham whispered:

"Leave us, Chesson, dear lad."

Instantly he obeyed. As he drew to the door he was aware of the widow on her knees, her hands extended, her voice full of passionate pleading as she cried:

"Oh, Matthew, hear me! Pardon—forgive!"

Harry Chesson paced the lane in view of the cottage waiting. He was surprised, bewildered. What did it all mean? Would Walsingham explain? Who was this lady—Ænone's mother? It was close upon an hour afterwards when Walsingham came out.

"You have waited," he said, and Chesson observed a change in his voice, it was softer. "Thank you! We will not go to the cottage again to-night; let us return to the inn; I have much to tell you."

He had slipped his arm into the other's, and they already were proceeding down the lane.

"You know Mrs. Greenlees?" hesitated Chesson.

"Not Greenlees now, her name is Mrs. Marsland," said Walsingham, in a low tone. "Chesson, she was the only woman I ever loved—loved as few men do. I believed my affection returned, I was accepted, our marriage day was fixed. It arrived; I was ready—all were ready, only one person was missing—the bride—Laura had fled. When I heard of her again she was wedded to Arthur Marsland!"

He paused a second, then went on.

"I must be brief; things seemed to speak for themselves. I gave her no further thought—or tried not to; and condemning Laura, condemned all her sex."

"But!" suggested Chesson, eagerly, "there has been an explanation!"

"Yes! It appears that this fellow had inveigled her when a girl into a correspondence; at one time she had believed she loved him; he, soon after her acquaintance with me, made her fear him. Her—her love for me, made her more sensitive that the foolish past should not reach my ears; she fought her persecutor to the last, until the eleventh hour—then her courage failed; she could fight no longer; she yielded to his threats, and sacrificed her happiness to save her folly being revealed. Now, dear boy, you know all. Will you go on first? I will follow."

* * * * *

Before the summer of the next year Harry Chesson and Ænone Marsland were married, the bride being given away by her step-father—Matthew Walsingham.

As the young pair were about to start on their tour, Chesson, stepping to Walsingham, while Ænone embraced her mother, whispered merrily:

"Well, Diogenes, have I won my wager?"

"You have, my son! If that philosopher never discovered an honest man, I have discovered a woman worthy of a man's love; nay, the devotion of a life!"

G. Parkyn.

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"IF ever I find money, I'll keep it. No advertising for the owner with me—not much!"

Many a time had Percival Langdon said this, with a careless glance down at the pavement and an odd feeling of wonder as to how it would feel were he to see a big roll of bank-notes at his feet. And now, there in his pathway, lay a pretty little purse, distinctly feminine, as unmistakably the lost property of a woman as if it had borne the name of the owner in big letters on the side.

Percival picked it up. It was a snake-skin, somewhat worn, but still dainty, and it had silver trimmings and a silver clasp. As the finder held it for a moment in his hand some strange force from the fingers accustomed to carrying it seemed to strike into his palm. It almost seemed to him as if he felt the warm weight of a little hand in his own. Who has not found this personality in a cast-off glove or shoe or other object strongly associated with its wearer? Even a cast-off relic of the dead has the touch and "feel" of the absent one long years after he or she has departed.

The young man looked up and down the street. Unconsciously his eyes sought out a short, stout figure, one befitting ownership of the little treasure trove which he had picked up. But there was no one in sight whom he could associate even remotely with the purse.

He laughed aloud.

"Well, by Jove, this is funny," he said to himself. "For years I have been wishing that I could find money and have planned how I would get rid of it if fortune ever favoured me, and the moment I really do find some, behold, I am looking for the owner. But perhaps there is no money in it to tempt me after all."

TREASURE TROVE.

The Tale of a Purse and its Owner.

He opened it. There were a number of samples of dress goods, a recipe for making soft gingerbread ("soft gingerbread—that's good," exclaimed Percival, smacking his lips. "If there is one thing I like better than another it's soft gingerbread!") a newspaper clipping containing three verses of sentimental poetry, a glove button-hook, a five pound note, and a handful of small change.

"My, what a tidy little sum!" cried Percival. "There's a box of cigars and a new suit. All I've got to do is to toss the purse into the sewer and put the money in my pocket!"

It was only a passing thought, a flash, the echo of ideas he had often had before when that dream which comes to all of us at one time or another—the dream of "picking up money"—lingered in his fancy.

But was there nothing in the purse to mark its owner? It did not appear so. "Women are so silly," he said. "No; it is I who am silly," he added, as it suddenly came to him that there was a back pocket in the purse. He lifted the cover. Yes; there was a narrow card tucked away in it. With blundering fingers he fished it out and turned it up so that he could see the name inscribed upon it—"her name." Somehow possession of the little purse had given him a sort of proprietary interest in the owner.

It was a pretty name, very pretty. Percy caught his breath when he read it:

MABEL SWEETBRIAR,
No. 77, Larkspur Gardens.

"Mabel! I always fancied that name." For some reason he could not understand Percy raised the bit of pasteboard to his lips, remembering that her fingers had touched it. "Mabel! Short and plump, with dark hair and big brown eyes. I'll bet that's what she is. Well, bless my soul, Percival Langdon, anyone might think you were already in love with her."

A moment later Percival was walking rapidly toward Larkspur Gardens. It was a mile away and in a rather aristocratic neighbourhood. But little thought he of distance. His one desire was to find the owner of the purse and restore her property before she had a chance to suffer much over its loss. Had he been a personal friend he could not have felt more anxious about it. As he went along he kept repeating to himself, "Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand!"

The touch of a vanished hand! Did he not feel it on the polished leather?

Langdon's heart was pumping like a fire engine when he rang the door bell of a pretty little house which bore the magic number "77" in gold foil on the glass panels. He was a good-looking young bank clerk, underpaid, as all bank clerks are, but earning a decent living, and able to dress well, and, as he would say it, live like a gentleman. He had an inborn honesty for which he did not give himself credit, for he often thought, given the opportunity, that he would appropriate a fortune without a tremor. And yet the moment he was put to the test he did not have an instant's temptation.

"Short and dark—I beg a thousand pardons," stammered Percival. "You—I was saying—is this Miss Mabel Sweetbriar?"

She clapped her hands.

"Oh, you have found it! I knew you would! I told mother you—that is, the finder—would read my name upon the card and bring it home. Mamma!" She raised her voice, and Percival noticed that it was sweet and fine. "The lost is found, dear! You will be able to see that specialist after all! But you must come in, sir! Mother—and I—will want to thank you."

"Yes, Mab," said a gentle voice from a room beyond. "Bring the gentleman in. He has taken such a load off our minds! You will excuse my not rising, sir? I am an invalid."

When Percival Langdon left the house an hour later, with an invitation to call again ringing in his ears, he waited until he got round the corner, and then he kicked himself.

"Down on your knees," he said to himself, "and thank God you are not a villain! If you had taken the earnings of that poor girl, already laid upon the altar of her mother's sickness, you would have been the most unmitigated scoundrel alive.

"It makes me shudder to think of it. But you were not tempted. You were not! The 'touch of a vanished hand' was on that purse, like a talisman. And what a plump little hand it was! Just what I conceived it would be. How warm it was and magnetic! She pressed mine and told me she was sure we would be great friends. Percival Langdon. I believe you are the seventh son of a seventh son. The glimpse you got of the owner of that purse was borne out by the reality in every respect."

* * * * * * * *

Six months later the plump little hand and the plump little owner thereof became the property of Mr. Percival Langdon for better or worse and all the rest of it. He is chief cashier at the bank now and has a salary not to be despised. And he will tell you, with a voice of pride and a smacking of the lips, that his wife makes the best soft gingerbread in all the world and other things just as good.

H. W. Raymond.

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Pa's Restoration.

A Move from the Kitchen to the Sitting Room.

The girls were thoroughly enjoying themselves in the sitting-room. It was well warmed and lighted, and there was a sound of laughter and the hum of merry voices. Someone was tuning a mandoline to the piano, and there was a fluttering of music leaves. Some friends had come in, as usual, to spend the evening. The Moberly girls, that is, the three older ones, all had light hair, blue eyes, and lively, vivacious manners that proved very attractive to the young people in the quiet village.

"Pa" Moberly nobody knew much about. He usually sat out in the kitchen during the evening. It was a dingy little room, and often he had no light; only the dull glow of the stove and the red sparks of his old-fashioned pipe.

Pa Moberly was a little, timid, shrinking man. He had faded blue eyes, bent shoulders and toil-worn hands. He had worked hard for his girls. He had ungrudgingly given them his best. It seemed too bad that now he was old and they were grown to womanhood they did not care.

When Mrs. Moberly was alive, however, things were different. He had his comfortable easy chair then in the sitting-room; his slippers, too, and there was the sofa to rest on when he was tired.

But as his girls grew up, pretty, strong-willed and altogether selfish, Pa Moberly found himself banished from his comfortable quarters. A number of cushions too fine for use adorned the old sofa, and his armchair was bedecked with a gaudy antimacassar. He was soon made to understand that he was not wanted.

It was therefore not long before he began to stay in the kitchen, and by and by he sat nowhere else. He knew every figure on the dingy papered walls, and the only chair he had to sit in was a straight-backed wooden one, in which he could not rest.

He used to long sometimes for his old corner in the sitting-room, with its lights, its laughter, and its music, but to his gentle hints the girls gave scant encouragement. "They didn't want pa there," they told themselves.

The lonely, tired old man had many thoughts as he sat in the kitchen night after night in solitude, and he used sometimes to ponder the question in his gentle heart as to whether, after all, it paid to bring up girls who were ashamed of you when you were old.

Polly, his youngest, did not know about the changed condition of affairs. She was more like her mother than any of the others, being small, quiet, and brown-eyed.

She had been staying for three years in Scotland with an invalid aunt, after whom she had been named. Poor Aunt Bassett was dead now, and to-day Polly had come home again. She was upstairs, busy in the small back room that the girls had forgotten to make ready for her.

As Pa Moberly sat alone in the kitchen to-night he was thinking of Polly. In his yearning, fatherly heart there was a faint stirring of hope.

There was a chance that he might take some comfort with this, his youngest daughter. He had felt that from the time she was born. She wasn't like the other girls, and she had seemed so unfeignedly glad to see him. He still felt the pressure of her young arms about his neck, and her kisses lay warm upon his furrowed cheek.

In the darkness of the old kitchen he brushed a tear from his eye. He was thinking of Ma Moberly, too, and of her gentle, tender, womanly ways. He wished the girls were more like their mother.

Just then Polly came in. She went quickly to his side.

"Why, pa," she cried, "what are you sitting in the kitchen for, and in the dark, too? Is anything the matter?"

In the friendly darkness Pa Moberly took the little hand and stroked it. "Nothing, Polly," he said. "I—I always sit here."

Polly seated herself on his knee. "Always sit here?" she cried, in surprise. "Don't you go into the sitting-room in the evenings as you used to?"

Pa Moberly shook his head. "No," he faltered.

"But why?" insisted Polly. "You don't mean to tell me you don't sit in your old chair any more?"

Pa Moberly's chin quivered. Polly did not know, and it was hard to tell her. Polly was like her mother.

"Alice likes to keep that chair for her friends," he said, slowly. "Oh, I don't mind the kitchen so much, dear," he added, as cheerfully as he could. "At least I won't now, since you've come home. I do miss the old chair rather, but it's all right.

"The girls don't want me in there, Polly," he went on, huskily. "They're young, and there's always company, you know. I don't know that I blame 'em much. I'm old and worn out and behind the times. No, I can't say that I really blame 'em."

Polly laid her soft cheek suddenly against the wrinkled one.

"You're not old or worn out or behind the times, either!" she said. "It's a shame for you to stay out here!" Her sweet, girlish voice was full of indignation.

"But never mind, pa," she went on. "I tell you there are better days ahead. I've come home now, and I'm going to look after you, see if I don't. What would mother think if she were here, to see you sitting all alone in this dark old kitchen? Why, it would break her heart! Come with me, pa!"

"Where?" said Pa Moberly, hesitatingly, in his surprise.

"Into the sitting-room."

"Oh, I can't go in there, Polly; they don't want me."

"Yes, you can. I want you. You wouldn't refuse me anything on this, my first night home?"

Pa Moberly got up. The old wooden chair was uncomfortable, and he rose stiffly even with the help of Polly's arm.

"No, I couldn't, Polly," he said. "You—you're too like your mother."

As they left the dark kitchen together Pa Moberly grasped Polly's hand tightly. "I'm afraid, Polly," he whispered. "We'd better not."

But Polly only squeezed his hand in a reassuring clasp, and somehow Pa Moberly felt stronger.

Polly opened the sitting-room door, and a stream of light flashed out into the dark little entry. The girls were certainly having a merry evening.

A young lady in a blue dress occupied the piano stool. A young man, with his hair plastered down over his forehead, occupied Pa Moberly's armchair. He had a mandoline in his hand, and was strumming it to the young lady's accompaniment. Alice and Belle and Harriet were sitting about with the liveliest air of enjoyment.

As Polly and Pa Moberly entered, their complacency suddenly faded into astonishment and dismay. What did Polly

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mean, and what did pa mean, by intruding on their company in this fashion?

Polly advanced steadily into the centre of the room, still holding her father's hand.

How little and shy and bent pa looked, the girls thought, and how determined was the air Polly wore—like a young captain going into battle. It was as if Ma Moberly had come to life.

Alice rose. The young lady at the piano turned, the young man stopped his mandoline. In all the months he had come to the Moberly house, this was the first time he had ever seen the little, white-haired man who lived there. And who was that pretty brown-haired girl with flashing eyes?

Alice broke the silence. "My sister Polly, Mr. Bryant," she said, a little nervously, "and—my father. And this is our friend, Eva Brent. Pa, you know Eva?"

Pa nodded cordially; so did Polly. But something wholly unusual was in the air, and everyone felt it.

Polly led Pa Moberly up to the young man reclining in the chair. "Do you mind taking another chair, Mr. Bryant?" she said, pleasantly. "You see, this one is father's favourite. Mother gave it to him."

Alice and Belle and Harriet flushed, but Polly was quite undisturbed. The young man was astonished, but he rose quickly, with a stammered apology, and Polly calmly wheeled the chair nearer the pleasant fire.

"Sit here, father," she said, affectionately, "and let me turn the light so that it won't hurt your eyes."

She adjusted the light to her liking, then pushed Pa Moberly gently into his old place. His white air shone in the lamplight, and his lips trembled.

"There!" said Polly, in a pleased voice. "Isn't that better?"

Regardless of all onlookers, she stooped and kissed the withered cheek; then she turned to the others.

"Go on with your playing, won't you, Eva?" she said, gently.

Nobody spoke; then the young lady turned to the piano and the restraint was quickly over.

Pa Moberly's eyes grew moist. How soft the chair was, and how pleasant the fire, and how comfortable was the touch of the little firm hand upon his shoulder!

And there was something else. He knew and everyone else knew that his lonely hours in the old kitchen were over.

To-morrow the straight-backed wooden chair would be pushed back, to be occupied no more. The firelight could play on the dingy walls, the mice could scamper at will over the old floor. Pa Moberly would not be there to see. Polly had come home to take care of him, and Polly was brave. It was as if Ma Moberly had come to life again.

S. H. Martin.

Fate Again.

Brown: "I'm glad I met your wife. She seemed to take a fancy to me." Jones: "I wish you'd met her sooner."

The Difference.

Young maids sit—ah, happy chaps—young maids sit on young men's laps. Old maids sit—when past their primes—old maids sit in the lapse of time.

Spoilt by Money.

Jack: "Many a happy marriage has been spoilt by money." Tom: "Yes, it spoilt mine. She refused me because I didn't have enough."

Had Stopped Fights Before.

Passer-by: "Policeman, there's a fight round the corner." Policeman: "Thank ye, sir; I'll do as much for you some day." (And he walked in the opposite direction.)

His Very Reason.

She: "I do not care to marry you. I do not even care to talk to you." He (a widower): "That is precisely the reason why I want you to marry me."

Your Editor Chats.

You will probably remember that a week or so ago I stated in this column that I had a big scheme on hand, the object of which was to secure more readers for this paper and at the same time to give you an opportunity, unexampled for its simplicity, of making money—not merely by shillings but by pounds, not for yourself only but also for your friends. Well, this scheme is now prepared, and you will find the preliminary announcement of it on page 7. I want you to read this notice through carefully, then you will have time to prepare your friends, and they to prepare their friends, and so on for what is coming next week. In this way you stand a better chance of coming in first with ten solid sovereigns jingling in your own pockets, and a number of your friend's friends possessing single sovereigns for the little trouble they took in trying to help you. I am certain that the scheme will be a success, and the more sovereigns we have to give away the better we shall be pleased.

I have received a very interesting letter from a correspondent who is immensely delighted with the "Confessions of Cynthia," and wants me to disclose Miss Cynthia's real name. But no, I really mustn't do that. I'm afraid Miss Cynthia might have something to say to me were I to do so, for the very fact that her own real name and the other names in the confessions are screened from the public, has alone enabled us to publish the exposure. By the way, there is a very startling development in next Tuesday's instalment. Things are beginning to look decidedly black for Mrs. Norton.

I wanted to have published the result of the "Design" competition this week, but owing to the number sent in this is impossible. I hope to give the names of the prize-winners next Tuesday, and to reproduce some of the best efforts, which, judging from those I have up to the present seen, are really remarkable exhibitions of skill.

For This Week's Competition I am offering a **Handsome Solid Silver Pencil-case** to the reader who sends me the most sensible sentence constructed out of twelve words, the first letters of which, taken in order, spell "Short Stories." The ten competitors whose efforts come next will receive prizes of pretty little **Rolled Gold Hearts** and **Rolled Gold Charms.** Sentences should be written on the back of post-cards only, should be marked "Word," and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C. The competition closes after the first post on Tuesday morning, July 8th.

Your Editor.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

MY COUSIN RECEIVES A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. Mary Vernon declares that they are exactly as given to her by Lord Kinross, whereupon Kinross breaks off the engagement. The diamonds subsequently appear as a gift from Fluffy to Mrs. Norton, set in a pair of hat-pins. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street.

THE next morning—our first in Pont Street—was a miserable one. Outside the day was gloomy, within it was not much better, for Frances, her amiability of the night before vanished, found fault impartially with everything and everybody. I endeavoured to dodge the domestic thunder-cloud and slipped into the library—Frankie had a lot of decent books—in the hope of a good read.

Not long was I left undisturbed.

"So you're here," Frances remarked angrily. "You are never to be found when you're wanted. Bring your books into the drawing-room, or, better still, get some work. I'm expecting somebody to call, and I wish you to be present."

Obediently I followed her, and sat and stitched till lunch-time, Frances sitting moodily by the fire, or pacing up and down the room with a swift, noiseless movement that reminded me of a feline creature in captivity.

She was never more fascinating than at such moments. Her long, graceful limbs outlined by the clinging skirt, her head thrown back in a defiant pose, eyes veiled with thought that yet revealed the smouldering fires of passion, lips red and ripe half parted showed the snowy white teeth.

"A dangerous woman," the old dowager had called her—something of what that meant, watching, I understood.

Lunch over, we changed our dresses, Frankie looking splendid in a tea-gown of daffodil satin with ruffles of Mechlin lace, while I was quite passable in a grey cloth gown with turquoise buttons.

Returning to the drawing-room, we sat and waited, hearing three, then four o'clock strike in silence. At last there came a ring at the front door, Frances leant forward, a scarlet flush in her cheek.

"Mrs. Norton?" It was Sir John's voice full of pleasurable anticipation.

I did not hear the maid's reply, but a few moments later the door shut and Sir John passed down the steps. I caught a glimpse of him as he went through the gate; he was wearing a frock coat suit of grey with a buttonhole of violets, and looked distinguished, but, I thought, tired and disappointed. I felt sorry for him, and vexed with Frances.

The next arrival was poor Fluffy, he also was sent empty away; with him an over-dressed young man, who bore a family likeness to the pink-faced youth I met at Lady Winchin's.

At five we had tea—Frankie stealthily watching the clock. I think she had given up hope of her visitor for that day, when a hansom stopped outside our door.

"It's Lord Kinross," I said quietly, and gathering up my work, prepared to leave the room.

"Sit down, sit down," cried Frankie; "I have something

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important to tell you. You remember Lady Westall, that horrid old woman we met at the races, and you remember also how she was pulling some woman's character to pieces the whole afternoon?"

"Yes, she was talking most of the time to Kinross. I was sorry for the poor woman she was speaking of, she said such nasty things."

"I am glad you remember. Lady Westall said the woman was an adventuress, with neither money, position, nor friends. I was the woman she referred to, Cynthia. I, your cousin!"

"Impossible, Frankie!"

"I tell you I caught my name. Besides, since that afternoon, Kinross has been different to me. He only called once at the Cecil afterwards, and was quite changed when I met him out."

"He can't believe that horrid Lady Westall?"

"What she said has had an effect upon him. He likes me, but has his suspicions all the same. Perhaps he thinks I want to entrap him into marriage—adventuresses always do that sort of thing, you know. Anyway, I am going to nip his suspicions in the bud. He shall hear from me this afternoon the history of my life—my girlhood, my marriage, who I am, where I come from, what I live on. I will tell him and he shall believe me."

Barely had she finished speaking when Lord Kinross was announced. I did not like his manner towards Frankie; usually I considered him a very charming person, that afternoon he struck me as being a touch too free and easy, familiar, almost wanting in respect.

Frankie seemed to feel the change; she was quite dignified, not to say stately in her greeting.

"You have worked a transformation here, Frankie," Kinross remarked, glancing round the room; "it's first-rate. Mrs. Ponsonby would not recognise her dingy apartment."

"I am so glad you like it," answered Frankie. "You are so terribly critical, I was afraid of your judgment."

"Never fear my judgment where you are concerned," he answered with an expressive look.

"Does that apply only to taste in furniture?"

"It covers everything."

"Do you know, I have been told you can be terribly severe, Lord Kinross?"

"An enemy's detraction—no more, Mrs. Norton. There's only one thing I can't forgive in man or woman"—he had grown suddenly grave, and spoke quite earnestly—"and that is deliberate deception. Anything else I would overlook—in you," he added flippantly.

"I wonder," she said with a laugh, "I wonder."

"Try me," he said, and came quite close, touching her with his hand.

Frankie did not respond to his advances.

"I thank your lordship," she said lightly, "and if at any time I feel disposed to forge your name, or steal your family jewels, I shall claim forgiveness."

"You may have the jewels without stealing 'em—under conditions," he said impudently.

"So? Then I'll borrow them some day. Say, when I am 'presented.'"

"Who's going to perform that office for you, Frankie—the invaluable Mrs. Ponsonby?"

"No, not Mrs. Ponsonby." Frances spoke in a deliberate fashion. "My late husband's cousin, Lady Gaveston, has expressed a wish that I should appear at Court under her wing. Otherwise my dear friend Lady Winchin would have presented me."

"Your late husband's cousin, Lady Gaveston," he repeated the phrase with unction—"is possibly the widow of the Scotch baronet, Sir Travers of that ilk?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"By reputation. I believe she is a good woman of the deepest dye—godly, sober, and righteous beyond endurance. You'll have to alter, Frankie, to find favour in her sight."

"My list of acquaintances—yes," she said with meaning.

"You needn't—Sir John will atone for a multitude of—Fluffies."

Frances flushed to her temples.

"One certainly cannot accuse Sir John of bad taste," she said pointedly.

Lord Kinross refused to accept the snub.

"He has the advantages of your tuition. One cannot help envying Sir John his opportunities. While as for Fluffy's—"

My cousin did not reply immediately.

"Poor Fluffy," she said at last with a half sigh, "and yet I don't know why I should call him 'poor.' There's a great deal to respect, indeed to admire in him. I, at least, cannot forget how good a friend he's been to me. There aren't many men who'd give up the time and thought to another's business that he has done to mine. My husband died very suddenly, Lord Kinross, leaving his affairs in a most complicated state, but for Fluffy's skill and patience in disentangling them I should be very differently placed at this present moment."

"Your husband's not been dead very long, Mrs. Norton?"

"Two years. He was a coffee planter in Jamaica. Fluffy was over there on business some six months before Mr. Norton's death. My husband and he took a great liking for each other."

"I suppose business fluctuates in Jamaica the same as in England," observed Lord Kinross flippantly.

"It does," Frances replied gravely. "My husband had been in treaty with several firms for the purchase of his estate, but nothing had been settled. At his death I found myself at a loss how best to act. None of the offers for the estate appeared to me good enough, and yet I was afraid to refuse them all."

"Fluffy, however, like a good angel, or a novelette, appeared in the nick of time and paid a thumping price. Eh, Mrs. Norton?"

"Nothing so melodramatic. He determined to form a company to take over the land at its proper value. The company through him was floated and the estate purchased. As a result I am richer by some thousands a year."

Lord Kinross bowed. "I congratulate you, Mrs. Norton, on your income and your friend. I wish I had one as serviceable."

"Oh, you're not likely to want friends," she answered. "You'll have plenty. Why not? Cynthia and I are different. Two forlorn orphans aren't likely to make many friends." She glanced at me and laughed. Then grew serious again.

"It's easy to smile now," she said, "but it was a different matter years ago, when we hadn't kith or kin in the whole world except each other. We were brought up from childhood in a convent school, and though the sisters were good to us, still it wasn't like being at home. I stayed till I was nineteen, and left to be married. Cynthia remained till she came to me."

"And did you meet the coffee planter at the convent?" His lordship's manner was serious, but there was a suspicious twinkle in his eyes. He seemed secretly amused, as if he suspected Frankie was not telling him the truth.

"Mr. Norton was a college chum of my father's," returned Frances. "He took the opportunity of a trip to Europe to come and see his old friend's little girl. And," she stopped, a sad look crept into her eyes, "he married me," she finished with a sigh.

Frankie's description somehow gave one the impression that her marriage had not been a success. Remembering Mr. Norton's kindly face and cheery ways I felt puzzled. Any woman, I thought, might have been proud and happy in his love.

"You must have missed your cousin terribly, Miss Hamilton?" said his lordship turning suddenly to me.

There was a keen look on his face, but a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth. The question took me by surprise. As a matter of fact, I had not felt my cousin's loss acutely.

"Yes," I said vaguely. "Yes."

"Poor little girl," said Frances tenderly, "how unhappy she was about my marriage. How she clung to me that last morning when I left; I could not say 'Good-bye' for tears. Do you remember my going, Cynthia?"

I remembered the occasion distinctly, but, oddly enough,

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"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
New Series of Stories.

my recollections did not correspond with Frankie's. My cousin, far from being overcome, had waved a cool "Good-bye" from the top of the coach, to which I had replied by one as calm from the convent window. Our mutual regrets were anything but keen.

"We used to lie awake at nights picturing our future—Cynthia and I. We imagined most brilliant prospects, and presented each other with the best of fortunes. But we always agreed to share our luck—if ever we had any, just as we shared our childish griefs and sorrow. Eh, dearie?" and she smiled at me.

She pinched my cheek playfully—but a little hard—when I made no answer. Somehow the right one would not come. I knew what I was wanted, what, indeed, I ought to say. Frances had been very generous to me since I became her companion, and it was only right I should acknowledge it. A vivid though unseasonable recollection obtruded itself and held me dumb. I remembered as a child at the convent, creeping to Frances in the night time, crying in the inconsistent and overwhelming fashion of childhood for my mother and my home. And Frances—well, she had not been quite kind.

My cheeks burnt under my cousin's reproachful gaze, but my heart was foolishly hot at the thought of the little crying child, and I sat silent.

And then Frances did a strange thing. She put her arm about my waist and bent over me caressingly, love and tenderness shining in her eyes.

"Cynthia," she said softly, "my dear little Cynthia, don't cry."

The words, the action, the soft touch of her fingers on my hair thrilled me. My cousin was a fascinating woman, and I a young girl, hungry for affection. The tears that had gathered in my eyes suddenly overflowed. I caught hold of her hand and held it tightly.

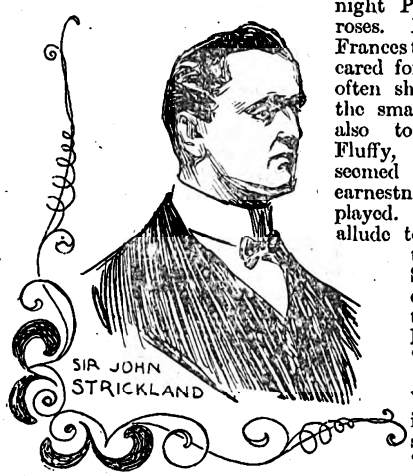
"Oh, Frankie, you are very, very good to me," I cried, and meant it every word.

Then fumbling for my handkerchief I made towards the door. Lord Kinross crossed quickly to where my cousin stood, his face was grave, and his manner quite abashed.

"Well?" she asked, throwing her head back, "well?" There was a note of challenge in her voice which Kinross answered.

He took her hands in his. "I offer my sincere apologies," he said. "I am convinced that Fluffy is a friend greatly to be desired, and I believe—whatever you choose to tell me," and stooping, he kissed her fingers. Frankie had triumphed, Kinross believed in her implicity.

I felt happier that evening than I had done—well, since the night Percival sent me the roses. It was so nice of Frances to show that she really cared for me. People didn't often show their feelings in the smart set. Nice of her also to have championed Fluffy, though he hardly seemed to call for such earnestness as she'd displayed. Frances did not allude to what had passed, to me, that is to say. She told Fluffy, who dropped in during the evening that his lordship had been "cheeky."



"That cat Lady Westall has been talking to him about me," she said viciously, "and other tabbies too, I expect. Lord, how I hate 'em all!" and she glared at her handsome face reflected in the glass as though for a moment she saw "the cat" referred to.

"Anything serious?" queried Fluffy. "I mean were you much annoyed?"

Frankie shrugged her shoulders.

"I've made it all right for the present," she said, "but—Jamaica's a nasty climate for reputations," she observed oracularly.

Sir John called early next morning, and left a beautiful basket of white lilac. Some half hour later Lord Kinross arrived with a suitable offering of violets and lilies. Frankie saw neither of them, but sent me down with a sweet message for each.

"Won't she see me, really, Cynthia? Not for a minute," pleaded Kinross.

I shook my head.

"Where is she?"

"In the morning-room, writing letters."

"Take me to her, like a good child."

"Certainly not. I'm afraid you're very forward, Lord Kinross."

"I'm certain you're very pretty, Cynthia. That's a sweet thing in gowns. As I can't see Frankie, I think I'll talk to you."

"You are extremely impertinent," I said indignantly.

"You are entirely charming. Look always thus, Cynthia, it is most becoming."

He gazed at me pensively, until I was obliged to laugh. It was no good to get angry with such an absurd person, and yet he irritated me, as he lounged gracefully against the mantelpiece, in a dark blue suit, with a buttonhole of lilies and a lovely thing in ties, I was obliged to own him charming. I studied his face intently—was he really the trifler he always appeared, or did this lightness of speech and manner merely serve as a cloak for sincerity? Had he, I wondered, a genuine affection for my cousin, or was he only playing, flirting with the most fascinating woman in London, as somebody called Frankie.

Sir John's straight figure and proud, set face came into my mind. How eagerly he had glanced up as I came into the room that morning, the brightness fading as he saw that yet again he was to be disappointed. No possibility of mistake there. He loved my cousin with the force of a strong, reserved nature, and so great as his love would be his suffering if—I did not care to continue that chain of thought, but returned to the consideration of his lordship.

I hoped that Frankie did not care for him; he was not, I thought angrily, capable of feeling deeply. I remembered poor Mary Vernon, and decided that had he truly loved her, he would have trusted and believed in her against all proof. I say that I decided this and approved of my decision—until I remembered Percival Hope and Mr. Pettigrew's pocket book, and grew troubled. But after all, that was quite different, Percival was nothing to me. A mere acquaintance, that was all. I sighed, and looking up, encountered Kinross' eyes.

"Well," he said, with a tolerant smile, "and what is your opinion? Am I a very worthless person, Cynthia?"

"I can't tell," I answered.

"Is my appearance so desperately deceitful? We are not all like your friend Sir John, who bears his character upon his face."

"Sir John is worth a hundred of—of other people," I concluded lamely.

"No, Cynthia, not of other people, but of me. You can afford to be candid, dear child, while your looks last."

"I did not mean to be rude," I said stiffly.

"Nor were you. Only delightfully ingenuous. Still the world isn't made up of men like me and Sir John. There are a few other types besides; and there always remains—Percival Hope." His lordship smiled maliciously, and took his leave.

Frances did not show any great enthusiasm for her flowers. I took them up for her, and was a little disappointed at her cool reception of the gifts—Sir John's at all events.

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"He is very fond of you, Frankie," I said timidly, sniffing the lilac.

Frances looked up quickly.

"Fond of me," she repeated, "do you think so?" She seemed quite interested, and left off writing.

"His face changes at your name, and when he looks at you!—you do care for him a little, Frankie?"

Frankie laughed.

"Yes—a little," she said.

"I like Sir John so much," I continued, eager on his behalf.

"Sir John," she repeated. Then as her eyes fell on the basket of lilac she frowned, looking positively angry.

"You talk a lot of nonsense, Cynthia," she said. "Put the flowers in water and run away, I'm busy."

Frances was certainly most variable.

For the first week we did not have many callers in Pont Street. Mrs. Curtis-Blunt looked us up, accompanied by a man in glasses, so also did the pink youth. Percival Hope left cards, Sir John and Lord Kinross came regularly of an afternoon. Others than these, however, did not appear. Frances, indeed, kept very quiet. She went to the theatre but little, and gave up dining at restaurants altogether.

"I'm saving myself for Lady Gaveston," she told Lord Kinross. "Her ladyship arrives next week, I'm to be presented the week after. Until then I'm leading a retired life. After——" she laughed.

"What are your 'At Home' days?" he asked.

"The first and third Wednesdays in the month. Will you promise to turn up?"

"I shall be charmed. My sister Paula is anxious to know you, with your permission I will bring her."

"I should like to meet your sister above everything," said Frances, a pink flush on her cheek.

"That's very good of you. Say, Frankie, are you doing anything to-night?"

"Yes, entertaining Sir John."

"I was going to ask you for an invitation to dinner, but in face of Sir John—Good-bye, Frankie. I'll look you up next week. My love to Lady Gaveston."

Sir John was very silent that evening, but seemed to me more in love than ever. Frankie in a white chiffon gown looked girlish and dainty, and wore some of his flowers—he sent them daily.

"I like your dress," he said gravely, "it is so simple. A beautiful jewel does not require a rich setting."

"A charming compliment, Sir John and a pretty simile. I'm afraid it won't hold good in life though. A woman may be fair as Venus, it won't prevent her being overlooked if she wears a last year's frock."

"Is happiness dependent on a constant publicity?" he asked.

"That depends on one's notion of happiness I suppose."

"But you, could you not content yourself with a life of quiet interests and pursuits if—" he paused, "if shared with one you loved?"

Frances did not reply but drew out her cigarette case, a dainty toy in silver set with turquoises, and extracted a cigarette.

"A special brand—will you have one?" she asked Sir John. "They are worth trying."

She leant back in her low cushioned chair blowing dainty wreaths of smoke.

"You're an inveterate smoker, Sir John," she remarked, handing him a fresh cigarette. "Tell me, could you content yourself with an inferior tobacco and a wretched pipe, knowing better could be had—for the asking?"

He leant forward, a pained expression on his face.

"I don't pretend to misunderstand you. But—doesn't love count at all?" he said in a low, strained voice.

"Love?" repeated Frankie scornfully, rising from her seat. "Would any man who truly loves a woman ask her to give up—this—" and she glanced round the room rich with soft silken hangings, rare flowers and costly ornaments. "When I marry I lose it all—all," she repeated. "What is offered in exchange?"

She stood before him her face glowing, her eyes flashing, an embodiment of youth and power.

He came quite close and put his hands upon her shoulders.

"Nothing but two strong hands to work for you, two arms to shelter you, a heart to love you always," he said. "I have but little money as you know."

"You can make as much as you desire—if you really cared for me."

"How? Only tell me and I'll do it. Only promise you will give me my reward, and I will not shrink from hardship, labour or anxiety."

"'Tis nothing so dreadful," she returned. "A man of your abilities could make thousands to-morrow—in the City."

"The City?" he repeated. "I do not understand. I—" he paused. "I fear I am a little dull. Will you explain?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Fluffy will do that," she said. "You'd better see him in the morning. He's always a hundred and one things on foot. He's just going to bring out a company. He might nominate you as director."

Sir John fell back.

"That," he said, "would be impossible. I know nothing of company work, and could not lend my name to an undertaking which I did not understand."

"You'll understand it all right. If not, well there's no harm in seeing Fluffy."

"I cannot——" he commenced but went no further.

Frankie had thrown herself into his arms.

"For my sake, John," she said, "for the sake of the woman who loves you. I cannot give you up, and yet I can't bear poverty. John!"

His arms about her, her fair head on his shoulder, her lips close to his own, what could he say? Was not she who asked him the woman he loved, the woman he'd dreamt might love him in return?

I went quietly from the room, but as I closed the door I heard his answer.

"For your sake, dearest, yes," he said.

And then he sighed.

And I, stealing softly through the darkened hall sighed also. I could not understand my cousin, and for the first time I doubted her. I did not believe she wanted Sir John to become a company director in order that he might make money for himself.

What then was her object? Like a flash the answer came.

To make money for herself and Fluffy!

Sir John's was a well known, indeed a famous name, many persons would take shares in a company of which he was a director, his name would stand as guarantee for any concern, and would induce hundreds to subscribe. So much the better if the concern were genuine, but, I remembered hearing someone say that certain of Fluffy's ventures were neither sound nor square. It might be that Sir John, in all ignorance, would lend his name to a company of this description, and thus induce people to risk their money, it might be their only savings.

I put the thought from me, but, try as I would, I still felt sad and ill at ease. Alas! All that I feared and dreaded for Sir John, fell short, far short of what the future brought him!

[Another dramatic incident in this powerful series is dealt with in next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES.]

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Fish Stories.

WATSON: "What was the largest trout you ever caught, James?" James: "Let's see; what day of the week is this, Watson?" "Monday, I believe. What in the world has that to do with my question?" "Oh, nothing; only I think you'd better wait until Wednesday. I always like to get as far as possible from Sunday when I tell about my fishing experiences."

Dark Corners Preferred.

"LOVE is blind," and that is why he always seeks the seclusion of the darkest corners in preference to the painful light of the front parlour.

Evidently weren't Thirsty.

LADY JANE: "Have you given the gold-fish fresh water, Janet?" Janet: "No, mum. They ain't finished the water I give 'em t'other week yet."

Friend for Mutual Convenience.

"I SEE Miss Sanders and Miss Smiley are nearly always together. What dear friends they must be!" "Not at all. You see each of them has an unmarried brother."

Terrible Trouble.

MRS. HOLDOVER: "You are in trouble, dear. Let me sympathise with you." Miss Justout: "You can't possibly, dear. I have had three proposals, and must choose between them."

Effective.

THE lady occupied a seat in the carriage alone. The man looked in, and with a smile and a bow inquired: "Engaged?" "No, married," she responded, and he backed off.

The Candid Friend.

TOM (a dejected suitor): "I congratulate you, Miss Flurt, on your approaching marriage with Mr. Brown." Miss Flurt: "Why do you congratulate me?" Tom: "Well, I can't honestly congratulate him."

Needs to be Strong.

HOUSEKEEPER: "I don't see why a big able-bodied man like you should be begging for a living." Tramp: "To tell ye the truth, mum, folks is becomin' so hard-hearted that a gent has got ter be big an' able-bodied to beg without gettin' hurt."

A Narrow Escape.

YOUNG LADY: "I suppose you have had some narrow escapes, Lieutenant Dashaway?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Y-a-a-s. Awfully narrow escape once, bah Jove!" Young Lady (breathlessly): "In what way?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Vewy near ordahed on active service, don'cher know; but the war came to an end before we embarked."

Drew it at the Bill.

"I SUPPOSE, doctor, that a large proportion of the ills of your patients are imaginary?" "Yes, sir, quite a large proportion." "And your treatment of such cases, I suppose, is by imaginary pills?" "Well, I suppose you might call it that." "Then, of course, for treating imaginary ills with imaginary pills, you send in imaginary bills?" "Oh, my dear sir, nothing of the kind. There's nothing imaginary about the bills; I have to draw the line somewhere."

He Didn't Ask Pa.

HE (seriously): "Do you think your father would object to my marrying you?" She: "I don't know; if he's anything like me he would."

No Alternative.

SHE: "I am simply tired of your conduct. I wonder how a woman can ever marry a man." He: "Well, there's really nothing else to marry, is there?"

Righteous Indignation.

THE BRIDE: "Kiss me again, dear!" The Groom: "But Madge, I have done nothing but kiss you for the last three hours." The Bride (bursting into tears): "Traitor, you love another!"

A Combined Effort.

CHAPPIE: "I believe there is something in this thought twansfewence notion. Vewy often I notice that Cholly and I have the same idea at once." Miss Flyppe: "Perhaps it requires your united efforts to really entertain an idea."

Absolute Certainty.

CORONER: "You seem to be certain that the deceased accidentally fell into the water. How do you know that this is not a case of suicide?" Witness: "He was a brither Scot, and had a wee bottle o' whisky on him wi' ne'er a nip ta'en oot."

Satisfactorily Explained.

"HENRY," she whispered, as though fearful of the worst, "do you love me less than a fortnight ago when you brought me some flowers or sweets every night?" "No, Evelina, no," he answered, "but pay day is yet a week off, and I generally get broke about the middle of the month."

A Bitter Pill.

HIS SECRETARY (hopefully): "Sir, I have married your daughter." (After a pause, bitterly): "I suppose you have no further use for me?" Himself: "Your week is not up until six o'clock. You may sit down and draw a new will for me, leaving all my property to the Church."

Nobody Minded.

"Do you think your sister likes to have me come here, Johnny?" "You bet. You take her to the theatre and bring her chocolates." "I'm glad I can make her happy." "Yes, and the young feller what she's engaged to don't mind it either, for it saves him that much money towards housekeeping."

Resembling Feature.

THE addresses of a young man having been declined by a young lady, he paid court to her sister. "How much you resemble your sister," said he, the evening of his first call. "You have the same hair, the same forehead, and the same eyes——" "And the same nose!" she added quickly. He has stopped calling at that house.

Hadn't Read It.

THEY were talking of poetry, and as he held her hand and looked into her eyes she asked him if he remembered the name of a certain poet. "He writes the most uncommon poetry about common things," she said. "I cannot think of his name, you know; he is the poet who writes so much in the vernacular." "Yes, dear," he said; "but I never read that magazine."

Took the Bull by the Horns.

ONE of the clerks in a prominent banking-house, having an intimation that it was proposed to dispense with his services, boldly entered the manager's private room, and said: "Mr. Smith, I have made up my mind that the interests of this bank require that either you or myself leave its service. As you are the leading man of the bank, and have a large family to support, I have concluded to leave you your position, and retire myself."

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Music the Mesmerist.

Telling of a Desperate Scheme which was Frustrated.

It was evident that she did not love him, and yet it was announced that she was to marry him. I was only a guest in the house, but the affair troubled me and I sought long and earnestly for an explanation of it. So far as I could judge Mary had a distinct aversion to Ralph Weston, rather than an affection for him, but nevertheless he seemed to dominate her life. She feared him, but for some reason chose to keep secret the cause of that fear. I could see her almost shrink from him when he called, but she dared not refuse to see him or break the engagement which her father had sanctioned.

What was the secret of his power? I asked myself. Why did she not go to her father—easy-going, blind old Mark Tottenham—and tell him she could not marry this man? I could see no reason why she should sacrifice herself. Her father was wealthy and Weston was not. Surely the latter had no hold upon the old gentleman that made such a marriage imperative. On the contrary, my observation led me to believe that Mr. Tottenham thought he was acting for the best interests of his daughter. He liked Weston—who could be extremely affable and entertaining when he wished, although usually rather taciturn—but there was nothing to indicate that he had his heart set on the match.

Yet Mary shuddered a little when her accepted suitor called, then greeted him with a show of cordiality and went blindly with him to the little reception-room, from which from time to time strains of music were wafted. Weston was a musician of no mean ability, and occasionally entertained us all with selections on the piano, but the fitful way in which he played when they were alone together impressed me as being rather strange. He seldom played a selection through in those circumstances, but seemed rather to run over the keys idly, improvising or giving a few bars from one air and then a few bars from another. Once when he was doing this I thought I heard a wild, pleading cry of "Oh, don't!" and then a half-smothered shriek, and, when he played for us all, the frightened look in Mary's eyes was enough to haunt a man for life. Apparently, however, I was the only one who noticed it.

Finally, overstepping even the liberty accorded to an old friend, I spoke plainly to her. I told her it was plain she did not love him and asked her why she did not go frankly to her father, tell him so, and break the engagement. The bare suggestion seemed to frighten her, and she shuddered as she answered: "I dare not, I dare not. He'd kill me."

"Kill you!" I exclaimed. "Nonsense! Your father has only your welfare at heart, and——"

"No, no; not my father," she interrupted. "I mean Mr. Weston. He has the keynote."

The keynote! I was more mystified than ever, but she gave me no chance to ask for an explanation. She hurried away as if already alarmed at what she had said; yet it seemed to me that she regarded me after that as one who was more in her confidence than others and to whom she might look for protection from some impending evil. Still I could not understand what she meant by the "keynote," and she avoided the subject as if it were fraught with great personal danger. When I asked her to explain she trembled and shook her head.

"No one would believe me," she said. "It is so strange, so weird. And he would kill me. He has threatened to and I know he would."

"Your nerves are overwrought," I replied. "Unless I misjudge the man, he would not know one end of a revolver from the other, and this is not the age for that sort of thing, anyway."

"But you don't understand," she insisted, laying her hand on my arm as if that gave her confidence, but nevertheless looking about her in a frightened way. "He has the keynote."

"That's what you said before," I returned, taking both her hands and holding her in front of me. "What do you mean by it? Tell me frankly. I'll believe you and I'll help you."

"If I thought you would?" she said doubtingly.

She seemed on the point of telling me her story, but evidently thought better of it.

"Wait," she said. "You shall see for yourself. He is coming to-night, and I will hide you behind the curtains. But don't let him kill me! If he tries to do it, knock him down—brain him—drive him away from the piano at all costs!"

There was a world of pathos in the earnestness with which she said that, and for the first time I began to understand the affair. There is a keynote to everything, as science has demonstrated. Just the right chord will make a glass shiver into a million pieces. If the keynote of St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey could only be discovered, either structure might be crumbled into dust, and it is not an unknown thing for articles in the vicinity of great organs to fall in pieces upon the sounding of a certain note. Indeed, I myself have felt the sudden emotional thrill that comes from the striking of a certain chord, and, I meditated, it is quite possible that if Weston had discovered the particular note to which Mary's nerves responded he might be capable of doing her enormous bodily harm.

That evening I was carefully concealed behind the window draperies when Weston called, and it is needless to say that my interest was intense. She shuddered as he drew her towards him, but remained passive in his embrace.

"To-morrow," he said, "we will be quietly married."

"No," she replied, and I could see that it was only with an effort that she forced herself to say it.

"But I insist!" he exclaimed. "I will no longer run the risk of losing you, and you promised yesterday."

"I've changed my mind," she answered shortly.

"Have a care!" he returned menacingly, releasing her and moving towards the piano.

Whether it was my presence that inspired her I know not, but for the first time, as she afterwards told me, her spirit was roused and she dared him.

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"Kill me if you will!" she cried. "Since the fatefu night since you first accidentally struck that chord and saw the effect it had on me, I have lived in almost constant fear of death or insanity, which is worse. I have trembled whenever you have touched the keys, even in the presence of others. You have played, as it seemed to me, on the live nerves of my body, and from very fear forced me to acquiesce in whatever you proposed, but I'll put a stop to it now. I will not marry you to-morrow or at any other time."

"Think again," he said softly, but nevertheless threateningly, as he seated himself at the piano and idly ran his fingers over the keys. "Remember! This is a power I will have always. I have no fear that I will kill you, but wherever I may find you I can inflict upon you the excruciating torture that you dread. Even at the altar this chord——"

He never finished the sentence, for as he spoke she uttered a sudden cry. Her face became deathly white and she swayed and shook like a leaf. I sprang from behind the curtains, but before I reached him he had struck the chord again and with a moan she collapsed and sank in a heap on the floor.

I did not handle him very gently, and when the others came in, attracted by the noise, he was in a fit condition to interview a doctor. He said when he left that he would find an opportunity to carry his threat into execution, and that she never would be able to escape that chord so long as both he and she lived.

She and her father left for a trip on the Continent a week later and Weston disappeared soon after. He intimated that it was his purpose to follow them. If he did, and her father remained in the same humour, in which I last saw him, I am satisfied that there is one musical genius occupying a grave somewhere on the Continent. But I have heard of no such tragedy.

E. Flower.

OUR COLOURED COVER FOR NEXT WEEK'S NUMBER.

"PITY! FOR YOUR CHILD'S SAKE." "MY CHILD! NO, *YOUR* CHILD."

A dramatic incident from our powerful story in next week's number, entitled:

"ANOTHER WOMAN'S CHILD."

CATCHING AN EARLY TRAIN.

One of the greatest delights of going into the country for the summer is the pleasure a man derives from his efforts to catch the early morning train by which he must reach the city and his business.

When he gets out of bed he looks at his watch and finds he has plenty of time, so he dresses leisurely, and sits down to breakfast in a calm and serene state of mind. Just as he cracks his first egg he hears the station bell ringing.

He starts, jerks out his watch, compares it with the clock, and finds that it is seventeen minutes slow, and that he has only six minutes left in which to get to the station.

In a fearful hurry he tries to scoop the egg out of the shell, but it burns his fingers and mashes into a hopeless mess.

He drops the whole concern in disgust, grabs a roll, and scalds his tongue with a quick mouthful of coffee, then he stuffs the roll into his pocket, while his wife hands him his bag and tells him she thinks she hears the whistle.

He plunges madly round the room looking for his umbrella, he kisses his wife as well as he can, says good-bye to the children in a lump, and makes a dash for the door. Just as he gets to the gate he finds that he has forgotten a parcel, and he charges back after it, snatches it up, and tears down the gravel path in a frenzy.

He doesn't like to run through the village because that would be undignified; but he walks furiously. He goes faster and faster. Half way down he does hear the whistle for certain.

He wants to run, but he knows that he will start up that dog there by the grocer's if he does. Then he actually sees the train coming into the station, and he feels that he must make a dash. He does. The dog becomes excited, and tears after him.

Six other dogs join in the chase, one after the other, and bark furiously, and frolic round his legs.

Small boys contribute to the excitement as he goes past, whistling on their fingers, and the men at work on the new village club knock off to look at him and laugh.

He feels ridiculous; but he must catch that train. He gets desperate when he has to slacken up until two or three women, who are on the pavement discussing the servant-girl question and the price of butter, scatter to let him pass. He arrives within one hundred yards of the station with coat-tails horizontal, and the dogs nipping his heels, just as the train commences to move.

He puts on extra pressure, and resolves to catch the train or perish.

He reaches it as the guard's van is going past. He seizes the handle, is violently jerked up and down, once or twice, but finally lands on the step on his knees, and is launched in by his coat-collar by the guard, hot, angry, dusty, with his trousers torn across the knees, his shins bruised, and three ribs of his umbrella broken.

Just as he gets into the van the train stops, backs up to the siding, and leisurely picks up a water-cress truck.

Then he is angrier than ever, and determines that he will move back to town to-morrow, and uses naughty words, while he looks out of the window and watches the dogs that followed him engaged in a contest over a bone, and he registers a silent vow to devote his first holiday to hunting up those dogs and braining them with a club.

J. L. P.

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MRS. BRENNAN'S "KID."

A Charming Little Tale of a Three-year-old Peacemaker.

The entire neighbourhood had long since decided that Mrs. Brennan's youngest hopeful would close his earthly career through the unwelcome attentions of the proverbial hangman. Maggie Brennan, aged fifteen, was a popular employee at Johnson's cigar factory. Young Dan was a telegraph boy, and even little Jennie earned odd pennies by caring for the neighbours' children when the parents were called away to christenings, funerals and weddings.

But from the day that the "Kid," at the tender age of nine months, had fallen from a window to the area below, striking a clothes line en route, and had sat up howling vigorously, but unhurt, his young life had been marked by a succession of stirring and nerve-distracting events. Even his good-natured Irish mother had begun to regard him as hopeless, and his one friend was pretty Miss Harris, whose pink and blue blouses and daintily embroidered skirts decorated the Brennan clothes horse each ironing day. Meta Harris always declared that the "Kid" was particularly intelligent, and some day would perform a great deed.

On this afternoon the "Kid," having reached the age of three, and having acquired sufficient wisdom to snatch a stick of liquorice from a weaker and meeker playmate in the gutter, had wandered far from home.

An overdose of liquorice on this hot, sultry day had affected the "Kid" as nothing had ever done before. He yearned for the narrow, dim court and the towering tenement, to say nothing of a drink and his mother's restful bosom. But all around him was mud, the thick, yellow mud of a newly-opened street, and beyond disgustingly new cottages painted in æsthetic tints and surrounded by gardens laid out in geometrical flower and lawn patterns. That is, all were thus laid out, save one. It was overgrown with weeds, which had choked out the flowers planted there early in the spring.

A young man, in a natty flannel suit, had paused at the gate and was surveying, with a clouded brow, the scene of desolation. It hardly seemed possible that just four months previous he and she had planted those flowers, coming up each evening to water them, pick out the weeds and put finishing touches within doors.

The furniture had been put in place, even some of the shining crockery had found its way to the small pantry, when the quarrel came.

He had done his best to smooth over the difficulty, but finally one afternoon he had walked over to the little cottage, which represented his savings of two hard years, closed and barred the windows and doors, and with a heavy heart had walked out through the small gate. Never again had he been near the burial ground of his high hopes—until this evening. Vaguely he felt lately that something ought to be done with the place.

The frown deepened as he turned away and marched resolutely down the street. He would see an estate agent at once and offer the place at any sacrifice. Then he'd try his luck in South Africa. The papers all said there were splendid openings down there for clever fellows from home.

"Mamma! Ma——!"

Jack Griswold stopped communing with the disagreeable past and stared down upon a bedraggled, forlorn bit of humanity.

"Hello, old chap. What are you doing here?"

The "old chap" resented the familiar address, fell to weeping lustily and rolled disconsolately in the soft mud.

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Jack, bending over the little fellow, "you mustn't do that! You'll be a sight. I suppose you're lost."

Griswold glanced helplessly at the neat cottages and then at the child of the slums. How ever did the youngster get out here? And his sobs were actually pitiful. Jack thought of a policeman, but such officials were seldom needed in this quiet neighbourhood.

Finally pity overcame discretion, and Jack grasped a small hand and led the runaway towards the cottage over which he had but lately been gloating in misery. He unlocked the door and led the culprit to the kitchen, turned on the water and awkwardly washed the astonished denizen of Diggle's Court.

"There, when I get a few layers of dirt off I'll take you to the nearest police station and they can find your 'ma.' But I'll be hanged if I'd drag such a connecting link as you were through the streets."

A fresh handkerchief was sacrificed on the altar of cleanliness, and then Griswold started towards the door with his unexpected charge. But here another surprise was in store for him. The skies were overcast and lightning was playing along the horizon. There was nothing to do but wait till the storm passed by.

Griswold sank into a chair in the tiny parlour, and Mrs. Brennan's "Kid" clambered familiarly upon his knee. The afternoon was sultry, the little head sank lower and lower on Griswold's immaculate flannel suit, and soon a soft, even breathing filled the quiet room.

The storm gathered and burst, but the child slept on, and Griswold, with half closed eyes, lived over again the happy days when she and he had planned and furnished the cottage.

A sudden flash of vivid lightning and a shrill feminine shriek!

"Oh, Mrs. Brennan, if only I had a key we could get in here! And porches and trees are so dangerous!"

Jack rose to his feet, the sleeping child still clasped in his arms. There was no mistaking that sweet voice. For an instant he hesitated, then threw open the door.

Two women crouched in the portal. One was middle aged and haggard, her sleeves rolled up to her elbow, and her apron tossed over her head. The other was young, and dainty and fair to look upon, even in her tearful fright. They rose and faced the sudden vision in the doorway.

The older woman gave a scream, half of anger, half of joy.

"It's me Kid! Where did ye foind him?" Then without waiting for reply she jerked the sleeping child from Griswold's arms and fell to weeping and scolding over him in true Irish fashion.

Ten minutes later the storm died down as suddenly as it had risen, and Mrs. Brennan and her "Kid," duly provided with 'bus fare, were wending their way towards Diggle's Court.

The younger woman still stood at the window, staring out upon the weeds, which hung heavy with moisture. She tapped her fingers mechanically on the window pane.

"I had gone over to Mrs. Brennan's for a blouse I wanted," she remarked suddenly, as if she felt that an explanation was obligatory. "And she was nearly crazy about the 'Kid.' I felt so sorry for her, and we kept walking, and walking, and every one had seen the little boy, they said, and we followed the trail till we got here—and——"

She turned suddenly and faced Griswold, who was regarding her anxiously. The contrast between his grave, pleading face and his generally demoralised attire was ludicrous. The departed "Kid" had left as mementoes of his short stay liberal stains of liquorice and mud on Griswold's soft flannel suit. One grimy hand had evidently found a resting place on Jack's smooth shaven cheek.

Meta Harris stopped laughing and exclaimed:

"Oh, to think you'd be so good to that miserable 'Kid.' You've made me feel so—so mean and insignificant." Her face was very sober now. "Do you think, Jack, you could forgive me, and——"

"Bless that 'Kid,'" exclaimed Jack as they walked home in the twilight. Meta had resolutely refused to take a 'bus in consideration of Jack's soiled raiment. "When we get settled the little chap can play up here every Saturday."

"Yes," mused Meta, "I always said that boy would do something worth doing."

Cicely Allen.

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YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

Author of "Fettered Lives," "As a Man Sows," "In the Grip of the Law," etc.

For New Readers.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude. Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, sets himself to prove the latter's guilt. Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake. In the meanwhile, Scarsdale, who has got into trouble for attacking a warder who jested with him about Esther, is taken seriously ill, and placed in the prison hospital, where he succeeds in writing a letter to Esther and giving it to a convict named Ben Needham, who has finished his sentence and has promised to deliver it to Esther upon his release.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself in the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on Revelle and Benny drive up in a dogcart, and suddenly, while talking to Esther, Revelle turns deadly pale. Crump is standing by, and quickly sees the reason for his emotion. Vance is approaching. She goes straight up to Revelle. It is a critical moment, but once more Revelle's iron will wins the day. Again apologising for her mistake in calling Revelle her husband, she allows herself to be led away. Later on she is placed in the county asylum. A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump.

CHAPTER XX.

How Seaton Revelle Manœuvred to be Alone with Esther.

THE concert had not yet started when Seaton Revelle returned to his seat between Lady Eliza Normanhurst and Esther. Punctuality is not always a characteristic of amateur performances. A hum of conversation filled the room. The Vicar was talking with Lord Normanhurst most enthusiastically on the subject of the restoration of his church. Then came a momentary lull.

"That was a remarkable escape of that convict from Greystone Prison, wasn't it? I suppose you read about it in the papers. The fellow seems to have got clean away, what's more!"

The words, addressed by a man to his companion, reached Esther—and Seaton Revelle.

Greystone Prison! Alec was there! Surroundings were forgotten now. Esther's face had gone ghastly white. Her heart had ceased to beat. What if——

"Yes, I saw something about it. What was the fellow's name?"

It seemed an eternity of time to Esther before the answer came. Revelle, though seeming not to do so, was watching her out of the corners of his eyes. He inwardly reviled the man behind for having started the topic. It meant the awakening, perhaps, of what he told himself Esther was rapidly forgetting. Savage annoyance was his first feeling; then a shadowy look of uneasiness played across his features.

Greystone prison. Scarsdale was there!

"A fellow called Crofton—known among the prisoners as Gentleman Jack! By the way, Greystone prison's the place, isn't it, where that——"

The man stopped abruptly, coughed, and then stammered out something about the awful time they were being kept waiting. He had momentarily forgotten that Miss Mansfield was sitting in front of him. Scarsdale's name had been on the tip of his tongue when his companion had brought his elbow sharply home into his ribs.

The moment of suspense—for Esther—was over; but the uneasy shadow on Revelle's face seemed to have deepened. But he pulled himself together, and answered a question addressed to him by Lady Eliza.

"Yes! They *are* a long time; but the local orchestra opens the ball, and I've always noticed that amateurs take an awful time to tune up. They are at it now!"

The plaintive wail of stringed instruments floated into the room. Esther outwardly seemed herself again; but her gloved hands were tightly clenched. It was hard to bear! It was a hard, heart-straining part that she had set herself to play. And this was what Crump, as he sat holding Pollie's hot little hand, was telling himself.

"Yes, Pollie, yes!" he said aloud, "they are coming in now. We shall be starting in a minute. What's that funny looking thing? Why that's what is called a double-bass. Yes, it's a big fiddle; but too big to be tucked under anybody's chin. It's a kind of hoarse-voiced fiddle, and it grunts instead of squeaking. That gentleman, looking very important, with white gloves and the stick, is the conductor. The only thing that he beats is time, and"—the little man chuckled—"not always that, Pollie."

"Doesn't he sing, or play, or do nothing?" questioned Pollie.

"No, only wags that stick; he may get excited; but nobody will take any notice of that!"

"Then he's not much use!" said Pollie decidedly.

"Sometimes most useful, most essential—when he is paid attention to; but I don't think that will happen to-night!"

And Crump was right. The opening overture—after a false start—was played in a go-as-you-please style ; but it was all in the cause of charity, and charity covers a multitude of sins.

Then a pale young man tootled a melancholy flute solo that suggested wind escaping from bellows rather than melody.

After that, another young man, with long hair, and wearing pince-nez, evidently endeavouring to look as much as possible like Sir Henry Irving, recited "The Dream of Eugene Aram," ; he would have been more impressive but for an unfortunate lapse of memory ; but even as it was, he thrilled the sixpenny seats, and one lady remarked that "He'd fair given her creeps !"

Crump chuckled quietly to himself. He had a strong sense of humour.

A love ditty by a Miss Gushington followed, the first stanza of which ran as follows :

Love's twining fingers wreath my heart,
Alas, my own, that we must part,
Alas, to think that Cupid's bow
Could wing a shaft so full of woe !

And the curate, who accompanied her, bent over the ivory keys and heaved a bitter sigh. For he loved the fair Gushington, and, though she had embroidered a pair of braces for him, and had sent him a pair of slippers two sizes too small for him, he had not dared as yet to tell his love !

Then Mr. Faversham appeared on the platform. Very dapper he looked in his evening dress, and there was just a suggestion of the actor about his clean-shaven face. The man who is nervous in the drawing-room is frequently quite self-possessed and at home on a platform or stage. It was so with Benny. Had circumstance ordered his life differently, he might have made a name for himself on the music hall stage.

"Herbert Giles, alias the Tinker !" said Crump to himself, "the impertinence of the fellow is really almost delightful. It would be quite ; but——"

Then his little eyes wandered to where Esther was sitting, and he sighed. Tragedy and comedy were strangely jumbled together that night.

Suddenly, however, as the preliminary chords were being played on the piano, Benny showed signs of nervousness. He was conscious of a pair of dark eyes bent upon him—eyes that stabbed into his conscience, eyes that made him for the moment forget his words, and made him think of a "poor devil" away in a gloomy convict prison, doing time ! But he managed to banish the picture conjured up, just in time, and started to sing :

Oh, when I was single, oh, then,
Oh, when I was single, oh, then,
Oh, when I was single,
My pockets did jingle,
I long to be single again !

There were several verses. At the conclusion of the song, he was vociferously encored.

Pollie clapped her hands together most excitedly.

"Isn't he a funny man !" she whispered to Crump.

"A very funny fellow !" said Crump, with a twinkling of his grey eyes. "A very funny fellow, indeed, Pollie !"

It was useless for Benny to bow. He was compelled to respond with a second song.

"How delightfully funny he is !" said Lady Eliza Normanhurst to Revelle ; "you must dine with us one night at the Towers, and bring Mr. Faversham. He's quite too screamingly funny !"

Benny's next song, "The Polka and the Choir-boy !"—the Vicar looked a little nervous at first ; but it was genuinely funny without being irreverent or vulgar—was even a greater success than the first. Three times he was recalled ; again bowing did not satisfy the audience. They meant to hear him again.

"Encore, encore, encore !"

At last the applause ceased. Benny stepped forward to the edge of the platform.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I'm sorry to say that I have run out of songs ; but, with your permission, in place of another song, I will give you a short recitation entitled 'Burglar Jack !'"

Revelle, clever as he was at disguising his feelings, tugged hard at his moustache, and vainly tried to conceal a smile. This was irony indeed ! A matchless piece of impertinence on Benny's part.

"What are you laughing at ?" asked Pollie, looking up into Crump's face.

"He's such a funny fellow !" chuckled the little man. "Oh, this is rich, very rich indeed !"

And Crump, for a moment only seeing the the humorous side of the case, grew quite red in the face with suppressed mirth.

The recitation proved partly humorous, partly pathetic—it dealt with a hardened, crime-stained burglar who was interrupted in the early hours of the morning by a little child, who ultimately melted his heart. Now there was loud laughter from, now a tendency to swallow at an invisible lump among the audience. The Vicar looked pleased. The recitation inculcated a moral lesson.

"Charming !" said Lady Eliza Normanhurst at the conclusion, "quite too charming ! Really he made me feel quite sad. He ought to have been an actor, Mr. Revelle !"

"I daresay," answered Revelle, "he would have been, if he had been compelled to earn his living ; but you know how often it is the case—money often suppresses talent. Where a fellow has no spur to drive him on, don't you know, he takes things slackly ; makes a hobby of a thing instead of going in for it in real earnest. That's been the case with my friend Faversham !"

"By the way, is he any connection with the Norfolk Favershams ?"

"Distantly related—yes !" replied Revelle unblushingly.

And Mr. Faversham, otherwise Benny Beard, alias Herbert Giles, the Tinker, who had suffered five years' penal servitude, went up thirty-five per cent., in Lady Eliza Normanhurst's estimation.

Esther rose up quietly, and made her way round to the room at the back of the platform where the performers were gathered together. After a second solo from the young gentleman on the flute, it was her turn to appear.

Revelle watched her as she moved on to the platform. Apart from her money, he told himself, she was well worth winning for herself. The song she sang was an old English ballad—there was nothing in it about "Love's twining fingers !"—and it went straight to the hearts of the audience.

"Your eyes are watering !" said Pollie, looking up into Crump's face, when the last soft notes had melted away.

"Yes, Pollie, yes !"—the little man blew his nose violently. —"I'm—I'm suffering from a slight cold in my head ! And, apart from that, the song was most touching, and"—he added to himself—"the singer !"

"Encore !" shouted the audience.

"I wish they wouldn't !" thought Crump, "I really wish they wouldn't. But they don't know the strain. Ah, it's the old play of 'Masks and Faces !'"

At the conclusion of the concert it was the general opinion that Miss Mansfield and Mr. Faversham had divided the honours between them. There was a touch of irony in that !

"And you've enjoyed yourself, Pollie ?" asked Crump, as they passed out of the building.

"Oh, ever so much. I liked that funny gentleman ; but I think I liked Miss Mansfield best !"

"I did !" said the little man.

Then a smartly equipped brougham dashed past them. Crump caught a glimpse of the two occupants—Seaton Revelle and Esther. Benny had acted upon the instructions given him, and had made himself scarce.

"What did you say ?" asked Pollie, as an exclamation burst rather suddenly from the little man to whose hand she was tightly clinging.

"Damp !" said Crump, "I was saying the evening air seemed a little damp !"

He felt compelled to tell an untruth. He could not have

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OUR NEW SERIAL.

told Pollie what he had really said. It was quite the exception for him to use strong language; but on this occasion a strong word had slipped out, and "him" had followed it. He had jumped at a conclusion as to what would happen before the brougham reached the Woodlands, and his indignation had mastered him.

"I think," said Revelle, "the whole affair went off splendidly, Miss Mansfield. You sang most charmingly!"

Esther could not help a little shudder. She was alone with the man whom, beyond all others, she loathed and despised. She was conscious of his eyes being upon her, could almost feel the look of admiration shining from them.

"I—er—I'm awfully sorry that your father couldn't come on with us; and yet I'm—I can't help being glad of this opportunity of being alone with you. Perhaps—perhaps, you can guess the reason why?"

At first Esther Mansfield had attracted him as other women had attracted him. She was pretty, fascinating, possessed of a peculiar charm of her own, and, one day, would inherit a fortune. He had entered the brougham believing that his heart was well under control of his head. Hitherto, he had never been led by passion. His utter selfishness had always been supreme. He was only conscious now that Esther appealed to him as no other woman had done before.

Away in the County asylum a lifeless-eyed woman, with an expressionless face, from which a former prettiness had been washed out, was talking to herself in a low monotone about Jim—her husband!

The good-looking man in evening dress turned his face towards Esther. She could not meet his gaze—a burning one now—lest he should read the fierce hate and loathing that burnt in her own—this man who had torn the man she loved from her. Instinct told her what was coming.

With a quick movement he took one of her hands in his own. With a little cry, as if his touch had burnt her, she snatched it from him.

Her action seemed only to embolden him. A moment later he had grasped her hand again.

"Esther," he breathed out quickly, "I want an answer to a question. I love you! Is there any hope for me?"

Her every feeling of delicacy was outraged. Though, womanlike, she had realised what was coming, though, in a measure, she had steeled herself to play her part in the presence of the man she loathed beyond expression, her first and almost irresistible impulse was to snatch her hand from the clasp that seemed to scorch her, and strike him across the face; and, with the blow, to shriek out her hate, her utter detestation for him!

Her face, white as death, was averted. The blue veins on her forehead throbbed with the pulse of passionate emotion. She had made no movement. Revelle still held her hand, icy, trembling, yet unresisting. He was well enough versed in the art of love-making. He had pleaded with other women as he was pleading now; but never before in such deadly earnest! She was different from those other women—something more to him than they had ever been!

"Esther, Esther!" He could not see her eyes, nor the strange fire that burnt within them. "You don't answer my question? I ask you again. Answer me. Is there any hope?"

A lamp burnt in the interior of the brougham. He could not see her eyes; but he saw the hot blood suffuse her white cheeks and mount to her forehead. And, with it, life seemed to return to her. With a quick movement she snatched free her hand. Her nostrils were dilated and quivering. Her bosom heaving tumultuously.

"Esther!"

"Don't call me by that name! Don't—don't speak to me!"

"Don't keep me in suspense. I—I must have an answer to my question!"

"You have no right to speak to me like this!"—the words came quickly, and so low that they were scarcely audible. "Have you forgotten altogether the past—my past?"

She had nerved herself up to play her part!

There was reproach in her words; but, to Seaton Revelle, it seemed not harsh reproach. He told himself that she was struggling between conscience and an inclination to listen to him.

"But surely," he whispered, "it isn't right that the past should enter into the present. The past is done with—I had hoped it was forgotten. It is the present, the future now."

"No"—there was a strange ring in her voice as she breathed out the words—"the past is not done with—for me! Do you think I can forget so soon?"

"I had hoped that time had deadened remembrance; that you had forgotten the man who wronged you so cruelly!"

She drew in her breath sharply. Woman though she was, at that moment she felt tempted to fly at his throat for the lying words he had uttered.

"But," he went on, "forgive me for having spoken as I have done. Forgive me if my love for you has carried me away. I don't ask for an answer to my question now. But I shall not change! I shall wait and hope. I shall ask you the same question again some day!"

He waited for a moment, as if expecting her to say something, but Esther neither stirred nor spoke. He held out his hand.

"Miss Mansfield, say you have forgiven me for what I have said! Tell me that it will make no difference in the future to our—our friendship?"

She took the outstretched hand. Her lips parted as though she would speak; but the words refused to come. Try hard as she would she could not utter that lie, though it would have been spoken to serve the man she loved. And yet she must say something!

"What has happened," she said at last, speaking in a low, quivering voice, "will make no—no difference, Mr. Revelle!"

No difference to her hate—no difference to her determination to struggle to bring the truth to light, to unmask the man beside her, who, mis-reading her words, utterly miscalculating, believed that he would win her yet! It was only a matter of time. He had spoken too prematurely, but he did look upon her refusal as final and absolute. He would win Benny's money yet!

"I couldn't bear to think," he went on, "that—that you would be any different to me from what you have been; that my presumption had sacrificed your friendship!"

He possessed all the outward polish of a gentleman. Had Esther only not known, there was nothing that he had actually said or done entitled to reproach.

The brougham drew up outside the Woodlands. Revelle alighted, rang the bell, then assisted out Esther.

"Tell me," he pleaded, "this will make no difference?"

"It will make no difference!" she answered mechanically.

If he could only have seen her a few minutes later, as, alone in her room, she buried her face in her hands, and gave way to a paroxysm of tears! Her very womanhood had been outraged. That he should have dared to speak to her as he had done; dared to assume that in a few short months she had forgotten the man she loved—would be willing to listen to another!

But Revelle had not seen, and, as he returned to the Firs, he was not altogether dissatisfied with himself. The thin edge of the wedge had been introduced. Then his face hardened a little.

Pah! But she was packed safely away. That corner seemed safely weathered. Twice, in the presence of witnesses, she had denied herself; yet——

He lit a cigarette. It was an unfortunate incident.

"So Crofton," he muttered presently, "has managed to escape. I'm glad—infernally glad—it wasn't the other fellow!"

The silent Railton admitted him. Mr. Faversham, he said, had already returned, and was in the billiard-room.

"How are you getting on?" said Revelle, in a low voice. "I saw you at the concert."

"Slowly, but well, sir! I am getting on very friendly terms with those two young constables. They are, sir, if I may use the expression, very 'green.' I am gleaning much

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information that may be useful. To-morrow evening, if I have your permission, I shall visit my friend, Mr. Piper, Lord Normanhurst's butler. His Lordship and her Ladyship are dining out."

"You're doing good work, Railton. I'm pleased with you!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Revelle made his way to the billiard-room where Benny, flushed a little with his triumph and a couple of whiskeys and sodas on the top of champagne, was knocking the balls about. He looked up as Revelle entered.

"You haven't won your bet?" he said.

"No," answered Revelle carelessly; "but there's still plenty of time!"

Benny gave a sigh of relief. He was a blackguard; but not absolutely a hopeless one. He was thankful—for Esther's sake!

CHAPTER XXI.
How a Letter Reached Esther.

A week had passed since the village concert, and the walls of Warham were placarded now with great posters announcing yet another and far more important festivity in connection with the raising of funds for the restoration of the Parish Church—a grand fête, under the direct patronage of Lord and Lady Normanhurst, to be held in the magnificent grounds that surrounded the Towers. In the village it was the one topic of conversation. In the posters much was made of the fact that Seaton Revelle, Esq., of the Firs, Warham, would in the course of the day, weather permitting, make a number of ascents in a captive balloon, taking with him a limited number of passengers. Tickets could be obtained either from the Vicar or Lord Normanhurst. The entertainment would conclude with a grand, free ascent by Seaton Revelle, Esq.

Tom Jackson, on duty outside the railway station, was scrutinising one of these posters.

A London train had just arrived, and a few passengers were passing out of the gates.

One of them was a powerful, broad-shouldered man, with rugged features, iron-grey hair, and on one side of his face stretched a deep scar that lost itself in his hair. He was wearing a peaked cap, and his coat, unbuttoned, revealed a blue jersey, across which was embroidered in red letters, "Salvation Army." He was evidently a stranger to the neighbourhood, for he looked about him with uncertainty, then moved across to Tom Jackson.

"Can yer tell me," he said, "whether there's a Mr. Mansfield living anywhere about here, and how I gets to his house?"

Tom Jackson looked at him with surprise, wondering what the Salvation Army man had in common with the rich banker.

"Why, yes, keep up the main road, and about a mile and a quarter on you'll see Mr. Mansfield's house, it stands off the road on the left-hand side."

"Thank yer, much obliged."

Tom followed him with his eyes.

"Rather a rough-looking customer," he said to himself, "wonder what his business with Mr. Mansfield is?"

"And now to see her," muttered the man, as he strode out with a peculiar dogged step, "and give them messages. I promised 'im, and Ben Needham keeps his word!"

When he had passed out of the village and there was no one to see him, he drew from his pocket two official-looking papers, and a dirty, thumb-marked, crumpled letter that had the appearance of having been rolled up, at one time or another, into a ball.

"It give me a lot of trouble to git it through, but in spite of all them searchings, I fair diddled 'em."

The name of Esther Mansfield was roughly scrawled in pencil across the smudged envelope.

Then, though he had read them through often enough before, he glanced at the other papers. One of them was a copy of His Majesty's license to be at large during the remaining portion of his term of penal servitude, and stated that if Benjamin Needham were convicted before the expiration of the said term of some indictable offence within the United King-

A New Industry for English Girls.

According to a statement recently made by the manager of a well-known London hat company, arrangements are now being made for the opening up of a new industry, viz., Panama hat making in England. This new industry, it is said, will provide employment for hundreds of girls. Factory life has, however, its drawbacks. Headache, biliousness, anæmia, and indigestion, prevail to an enormous extent amongst factory workers, but Bile Beans for Biliousness are a certain cure for these ailments. Proof of this is to be found in the following statement of Mrs. G. Woodcroft, a straw hat maker of 29 Essex Street, Luton. To a representative of the *Luton Reporter*, she said:

"Ever since I can recollect, I have suffered a good deal from biliousness. It has sometimes kept me from following my occupation at the factory for five days out of the six. When these attacks came on they were accompanied by giddiness. My sight was also affected, and I was unable to see anything very clearly. I continually experienced a sensation of coldness in my arms and legs, and even in the morning I felt sleepy and drowsy. A languid feeling would quite overcome me, and I could not take an interest in anything. I visited many doctors, and took bottle after bottle of their medicine. Then I tried various remedies that my neighbours advised, but still I got no better. Still determined to persevere in my search for health, I tried a number of patent medicines which I saw advertised, but none of them took effect, and I remained as far as ever from being cured.

"Last summer I saw in one of the London papers an account of the benefit that had been derived by persons taking Bile Beans, and I thought I would try them. I wrote for a box and began to take them. In a very short time I felt better. The languid feeling disappeared, and I do not now feel drowsy as I used to do, but on the contrary I have more energy than ever I had before. Since taking Bile Beans, I have not had a single attack of biliousness. Two years ago my husband went away to the war in South Africa, and I was very bad then with biliousness, but Bile Beans have created such a change in me that he will hardly know me when he comes home again. Bile Beans for Biliousness, which accomplished the above cure are purely vegetable in composition, and their excellence has been so well proved that many eminent doctors are now prescribing them largely. They are a certain cure for biliousness, headache, congestion of the liver, neuralgia, fainting fits, attacks of dizziness, indigestion, flatulence, pains in the chest loins, or back, defective secretion of bile, wasting affections, female ailments, rheumatism, gout, skin eruptions, and the host of ailments having a common origin in impurity of the blood, a general congestion of the system, and loss of vital force. Obtainable from all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 & 120 London Wall, London, E.C., upon receipt of prices, one and three halfpence or two and nine.

The Only Efficacious Substitute for Cod Liver Oil—

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(*Really Genuine.*)

In patent air-tight tins, ½lb., 1/4; 1lb., 2/4; 2lb., 4/-; including tin and postage.

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dom, such license should be immediately forfeited. By law if the license were forfeited, he would be liable to undergo a term of penal servitude equal to the portion of his term of ten years which remained unexpired when the license was granted.

The other paper ran as follows—

"Register No. X. 375. Name, Benjamin Needham. Take notice. You are required by Act of Parliament to report yourself to the chief police-station of the locality to which you may go within forty-eight hours after your arrival therein; and if you change your residence from one police-district to another, you must report it to the police-station to which you last reported yourself, before you go. If you omit any of the above particulars, you will be guilty of a misdemeanour, and, upon conviction, will forfeit your license."

The ticket-of-leave man folded up the papers with a grim smile; then tramped on again. "That must be the house," he muttered, some ten minutes later, "the question is how am I to git to see the young lady. I reckon she won't care about bein' seen talkin' to a cove who's out on ticket!"

He was staring up the drive, doubting what to do, when the front door opened and Esther Mansfield issued and came towards him.

"If this is the young lady," muttered Ben Needham, "I'm in luck!"

And with a husky cough he gripped the crumpled letter.

It was only when she had reached the gates that Esther noticed the strange man standing there. She glanced at his rugged, scarred face, noted the "Salvation Army" embroidered across his jersey, and would have passed on. She was conscious of the fact that the man was staring rather hard at her.

"Axin' yer pardon, Miss"—the man, with a movement of rough politeness, had doffed his cap—"but does a Mr. Mansfield live in yonder house?"

"Yes," answered Esther, a little taken aback by the question, "but he is in London. Can I give him any message?"

And Esther, in her turn, stared at the man's face, wondering what business he could have with her father.

"It ain't with Mr. Mansfield as I wants to speak, but Miss Mansfield. Axin' yer pardon, but I've a sort o' notion its Miss Mansfield I'm speaking to now."

"Yes, I'm Miss Mansfield, but you want to speak with me! What is it?"

Ben Needham glanced first at the house in the background, then down the road.

"I've just come out on ticket," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper. "There was a certain party from where I've come as was pertikler anxious to git a letter through to someone. He axed me to give it, along with one or two messages, to Miss Mansfield."

The first part of the man's speech was incomprehensible to her.

She did not know the meaning of the phrase "to come out on ticket," but the word "letter" had caused the hot blood to flood her cheeks, then the flush ebbed away, leaving them paler than before.

"A letter!" she gasped. "Quick, don't keep me in suspense—from whom?"

In her eagerness she took a step towards him and laid a trembling hand on his sleeve. Ben Needham drew the crumpled, dirty envelope from his pocket.

"From No. 35, Miss," he said, in a husky whisper. He saw her dark eyes dilate as they fell on the scrawled address; he heard the little cry of recognition, a cry of mingled pain and joy; and then, with a gulp, and drawing his hand across his eyes he turned aside his head and stared down upon the ground.

Surroundings were forgotten. Had the road been thronged with men and women, Esther would neither have seen nor heard them. With tear-dimmed eyes she read the pencilled words. He seemed to be speaking to her. Next to her heart she bore a letter—a letter that had passed under the eyes of prison officials. But this one was so different. There was no reserve; no holding back. Though many miles and prison walls intervened, he had spoken to her. Again and again she read the letter, until the fast-falling tears blurred her sight. Then she strained it to her bosom. It had strengthened her, and had given her fresh hope. There is a pain that is closely allied to joy—an indescribable emotion that now thrilled Esther's heart.

Ben Needham had not stirred; his grey head was bent forward, his eyes fastened on the ground. There was a delicacy of feeling somewhere concealed beneath the rough exterior of the ticket-of-leave man and ex-felon. He did not wish to intrude upon her thoughts.

Esther was the first to break the silence.

"You have some—some messages for me," she said, in a low, broken voice.

"Yes, Miss," answered the ticket-of-leave man huskily; "there was a number of messages as I promised 'im I'd give yer. And the last of 'em was ter tell yer—I was standing by 'im just after he'd writ that brief—was to tell yer, Miss—there, don't mind me, I'm an old 'un—was to tell yer that he loved yer!"

Then, haltingly, but almost word for word, he repeated the messages that Alec Scarsdale had whispered to him in the prison ward. He found it a hard task, and more than once he nearly broke down. His voice shook, and he kept his eyes averted, for Esther was crying now like a little child.

"There, there, Missie," he faltered, when the last message had been given, "don't take on so. Look at me, I've done twenty year's time, all told, and I've come out all right."

And, with a rough movement of sympathy, he held out his great, hard hands; Esther took them both in her own.

"He says," she sobbed, "that you have been a good friend to him—how can I thank you, how can I repay you for all you have done?"

"I don't want nor yet ax for nothing, Missie. I'm only too glad to think I've kept my promises as I made 'em—for his sake and for yourn."

"Are you quite sure there is nothing I can do for you. You have done so much for me!"

"No, Missie, I don't want nothink, I'm thankful to say. I've got a job to my liking, and a straight job, too, which ain't altogether usual with me!"

And the old burglar glancing down at the embroidery on his jersey gave a grim smile. Then he glanced up and down the still deserted road.

"Sometimes, Missie," he said, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "it makes me grin a bit when I thinks of myself in this 'ere kit, me, as only a few weeks ago was wearing the prison slops. It seems a bit late in the day to turn over a new leaf—I'm well past fifty, missie, and I cracked my first crib when I was a kid of six, my father shovin' me through a little window for to go round and unbolt the door for 'im and his pal, but they say it's never too late to mend."

Though Esther did not understand many of his words she followed his meaning. Looking at him with bewildered astonishment she realised that she had been brought face to face with a character who represented a side of life of which, till then, she had known nothing.

Ben Needham seemed to read her thought. Again he grimly smiled.

"You ain't met many like me, I'm thinking, Missie, and a good job, too! Well, then, I've kept my promise, and I'll be gettin' back agen. If I can be of any service to yer, you've only to write to Ben Needham, the Barracks, Mile End Road, London—that'll find me. Anythink I can do, I'll do and glad to do it, for yer own sake and for his'n!"

But Esther had a hundred questions to ask—many of them searching questions, prompted by instinct, about prison life in general. And Ben Needham, glancing down into the anxious upturned face, with its piteous, inquiring look, was constrained to twist and smooth over the real facts. He had not forgotten Scarsdale's request to keep from her the truth about prison-life.

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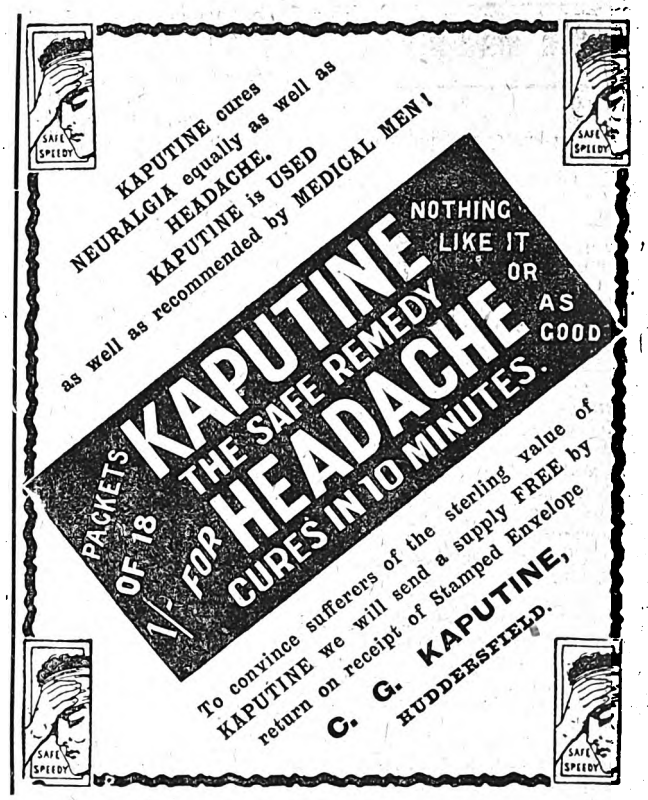
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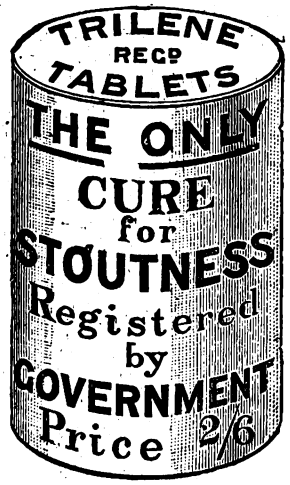

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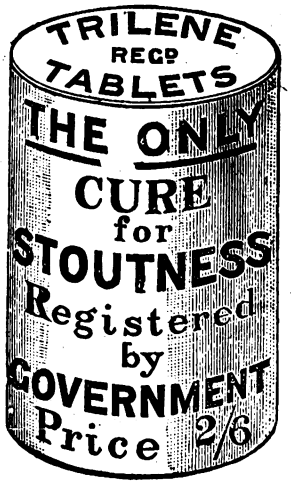

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER, of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets, I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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"Good-bye, Missie," he said at last; "don't forget my address. If yer wants me, to ax a sudden question like, the answer of which might ease yer mind, I'll come to yer."

Again Esther took the hard, rough hands in her own, and her words of thanks came from the bottom of her heart. There was a look of sturdy independence about the man that told her delicate sense of perception that to offer him recompense for what he had done in the shape of money would only hurt his feelings.

Raising his cap, Ben Needham said good-bye, and with the same, peculiar, dogged gait, walked back stationwards.

Esther returned to the house—her purpose in leaving it was forgotten—and, in the privacy of her room, again and again re-read the precious letter with its messages of love, of hope, of belief that ultimately justice would be done. Things were just as they had been, Scarsdale was still a prisoner; a terrible term of imprisonment still stretched between him and freedom; yet that letter and those messages had gladdened Esther's heart as it had not been gladdened for many a weary day. They had come as refreshingly as moisture to a drooping flower.

* * * * *

Some three days after Needham's interview with Esther, a registered packet arrived for him at his quarters.

On opening it, he found within a handsome gold watch and chain. There was no accompanying note, but on the back of the watch, plainly engraved, were the words, "To Ben Needham, from Esther Mansfield."

He stared at it; his rugged features twitched; the colour beneath his tan skin deepened.

"Gawd bless 'er! She ain't ashamed to couple her sweet name with mine—me, an old lag—me as ain't fit to breathe the same air as 'er!"

Again he stared hard at the watch and chain.

"I've handled dozens of 'em before"—the same grim smile played across the scared features—"but it's the fust one that I've come by honest. Gawd bless 'er 'eart!"

CHAPTER XXII.

Escaped.

"Now, Mrs. Cobb, I insist! I'm not going to do any work myself to-day. It's a general holiday. And I'm going to take you and Pollie over to this grand *fête* at the Towers. It is, they tell me, going to be a wonderful affair. Steam-horses, shows, even a balloon!"

"Well, well, Mr. Penworthy, it's very kind of you, I'm sure. Though I feel I'm getting too old for this kind of thing!"

"Tut, tut, tut!" said Crump, "that's settled!"

And half an hour later, Crump, his white-haired landlady leaning on his arm, and Pollie holding on to one hand, his homely face aglow—he loved to give pleasure to other people—left Woodbine Cottage for the Towers. His patience was being tried; but he possessed the faculty of being able to temporarily set his worries on one side; and though matters were at a standstill, he was not dissatisfied. His affairs were in good order, and his nets spread.

"Oh—o—o—oh! Look!" said Pollie presently, pointing excitedly upwards, "there's the balloon!"

A captive balloon, in the distance looking like a toy, had risen up above the tops of some trees, then presently came to a standstill, swaying to and fro like an inverted pendulum!

"Yes, that's the balloon, Pollie!" said Crump; then thought of Vance, away in the County asylum, just visible from the Towers, and Jim! The little man's face lost its look of gaiety, and Pollie tugged rather impatiently at his hand, and had to repeat her question twice—what made balloons go up into the air?—before Crump realised that he was being spoken to. Then he explained that it was gas, and added that gas sometimes was the power also that raised human beings into high places in the world as well as balloons!

Then Crump guided his two charges out of the road to one side as the rattle of wheels and hoofs told of an approaching carriage. The next minute, he was raising his hat deferentially to John Mansfield and Esther as they were carried past.

"I like that little fellow Penworthy, Esther," said the banker, "he's quiet, gentlemanly, and unassuming, and, moreover, he knows his business. That front garden of ours will be vastly improved by the time he's done with it. Hallo!"—he pointed to the distant balloon—"our friend Revelle is already sky high! I must say he is a tremendous addition to the neighbourhood, so full of enterprise. I hear there's some talk of his being nominated for a Justice of the Peace. Normanhurst has taken to him, and it's his idea!"

As the carriage rolled through the gates, two strapping young constables on duty outside brought their hands sharply to the salute, and one of them coloured up under his helmet.

"It seems only the other day," said the banker, "that Jackson was a slip of a lad in the bank. What a fine young fellow he's developing into. Scars——"

He stopped shortly, and coughed.

Esther winced; then seemed herself again. She was learning to school her emotions. The grounds were already thronged with folk, and many a young girl, as she watched the carriage roll past, heaved a sigh, and envied the rich banker's daughter. Surely she wanted for nothing!

Some little time after the carriage had passed through, Fred Wilton winked across at Tom Jackson.

"Tom!" he said, "here comes Uncle! Bless him! He's got old Mrs. Cobb and Pollie in charge, and he's looking as proud as an old hen out with a couple of chicks! Just like him! He's never so happy as when he's giving other folk a treat. Doesn't look much like a late chief inspector of Scotland Yard, does he?"

Tom Jackson nodded his head.; then his expression changed and he stared in the opposite direction. A distant cloud of dust was moving along the road. The sound of hoofs had reached his ears.

"Look out, Fred!" he cried sharply, "a runaway horse!"

Crump also had seen and heard, and was under the same impression. He hustled Mrs. Cobb and Pollie almost into the ditch. And then, with a remarkable agility, darted after the constables down the road.

"Go for the bridle, and cling on!" he shouted, "but let me have a try first, lads. I've had more experience than you! Let me get ahead. You drop behind! Let me have first shot!"

But there was no need. The horses—there were two—were not runaways. At the sight of the constables the riders reined in sharply.

"What's up?" cried Tom Jackson.

"A woman's escaped from the asylum," answered back one of the men quickly, "when she got away she was wearing the regulation dress. It's a case of looking sharp. She's suffering from suicidal mania; maybe, she got through into the grounds with the crowd, or has gone on to the reservoir!"

"I've been here since ten o'clock," answered Jackson; "no one in the dress has passed this way, I'm certain of that!"

"What's her name?"

It was Crump who asked the question sharply.

"Vance!"

The captive balloon was still up in mid-air, swaying to and fro in the breeze, and the figure, seated daringly in the rigging above the passengers in the car below, was waving a hat to the great, gaping crowd below!

"Vance!" cried Crump; "then, if you'll take my advice, one of you will go into the grounds, and the other ride at full speed to the reservoir!"

Instinctively he had taken command.

The stationary steam-engine, that worked the drum to which the wire that held the balloon was attached, started to pant and snort.

Seaton Revelle had signalled from his perch in the rigging.

The balloon was descending!

[Another splendid instalment of this powerful story will be published next Tuesday.]

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IN CONFIDENCE

By MADGE MORRIS.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Who Should Start It?

You have often, writes "BESSIE," advised people to try and get introduced to each other by the aid of mutual friends. Now I know a young man by sight whom I should very much like to meet, and I think he would like to know me. For some time we have come no nearer an acquaintance. Should I make the necessary effort to get introduced or should I leave it to him?

Certainly, you should leave it to him. If he is really drawn towards you he will have more resources to secure the introduction to you than you to him, and further it is for him to make the overtures, not you. You had better wait and see if he makes any such attempts to know you, and if not rest assured that his feeling towards you is not so active as you imagine.

A Case for Caution.

"W. H. L." writes to me to tell me of a strangely sudden infatuation he has formed for a young girl of between sixteen or seventeen, whom he first saw in a provincial town, and afterwards at a place of worship at which both were attending. Her parents are very careful of her, and as to whom she meets. Should my correspondent seek to make her acquaintance, and if so, how. He fears by writing to her father, his intentions might be misunderstood. I think "W. H. L." had better postpone writing to the parent until he has tried other methods of securing a formal introduction. As he says, her father might quite easily be prejudiced against a communication from a strange man.

If he can get an introduction through the medium of mutual friends I do not see that her youth would be so serious a bar to an attachment, if they were on proper social terms. Seventeen is a fault a girl soon grows out of. If the introduction cannot be obtained, he might try and get to know the father on a social basis. This advice, I know, savours very much of intrigue, but there is little doubt that in love it is very difficult to get on without it. "W. H. L." must try his capacities in this direction, and if there is no result, he had better make a frontal attack and place his case direct before the parent, and ask his permission to pay his attentions, explaining at the same time his position and prospects in life. Straightforward conduct of this kind has in more than one case to my knowledge been successful.

Should He Tell Her?

"SHOULD a man tell his *fiancée* everything?" inquires "R. T." "Even when to do so might ruin their happiness?" The circumstances under which he writes are as follows: Early in his life he got into trouble over a money matter and was sent to prison. Since his release he went abroad, started a business in the colonies, and is now a prosperous merchant and engaged to be married. Is it his duty to tell the girl of his early disgrace?

If the nature of "R. T's" early trouble is known to the people with whom he comes into contact, and the stigma in any way still hangs to him, he should certainly make a clean breast of the whole thing. To ask his *fiancée* to tie herself to a man labouring under a disgrace would be an offence beyond condemnation, if she were not made aware of what she was facing. And if "R. T.'s" life will be far away from those who know his past, and where he is unlikely to meet any one who may reveal unpleasant things about him, I do not see why he need be afraid to tell her the truth and assure her that no stigma attaches to him in the place where he will dwell. If she is really fond of him she will not allow this to stand in the way of their union. He will have to break the news to her with skill approaching genius, however, as a clumsy revelation of the fact that her betrothed had been in prison might so terrify her that all would be lost. So try to tell the truth very carefully, "R. T."

A Very Simple Problem.

I DON'T want to appear unkind, but many of my correspondents put me questions which they should be able to solve themselves with the smallest amount of thought. If my advice can be of real assistance to anyone, I am only too pleased to give it, but there are cases in which one's own common sense is all that is wanted. Now "DOLLY GREY" has been for many years continuously in the company of a young man she has known from childhood. Naturally enough on growing older she has found that her feelings towards him have undergone a change, and has fallen in love with another man. But her previous lover still remains devoted to her.

Obviously "DOLLY'S" duty is to let the latter know the plain truth that she no longer cares for him. It is a very painful task to have to perform, but life is full of such things. Write to him, "DOLLY," and tell him exactly what your feelings are, and ask him as a man to cease his attentions. No, I should not ask the intervention of your new sweetheart. That would be an unkind thing to do. Any termination of your affair with his predecessor should be done by yourself. Men never tolerate the intervention of third parties in their love affairs.

A Great Big Shame!

"C. S." is in love with a girl who is only four feet eight in height, while he measures five feet ten. His friends tell him he would regret marrying her, but he is very fond of her and would not wish to give her up. Your friends may be right, "C. S." You have, no doubt, heard the song which describes the sorrows of the man who suffered continually from the nagging of a woman of four feet two, he being six feet three, a fact which the author suggested was "a great big shame." Little women proverbially exercise supreme control over their husbands, so you are facing rather serious possibilities. But what should this matter if you really love her. No, "C. S.," be a man, and do not be distracted from your intentions by the experiences of others. She may not turn out so formidable as you fear.

When is She an Old Maid?

ETHEL G. writes to ask at what age does a woman become an old maid. So far as I know there is no recognised boundary line in this country between girlhood and old maidenhood. In France, however, an unmarried woman is an old maid at thirty. She is still a young maid at twenty-nine years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days, but twenty-four hours later she has reached old maidenhood.

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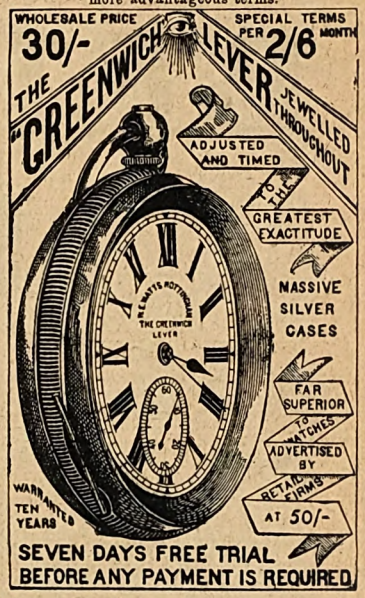

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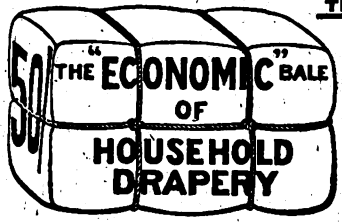

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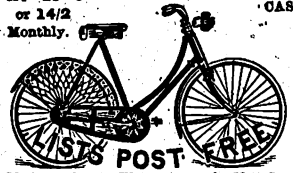

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ANOTHER WOMAN'S CHILD.

A Powerful Story which Tells of Love's Revenge.

"I HATE her! I hate her! I hate her!"

The words rang out in accents of passionate anger, beneath which could be distinguished a note of intolerable pain.

The girl who uttered them leant back against the gnarled trunk of an old apple-tree, her face uplifted to the man who stood beside her, embarrassment visible in every jerky movement he made, every nervous word he spoke.

"I say, Joyce, I'm most awfully sorry, but—but don't talk like that. She——"

"She has stolen you from me—and I tell you I hate her—I hate her!" the girl turned on him fiercely. "You loved me once. You loved me till she won you away from me with her beauty and her wiles, and now my heart is broken—broken!"

And sinking into a little miserable heap upon the ground, the girl broke into a storm of tears.

Embarrassment and impatience were the prevailing expressions on the face of the man who stood awkwardly beside her—a man whose weakness of character was written plainly on his fair, undecided face.

"I'm awfully sorry, Joyce!" he began. "I'm awfully sorry—but——"

She sprang to her feet again with an exclamation of scorn.

"What good do you think it will do to say you are sorry? Sorry! You say you are 'sorry' if you break a cup. You can spare your sorrow now! Do you think you are likely to be happy with this beautiful cousin of whom you tell me, whom you have won over another woman's heart, and by trampling on another woman's love? Will you be happy with her, I wonder? Why did you make me love you if this was to be the end?"

The sun filtered through the blossom-laden apple-trees upon the girl's fair face. Her blue tear-filled eyes smote the man who watched her with a momentary compunction. It was but momentary. Another face rose before him—a face as brilliant in colouring as a gorgeous tropical flower—eyes, in whose bewitching glances he had forgotten loyalty, truth, honour—a bewildering smile whose fascination had made his brain whirl with strange, new sensations, never aroused by his calmer, and better love for Joyce. The comparison in his mind between his beautiful, queenly cousin, Hilda, and the girl who stood before him now, drove from his heart that momentary compunction.

"After all," he reflected, "Joyce and I would never have been really happy together. A man cannot commit a greater folly than to marry out of his own station in life, and I should have done that if I had married Joyce. Poor little girl! She will soon forget me, and marry someone more suited to her, who will make her far happier than I could have done. I could not give Hilda up now. It is all for the best!"

So argued the weak, easy-going Aleck Baynes, the man whom Hilda Baynes, his beautiful cousin, had fascinated, as easily as a snake fascinates a bird.

"Joyce," he began again, touching her arm, "I cannot tell you—I cannot ever tell you how terribly sorry I am for having hurt you! I know I have been a brute, but I could not marry you now that I—that I——"

"Now that you love someone else better," she retorted scornfully; "now that this fine cousin you tell me about has taken you away. Where did you find this wonderful cousin you had not met before?"

"I met her at the house of a mutual relation," he replied, cautiously refraining from mentioning the locality in which Hilda lived.

"And she is very beautiful?"

"Beautiful?"—a little rapt look came into the young man's eyes—"she—she—I never saw anyone like her. She is wonderful—and she loves me—and——"

He broke off, with a sudden remembrance of who his listener was.

"Thanks!" she said sarcastically. "I don't care to hear your raptures about your new love. You had better make haste to say good-bye to your old one! Why did you ask me to meet you here—in the old place where we have been so happy? It was like an insult to ask me *here*—to this orchard. It hurts—ah! it hurts! Why did you make me come?"

"I wanted us to part good friends," he said weakly. "I could not bear to feel you were angry with me, Joyce."

"Good friends!" she exclaimed indignantly; "good friends! You and I can never be friends again. You cannot throw a woman's heart away as you would an old shoe! When are you to marry your cousin?" she asked abruptly. "Is it to be a grand affair?"

A dull flush mounted to Aleck Baynes' forehead, he stirred uneasily.

"Don't be so bitter, Joyce—Joyce, dear!" he stammered; "it—we, I mean the wedding, will not be grand at all. It is to be a—a secret marriage!"

"A secret marriage?" As the girl repeated his words, a gleam shot into her eyes, rightly interpreted by Aleck. He seized her arm.

"Joyce!" he cried, "do not take your revenge for the wrong I have done you by making our marriage known. I beseech you help us to keep it a secret. It is bitterly opposed by Hilda's people and mine. For the present it is imperative that it should be a dead secret. Joyce, for the sake of all

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that has come and gone between us, be good to me and keep my secret!"

His passionate, pleading voice died into silence. For a moment Joyce's face was set in lines of sullen resolve, then a gentler emotion swept them away.

"I can't refuse you," she said brokenly; "I never could. I will keep your secret, Aleck. I will not tell of your marriage, or injure you—and I hope—oh, I hope you may be happy!"

Then, with one long last look into the face of the man she loved, Joyce turned from him and walked away across the orchard, under the blossoming trees. She looked back at him once, but his eyes were fixed on the ground—he did not see her.

"Good-bye, Aleck, my darling!" she whispered; "good-bye, good-bye! I do not blame *you* so much. It is she that I hate—hate—hate. She has stolen you from me, and I hate her! Ah, if only I could punish her for what she has done, how gladly would I do it—how gladly!"

Thus the first seed of revengeful longing was sown in Joyce's heart, a seed destined some day to spring into a full grown tree.

* * * * *

Fate plays strange pranks sometimes. It played into Joyce's hands a year later.

The girl married shortly after Aleck's desertion of her—married a good man who had wooed her for years, and loved her steadfastly, and though she told him sorrowfully she had no heart to give him, he persuaded her to become his wife, and to let him try to comfort her. He and Joyce established themselves in a small house in London, and took in lodgers, and though it would be untrue to say that Joyce was happy, she worked loyally for and with her husband, and made him a good and faithful wife. But she never forgot the man she loved—and she never forgave the woman who had stolen him from her.

Just a year after her bitter parting with Aleck Baynes, there came to Joyce's house a woman who asked for rooms. She was singularly beautiful, and she told Joyce that she had lately lost her husband, and needed shelter for herself and for her unborn child. Joyce's heart went out to her, and she was even inclined to refuse the liberal prepayment which the stranger insisted upon bestowing upon her. Without further inquiries she agreed to help this lady in her trouble, and the best rooms were at once prepared for her.

Only after the beautiful stranger was installed did Joyce learn her name. Only after she had promised to succour and care for her did it become known to her that the woman under her roof was none other than the woman who had stolen her lover from her, but whom hitherto she had never seen—Hilda Baynes—now a widow and desolate! For one wild moment Joyce allowed her visions of revenge to run rampant in her mind. She would turn this creature out—she would——

But gentler thoughts followed, brought to her perhaps by the twining touch of her own baby's fingers—her month old baby, who had come to soften Joyce's heart. "No, no," she reflected, "I cannot take vengeance upon a woman, ill and in sore trouble. No, I will help Aleck's widow in this time of her sorest need, and if at some time revenge is put into my hands—it must not be yet."

So it came about that through the weeks that followed Hilda Baynes was totally unaware of the identity of the woman who tended her, never dreaming that her landlady—Joyce Carnegie—was the girl vaguely mentioned to her by Aleck, the girl from whom she herself had stolen him.

Perhaps Hilda was too utterly selfish to observe that Joyce's care of her was bestowed as a duty; she was so entirely self-absorbed that nothing outside her own immediate range of vision ever did impress her.

When her baby was born she showed neither love for it, nor interest in it.

"Take it away," she cried fretfully. "What can I do with a baby? Take it away!" Then she turned her face to the wall and railed against Fate, planning desperately how to circumvent this latest blow of fortune.

"A child!" she thought bitterly. "What shall I do now? My marriage has been successfully hidden; no one need ever have known it. I had not to change my name in marrying Aleck—the secret could have gone with me to my grave. But this wretched child has spoilt it all!" No spark of mother's love burnt in Hilda Baynes' bosom; no kindly thought of her helpless little one stirred within her; her own interests, her own ambition were all for which she cared.

The secret marriage had turned out a miserable failure; mutual reproaches and recriminations between the young couple had ended in an almost total rupture, and Aleck's death had been simply untold relief to his wife. Now at last she felt she would be able to attain the ambition which her temporary passion for her cousin had made her forget. She relegated her brief married life to the realms of nightmare, and indulged in blissful dreams of social triumphs and worldly delights such as her soul hankered after. With her great beauty she would make a great marriage, she thought, love might be set aside for ever, and ambition would be her god in his place.

And now the cup was dashed from her lips. This baby had spoilt everything. No man would wish to marry a woman who had previously contracted a secret marriage, and was burdened with a child. The man upon whom her ambitious soul was set was above all a man of honour and uprightness, who would despise her for her conduct, and turn his back upon her if he learnt of what had happened.

She clutched at the bedclothes in a paroxysm as her thoughts reached this point, and then all at once a smile hovered round her lips.

"I have it!" she whispered, "I have it! I believe it could be worked. I shall surely be able to carry it out successfully, and if so I shall be free—free—free!"

After this Joyce noticed how changed was Hilda's demeanour to her child. She seemed interested in it, even fond of it, and Joyce began to think that she had misjudged her rival.

The seed of revengeful longing in her heart came near to dying just then. Feeling she had misjudged Hilda the widow, she began to wonder whether she had perhaps misjudged Hilda the girl; but the seed of revenge lay dormant only for a while; it was to revive presently in its full strength.

Hilda recovered rapidly, and on a sunny May afternoon she summoned Joyce to her sitting-room, and said in her most charming accents:

"Mrs. Carnegie, you have been so good to me, that I have planned a tiny pleasure for you this afternoon. I want you and your husband to go to the theatre. I have taken seats for you, and you must really spare the time to go, I will take care of baby."

Much surprised, Joyce expressed the gratitude she felt, and early in the afternoon she and her husband started in the cab also provided by Mrs. Baynes, leaving the latter upon her sitting-room sofa, the baby's cradle beside her. But no sooner had the Carnegie's cab rolled away than Hilda leapt from the sofa, locked the door, and began with feverish haste to tear off the black garments she wore, replacing them by coloured clothes she drew from a box in the adjoining bedroom. She next proceeded to ransack cupboards, empty drawers, and to jam their contents pell mell into a large trunk, stopping now and again to laugh triumphantly.

"Thank Heaven, I gave her no address when I came to her," she said; "she will never be able to trace me. How could she do so? My name is common enough. When I marry again I shall insist upon a very quiet wedding. Joyce Carnegie will never discover me again—of that I shall make

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very sure!" Laughing still, she rammed the last remaining articles into her box, and banged down the lid resentfully.

"Thank Heaven. I have found a way of escape!" she cried. Her next action was to go into the sitting-room and look down at the sleeping babe, but there was no love on her beautiful face.

"I have found a means of disposing of you," she said; "you will be very happy as the Carnegie's child—you would be miserable as mine! You will be a companion for their own child—if you live, that is to say, and the doctor says you are very delicate!"

She then wrote a hurried note, after which she rang the bell for the maid of all work.

"I have a fearful toothache," she said, "Go to Holden, my chemist, and ask for some toothache tincture for me."

The girl hesitated, looking at her open-mouthed.

"Please ma'am, I can't leave the 'ouse," she said. "'Olden's a long ways off, and there's missus' baby and all."

"Do as I tell you," Hilda answered, "I am here, the house will come to no harm. Go at once!"

The girl fled incontinently, and as soon as Hilda had seen her out of sight down the street, she flung on a hat and cloak, and rushed to the front door to summon a cab.

Her beauty and her imperiousness paralysed the cabman into doing exactly what she wished, although as he told his wife later on, he had many misgivings as to her strange conduct in leaving a house apparently deserted, save for a sleeping baby in the cradle upstairs and another baby crying in the kitchen.

But in spite of his misgivings he fetched down her box, meekly remounted his cab and drove Hilda to Paddington—a handsome girl dressed in a dark red gown and a hat of roses to match it—a being as unlike as could well be imagined to the woman in sweeping black draperies who six weeks before had entered Joyce Carnegie's house.

Arrived at Paddington she ordered the porter in the cabman's hearing to label her box to Cheltenham, but when the cabby had departed she calmly told the man that she had made a mistake, and for Cheltenham substituted the name of a remote station in Devonshire.

Late that afternoon Joyce and her husband reached home. The front door was flung open by the little slavey who greeted them with a storm of words out of which only two were comprehensible.

"She've gone—she've gone!"

"Who has gone?" cried Mrs. Carnegie.

"She've gone and left the baby. Oh the wicked woman! Send me out she did and back I come to find both the blessed babies screaming their little 'earts out."

Trembling in every limb and with a face as white as death, Joyce flew upstairs to the sitting-room lately occupied by Hilda and now a scene of desolation. Drawers were pulled out and empty, the cupboard was empty too, a litter of paper strewed the floor and table, and on the bed next door lay an untidy heap of the black garments lately worn by Mrs. Baynes.

The baby was once more asleep, and by its side lay a note addressed to Joyce, which she hastily tore open and read. It was very short.

"I am leaving hurriedly. You have often expressed such fondness for children that I leave my child to your tender mercies. Bring her up with yours if she lives—which I doubt her doing—I was never intended to be a mother.—H.B."

With the letter was a five-pound note and that was all!

Joyce uttered a little cry, then with a gesture of inexpressible anger she tore the letter into tiny fragments and stamped upon them.

"Baffled" she cried, "baffled! But I will find her. I will find her if I have to track her till the day of doom. She stole the man I loved. She has deserted her child and left it to my 'tender mercies!' Tender mercies indeed! If it were not Aleck's child as well as hers I would send it to the workhouse—but—but—" and kneeling beside the cradle Joyce broke into a passion of weeping.

Then she rose suddenly to her feet.

"Hilda Baynes" she said aloud and solemnly "I will seek you—seek you till my dying day. You shall pay for all that you have done and I will be avenged. You shall not escape scot free. I will have my revenge!"

Hilda had vanished into the great wilderness of London and left no clue but the seed of revengeful longing grew and flourished in Joyce's heart till it became a great tree—a tree destined to bear bitter and terrible fruit.

* * * * *

Lady Trevor—the most beautiful woman in London—stood in the midst of her great drawing-room giving directions to an army of workmen anent the ball which that night was to make her more than ever famous. She had vowed that her ball should eclipse every function of the kind hitherto held, and what Lady Trevor vowed she was generally capable of fulfilling, she made all things about her bow to her imperious will. Rich, handsome, adored by her husband and flattered by an admiring circle of friends, she might well feel that the world was at her feet, and she had determined that to-night, the world for whose approving voice she cared more for than anything else in the universe—should stand speechless with admiration and amazement.

There were to be acres of flowers in her spacious rooms—fairy lamps were to glow by thousands in every corner of the stately mansion which called her mistress, the supper was to include every out of season delicacy that imagination could devise—no expense was to be spared to make the occasion something to be dreamt of and talked of for weeks to come.

Hilda Trevor had attained to the first of her ambitions when Sir Alfred made her his wife. The handsome, self-willed girl had vowed that she would marry wealth and birth, and she had done both; and though, heartless and cold herself, she had not even the fraction of a heart to bestow upon the distinguished man who married her, he blindly worshipped the very ground upon which his wife's feet trod, and bestowed upon her a passionate and adoring love.

She was very beautiful.

Tall, graceful, stately, she moved across her great room like some Eastern Queen of old, in her dark, wonderful beauty. Her eyes were black as night, and glowing with the excitement of anticipations as she pictured her triumph of the night. Her raven locks framed a face over which artists raved, so exquisite were its outlines, so rich and glowing the colouring of her marvellous complexion. She turned to her husband with a smile.

"A bank of roses, there, Alfred, will make this room complete," she said.

"What you like, dear," he answered cheerfully, "choose everything you think best, I trust entirely to your taste."

She was turning from him to give the necessary order to a respectful foreman who stood at her right hand, when a footman crossed the room, bearing upon a salver a note which he handed to his mistress. A look of surprise crossed her face as she took up the envelope. It was dirty, untidy, and crumpled, singularly unlike any communications this spoilt child of fortune was in the habit of receiving.

"What a nasty document!" she exclaimed, opening the envelope with a distasteful glance, "some begging letter, I suppose."

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"Let me look at it for you," said her husband, but even as he spoke the colour faded from his wife's face, the eyes she had fixed upon the letter in her hand grew strained and fixed, she swayed where she stood and would have fallen but for Sir Alfred's supporting arm.

"What is it, dear?" he cried, "has that note——"

With a violent effort she recovered her self-control, and drew herself away from his arm. The semblance of a smile trembled across her deathly white face, she crumpled the letter in her hand, and said quietly, though in a voice that shook.

"Oh, my dear Alfred, no. The note is merely a line—from a poor woman I am employing. I—I think I must be a little tired, the heat has upset me I expect. I felt quite faint for a minute. I will go and rest."

Her husband's face was still full of anxiety, tenderly giving her his arm he led her upstairs to her luxurious bedroom, brought her salts and eau de Cologne, and only left her at last when she declared that she felt really better, and would lie down on her sofa, and try to get a little sleep. But no sooner had Sir Alfred's steps died away in the passage than she sprang from the couch, hastily turned the key in the lock, and began pacing the room like a caged beast, clenching and unclenching her hands in ungovernable passion.

"How has she found me out? How has that woman found me out?" she cried aloud. "I thought I was safe from her for ever. How has she discovered me, and what must I do?"

That was the sum and substance of all her musings—what must she do? What *could* she do now that Joyce Carnegie had discovered her whereabouts and her identity with the Hilda Baynes of a year before? Would her secret be known to Sir Alfred and the world? This was the dread question which rioted to and fro in her brain. She unfolded the note that was still crumpled in her hand.

"You must come to me, or I will come to you"—so it ran. It was signed "Joyce Carnegie," and an address followed.

"At all costs I must prevent her from coming here," Hilda reflected, "at all costs that must be stopped. Good God! I thought I was safe from her for ever!"

With desperate haste she tore from her wardrobe a long, fur-trimmed cloak which covered her from head to foot, and hid the scarlet folds of her gown. She pinned on a large hat covered with ostrich feathers, and then, opening the door cautiously, she stole out into the passage and down the stairs. As she passed the drawing-room door she heard her husband's voice giving orders to the workmen, and, still unseen, she went on across the hall and out of the front door.

For half a second she stood irresolute on the pavement outside, then she hailed a passing hansom, and giving the man the address which already seemed to be burnt into her brain in letters of fire, she was whirled away Eastwards.

But in her haste and desperation she had overlooked one thing. That crumpled note which had wrought such havoc in her mind, lay white and prominent upon the carpet in her bedroom, where, in her feverish pacing she had dropped it. There, half an hour later, her husband found it when he stood gazing blankly round his wife's empty room. Mechanically he unfolded the soiled sheet and read the note—read it over and over again, his eyes wide with dismay. Then he tore it into a thousand fragments.

"What in the wide world does it mean?" he cried. "What can it mean, and who is Joyce Carnegie?"

[*The conclusion of this story (describing the incident shown on the cover) will appear in next Tuesday's Short Stories.*]

THE DOCTOR'S MOTOR.

And How It Played the Part of Matchmaker.

"I shall go to South Africa," he said, gloomily.

She made a little gesture of vexation. She drummed on the carpet with a pair of small, strong heels.

"For goodness' sake," she cried, petulantly, "try to do something less hackneyed. Nowadays every man who thinks he likes a woman who doesn't happen to be prepared to marry him at a moment's notice, goes off to South Africa."

He turned upon her sturdily.

"Indeed! If you imagine I'm going there heart-broken you're mistaken. I'm going there to make my fortune. I shall take that post Levy offered me on his ranch. I shall combine it with doctoring, and between the two I might make money."

She had turned toward him with rather a serious expression.

"Really?" she said, slowly.

"Really," he said, emphatically.

She did not look so confident as she had looked some minutes earlier. There was a little whitening of her cheeks. He was a fine-looking, well-set-up young man, for whom any woman might have cared. But he had committed that most foolish of love's many blunders; he had proposed to a woman without having given her time to know whether she cared for him or not. The wise man defers his proposal until the woman has begun to tremble lest it shall not come. In life we value most the things we think or have thought ourselves in danger of losing. Impetuous of disposition, he had fallen in love with her at first sight. She was of calmer temper; but although she was not prepared to accept him in a moment, neither was she prepared to lose him in a moment. This notion of South Africa affected her more than she was able to explain to herself.

"To make a fortune is a very poor ambition for a young man," she said, loftily.

"Possibly," he agreed, "but the fortune made is a very comfortable condition for an old one."

"How clever you are," she said, with a rallying smile.

But he did not rally.

"You'd far better remain here," she resumed, glancing sidelong at his rueful countenance. "You're getting on well in your profession. Since you set up people seem to have fallen ill just for the sake of adding to your practice. In old Dr. Jarvis's time nobody was ill. Now it seems as though the lease of everybody's constitution had suddenly fallen in."

"Oh I'm doing well enough," he said, dejectedly. She was so serious and yet so gay, so prudent and so charming. Her blue eyes showed sincere, yet full of humour. The red lips from which her wisdoms fell seemed made for kisses. Her curls were such a charming golden frame for common sense. Yet where was the use of his doing well, or of her lips and

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curls, if these were to fall to the lot of some luckier man? He could not bear to think of it. He stifled a groan and took up his hat. She stood there in her fresh print frock. She wore a charming apron, with lace frills and pockets. She was a delightful young farmer. When her father died, some two years earlier, she had taken up his work, and was doing it successfully. Her butter, the making of which she personally superintended, had a fame for miles round. He had been called in this morning to see an ailing dairymaid. Having prescribed for the dairymaid, he had proposed to the mistress.

The scene had been enacted in the pretty parlour of the old farm house. Through the opened windows came the perfume of roses and syringa, and a tangle of sweet lilies. Bees hummed, birds twittered and sung. Life was a poem. He stifled a groan, and taking up his hat moved some paces toward the long French window.

"At all events, you will not be leaving us just yet," she said, a trifle persuasively.

"Not till next month," he responded gravely, and with the air of a man who has made his final plans. He was guilty of a second of love's blunders. "No" to him spelled nothing but "No!"

"Next month?" she cried, dismayed. "Oh, what madness it is to let another person so affect your life."

"It might have been the sweetest madness in the world," he said, ardently.

She stirred restlessly. She fanned herself with her big sun hat. There was a fire in the air that seemed to burn her cheeks. But she would not be serious. She dared not be serious until she should be left alone to think.

"Your lovely new motor-car?" she challenged him. "You cannot take it to South Africa, and you will never have the heart to leave it."

From where they stood they could see it at rest before the opened gate. It sparkled in the sunshine. It was clean and smart of line, and cosily cushioned.

"I had it built for two," he said, and added, "I was a presumptuous ass."

He bowed his good-byes and escaped across the daisied lawn. She flung herself into a chair and started weeping.

* * * * *

He had made his rounds and, returning, fell into a bitter reverie. Now, although a motor car is as safe as any other form of locomotion, it is as well when driving one to keep the hand and mind upon the steering wheel.

Dyson, since the morning's disappointment, having had the subject next his heart, he elbowed aside, perforce, such mere commonplaces as a baby's teething, a schoolboy's measles, or a mother's indigestion, flung physic to the dogs and allowed himself a violent reaction. Knowing the straight clear road of some two miles before him, he dropped his head absently upon his chest, and in the dusk and silence of the scented woods through which his way ran, groaned out his desolation.

He would get away from it post-haste. He had made up his mind to that.

Every well-remembered signpost, every rustic homestead, every spot of beauty turned him sick. Yesterday he had seen these glorified by hope; now that he was hopeless they were sword thrusts at his heart.

Jack, his younger brother, who had just qualified, and was looking for a post, should take his practice at once, leaving him leisure to pack his traps and be off in a fortnight to Johannesburg. The fresh surroundings, the new, rough life, would give him something to think about besides golden hair, blue eyes, and the dearest, sweetest, gayest spirit in the world.

He looked up for a moment. There was a hedge which marked the furthest limit of her small estate. Yesterday, at sight of it he had broken into whistling. To-day—! He choked. A mist swam before his eyes. Two minutes later he pulled himself together. His road branched at an angle from the straight broad highway he had been following in a dream. His hand gripped the steering wheel, his eye marked hawthorns overhanging the corner of the lane down which he must turn; but his mind was in a certain room in the pretty, well-beloved farmhouse to the right of him.

Just as he turned into the lane, with wandering, dejected wits, a woman picking blackberries from the hedge, a baby hanging on her arm, suddenly shrieked and stood still, panic-stricken in the middle of the road.

Either he must run her down or he must ride into a bank. He chose the bank. He swung round his steering wheel, shut off the engines, and prepared for—anything.

Dorothy Lentham, musing in her garden, heard the well-known "Teuf-Teuf," guiltily blushed, and wondered how she would be able, without undue injury to her pride, to dissuade him from wrecking his future in South Africa.

Then came a sudden scream, a masculine exclamation—a thud—a crash and rattle, then—silence.

Hatless, breathless, blanched of face, she ran down the garden and out through a rustic gateway into the road.

The gaily-painted car stood on its hind wheels apparently uninjured, its front wheels raised and embedded in a grassy bank. Dyson, who had been thrown violently out, lay senseless in the road. The woman wrung her hands and wept above the scene. The baby howled and slapped its mother's face.

* * * * *

He came to his senses with the touch of a light hand on his brows. He opened heavy eyes and peered about a darkened room.

"John," he demanded of his dispenser, "what the deuce is up?"

But John was not there. He thought he must be dreaming still when the voice which had haunted him sweetly and mercilessly for many a week besought him to be quiet.

"You had an accident," she told him, with the sound of tears in her voice.

"Ah!" he said, and remembered. What a confounded nuisance! After all, he would not be able to get away as soon as he had hoped. Dazed as he was, that necessity to escape from the scene of his misery possessed him.

"Any bones broken?" he murmured.

"No," she said; "only brain concussion. But you must keep perfectly, perfectly still, Dr. Edwards says."

After a minute:

"Miss Lentham," he said, feebly—he was conscious of being able, had he wished, to speak more strongly, but the words sounded better uttered feebly—"would you mind just kissing me once—in case I should—should die, you know?"

There was a pause, which seemed to him an age.

Then he felt the red lips softly and rather timidly on his. Concussion seemed to have shaken discrimination into him.

"Good heavens!" he cried, in a wonder of amazement, "do you——I say, Miss Lentham, after all, do you——by Jove, I think, after all, I'll get well!"

"But you won't go to South Africa?" she wailed

"Not if I know it!" cried he.

The motor-car was so little injured—having safely and softly embedded itself—that not three months later, it took the couple for whom it had been built honeymooning, all over Wales.

ARABELLA KENEALY.

A Hate Match.

MISS SMILAX: "And so Miss Passe and Mr. Gotnix really got married. Was it a love match?" Mary: "On the contrary, I should call it a hate match." Miss Smilax: "Why? I don't understand you." Mary: "Why, she hated to be an old maid, and he hated to be poor."

To Keep them Humble.

FRIEND: "One of your clerks tells me you raised his salary and told him to get married, under penalty of discharge." Business Man: "Yes, I do that to all my clerks when they get old enough to marry. I don't want any of your independent, conceited men about my place."

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THE LORD OF THE EAGLES

By VICTOR PITT-KETHLEY.

PHILIP DRAKE was an artist, and he had come to the out-of-the world Spanish Pyrenean village of Turgiana in search of unhackneyed subjects. He had not been disappointed. Savage-looking, but eminently picturesque muleteers and their gaily-caparisoned beasts; the curious peasant types who frequented the little *venta* * at which he was staying (and where he made shift to exist on a menu composed largely of omelettes, washed down by fiery mountain wine); the shepherds; the dirty, but surpassingly beautiful children—these, set in a background of wild and rugged mountain, and moving in an atmosphere far removed from that of the bustling English city whence he had come, provided Philip with endless studies. And as the weeks glided on the handsome foreign *señor* became known to everybody in the village, while all—especially the privileged ones who had sat to him—agreed that no such painter had ever been heard of. An opinion in which the *padre*, whose heart the young artist had won by various acts of kindness, fully joined.

For his excursions into the mountains Philip engaged the services of a young man from the village, one Pepe Nerito, who soon began to conceive a dog-like affection for the tall young Englishman. One day, when they had penetrated into a wild and rocky valley, where, amid a setting of savage rocks and beetling precipices an impetuous mountain torrent dashed over a cliff in a cascade of milk-white foam, Philip noticed, on an eminence above him, a curious looking building, half castle and half dwelling-house. An indescribable air of desolation and decay seemed to brood over this strange habitation, set like an eyrie on its precipitous crag, and now bathed in a flood of blood-red light as the last rays of the setting sun fell upon it.

"Who lives in yonder house?" asked Drake, curiously.

Pepe glanced over his shoulder at the castle, and then crossed himself hastily.

"May the saints preserve us, *señor!*" he replied uneasily. "That is the Castle on the Rock. Old Don Andrea the witch-man liveth there, the Lord of the Eagles."

"Don Andrea the witch-man!" repeated Drake. "Who on earth is he?"

Pepe glanced once more at the grim building on the hill, now gradually fading into the evening mists. Then he spoke.

"I call him witch-man, *señor*," he explained, "because they say that he is not as other men—that he possesses the evil eye, and that he can cast spells upon his enemies. Once, years ago—my father told me the story—Don Andrea passed through the village, and the children mocked him and threw stones at him. He cursed them and their parents, telling them that a great evil should overtake them. That very week a strange sickness seized the flocks on the mountains, and ruin fell upon many in Turgiana. But that was not all. When the hot wind came out of the south a fever broke out in the village, and the first to die of it were the little ones who had mocked old Don Andrea. Since that day he has never been seen in Turgiana, but some of the muleteers have seen his daughter at different times, roaming alone over the hill-sides. She, they say, is fair as the lily, but the Don keepeth her away from all mankind."

"This is very interesting," said Philip, who was too well acquainted with the Spanish temperament to cast doubts on his guide's superstitious gabblings; "but why do you call this old hermit 'Lord of the Eagles'?"

"It is soon said, *señor*," replied Pepe. "Look at his castle and tell me what you see."

"I can see birds hovering round it," said Philip, after a pause; "small, black birds."

"They look small from here," said Pepe, "but were you nearer, *señor*, you would see that they are eagles—the great black eagles of the Sierras, cruel and terrible birds. And we call Don Andrea Lord of the Eagles because they come and go at his call—even eat out of his hand, so the people say. Were it not for the eagles, excellency, it might well have happened that the men had burnt his house over his head when the flocks have sickened through his spells. But he needeth no watch-dogs while he hath his eagles. Sometimes they swoop down upon the village, and steal sleeping babes from their cots, or fly at little children. The people tell tales of men who, in their cups, have gone up the mountain to beard the Don in his den. But none have ever returned—save only one, and he came back sightless, and an idiot!" He shuddered as he finished speaking.

On the way back to the village Philip thought over the wild and fantastic story his simple guide had unfolded to him. He was of a somewhat romantic temperament, and he was charmed to find this fragment of blind superstition lingering in the mountains. He determined, if possible, to find out more about the mysterious occupant of the Castle on the Rock. To this end he called on the old *padre*, the most intelligent person in the little community.

The priest was by this time quite an intimate friend of the young Englishman's. He had been first attracted to him by the fact that the latter was a Roman Catholic, and the bond of interest thus established had been strengthened by the kindly act of the young artist in executing a masterly copy of the old man's treasured Madonna, which hung in the village church. He received Drake with great heartiness.

When Philip mentioned his conversation with Pepe relative

* Wayside inn.

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to the strange inhabitant of the Castle on the Rock, however, the old *padre's* gentle face clouded.

"There are indeed strange tales about concerning Don Andrea," he said. "May the saints grant that they be not all true! What I know of him is not much, *señor*. He is the last of his race, the Almanzas of Navarra, and the Castle of the Rock and the mountain on which it stands are all that remains of their ancient estates. Many years ago he brought to that desolate house a young bride—if my memory serves me, a compatriot of your own. He treated her harshly, so it was said, and the tender northern flower faded away until she died, after giving birth to a little girl. Her death, I suppose, soured him, although he was always of a saturnine disposition. From that day to this, *señor*, he has held no communion with his fellows. The daughter has grown up as beautiful as her mother—and that is saying much. I have not set eyes on her since her childhood, but her mother I remember well."

"But what is all this wild talk about Don Andrea bewitching the village, and possessing powers over the eagles?" asked Drake.

The old priest stirred in his chair. "There is much talk on that subject, my son," he said; "but you and I know that by the goodness of Heaven such things as the evil eye cannot exist. As to the eagles, however, there can be no doubt that Don Andrea *does* possess some strange influence over them. Often do we see them circling over the Castle on the Rock, and when foolhardy men, drunk with wine, have gone forth, as they said, to bait the old man, they have been attacked by the eagles and killed or disfigured. Know you old Beppo, the blind beggar?"

"A half-witted man with scars on his face?" asked Drake.

"That is he," replied the priest. "Three years ago he was a muleteer, upright and strong, and possessed of his sight. Two of his mules died of a mysterious sickness, and he would have it that Don Andrea had cast his eye upon them. So the misguided man set forth to punish the old Don. Late at night some people on the outskirts of Turgiana were aroused by wild screams, and on going out, they found Beppo lying on the ground frightfully torn and disfigured, and covered with blood. Both his eyesight and his reason were totally gone."

"And was this done by the eagles?" asked Drake incredulously.

"Even so," said the priest gravely. "In his moments of sanity the poor wretch sometimes babbles of his terrible adventure of that night, and one gathers from his story that it was Don Andrea who set the eagles at him, as we might a watch-dog on a robber. Curiously enough, the crest of the Almanzas is a mountain eagle."

Drake was keenly interested in the curious story he had heard, and he secretly resolved to try and find out something for himself about Don Andrea and his daughter. Particularly was he interested in the beautiful girl—the daughter of an English mother—and he pictured to himself how unutterably lonely her life must be, cut off as she was from the society of her sisters in the outside world, and doomed to spend her young life in the company of an old madman—for such Drake judged Don Andrea to be.

In pursuit of his intention, he went day after day to the grim valley underneath the rock on which the castle of the Almanzas stood. Ostensibly he was there to paint the cascade, but more often than not, over a meditative pipe, he would watch the grim old building above for half an hour at a time. The only signs of life he saw about the place, however, were an occasional thread of smoke and the circling of the eagles, which certainly seemed to make their home somewhere in the recesses of the castle.

Since Drake had taken to visiting the valley, Pepe had been requisitioned by his father to aid in some building operations, so that the artist had the place to himself; for even had there been any pasture in this forbidding place it is doubtful whether the superstitious shepherds would have brought their flocks thither, so afraid were they of the evil eye of the Lord of the Eagles.

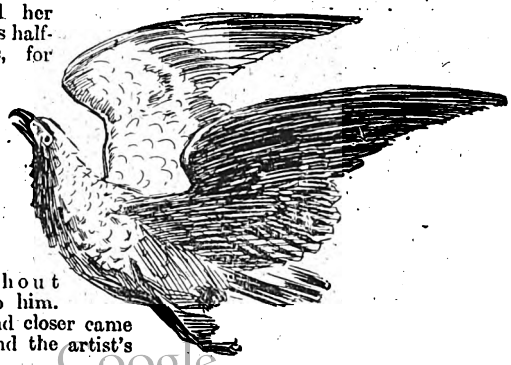
It came about one day that Philip set eyes, for the first time, on Don Andrea's daughter. Coming suddenly round a corner on the way to his painting-spot, he was startled to see a slight, girlish figure sitting on a rock. He had a momentary glimpse of a beautiful face, browned by exposure to the sun, and yet fairer in complexion than the average run of Spanish girls, and then the girl fled, like a frightened fawn, up the crags, skipping from rock to rock with the agility of a chamois. Drake felt certain that this shy maid of the mountains could be none other than Don Andrea's daughter, and he chuckled to himself at the idea that a creature so fair could possess the evil eye.

On the following day, as he sat at work, his thoughts every now and again straying to the fair apparition of the previous morning, he suddenly got it into his head that he was being watched. He scanned the rugged precipices around him, but saw nothing; he strained his ears for sounds, but all that came to him was the dull roar of the cascade. Nevertheless, he had an uneasy feeling that someone was near him, and although he feigned to be absorbed in his work, he kept on the alert. Once, hearing a slight sound, he turned his eyes cautiously in the direction whence it emanated, and fancied that he saw the girl's face for an instant behind a rock, but so quickly was it withdrawn, that he could not make certain his eyes were not deceiving him.

And then he thought of a plan whereby he hoped to make the watcher, if it were indeed the Don's daughter, declare herself. His picture needed a human figure. On a rock in the foreground he started to work in, with rapid strokes, a presentment of the girl he had seen for a few fleeting moments in the little cleft. The sketch grew under his hand in a way which surprised even himself, and he felt a glow of satisfaction as he contemplated the work.

At lunch-time he left the picture, and sitting down at some distance from it, ate his lunch with keen relish. Then he smoked a pipe in thoughtful fashion, and finally made elaborate preparations for a *siesta*. In full view of any watcher he spread himself out behind a convenient rock and was soon, to all appearances, fast asleep. In reality, however, he was very much awake indeed, for he had laid a little trap for the spy whom he felt convinced was lurking somewhere among the rocks. If Don Andrea's daughter had in reality been observing him, he argued, she would have seen that he had put her into his picture. That being so, she would naturally, being a woman, wish to see how he had portrayed her. Her curiosity might bring her near enough for him to speak to her—for he had been curiously struck by her beauty.

Half an hour passed, and nothing happened, save that an eagle flapped lazily over the valley at a great height, a black blot against the cloudless azure of that burning southern sky. Drake was beginning to revile the clumsiness of his scheme, when suddenly he fancied he saw a slight movement behind a huge rock a little to his left. In a few seconds his suspicion became a certainty; a figure darted to a rock still nearer—and he knew it was the girl he had waited for. Nearer and nearer she came, still keeping under cover, until at last she had reached a boulder a little to his rear. Drake chuckled to himself as he watched her through his half-closed lids, for he noticed that if the girl came forward past him to look at the picture she could not very well run away without speaking to him.



Closer and closer came the girl, and the artist's

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heart beat fast. Now, he knew, she was scrutinising him to see whether he was likely to wake immediately. Would she decide, he wondered, that the risk of his waking and catching her was too great, or would she proceed to gratify her curiosity?

His cogitations were set at rest by the girl's next act. With a light step she tripped straight across from her place of concealment, cast one searching glance at Drake's immobile features, and then hurried on to the canvas, examining the portrait of herself with wide-opened eyes. While she was thus occupied Drake sat up. Now that for which he had schemed had come to pass, he felt rather ashamed of himself. Fortunately for himself, he was a fluent Spanish scholar.

"Is the *señorita* interested in my attempt to place her upon canvas?" he inquired.

The girl started violently and turned round, a wave of crimson spreading over her lovely face as she did so. She cast one look at Drake, and then her large, expressive eyes darted to the rocks behind him.

"I do not know what you must think of my intrusion, *señor*," she said at last, and the suspicion of a smile lurked for an instant round the corners of her mouth. "I thought that you slept—and—and——"

"Pray do not apologies, *señorita*," cried Drake "I can assure you that I have been hoping to see you again every day, in order that I might beg of you the favour of a few sittings, so that I may complete my rough sketch."

The girl blushed again. "Are there not girls in Turgiana?" she asked.

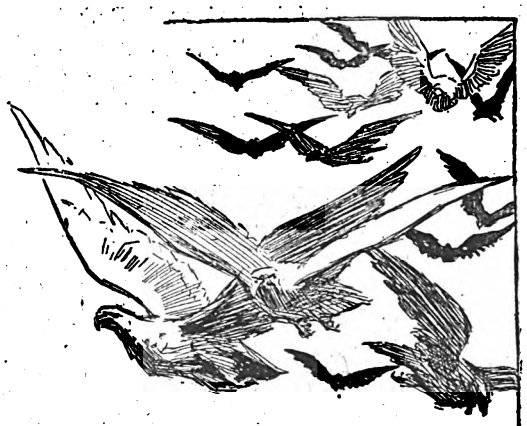
"You see, I have decided to put *you* in," said Drake. "And, besides, as you live so near the cascade, you have an interest in the picture."

"How do you know where I live?" asked the girl, her dark eyes resting on Drake's face.

"I guessed," confessed Drake. "Are you not the daughter of Don Andrea up at the castle yonder?"

"Yes," she said simply. "Then you have heard about my father?"

"I heard that he lived alone with his daughter," said Drake evasively, "and from the description I judged it to be you when I first saw you."



"Tell me," said the girl suddenly. "You are an Englishman?"

"Yes."

"My mother was an Englishwoman, but she died when I was a child. Tell me about England—what it is like."

Drake gave her a rapid sketch, as best he could, of his native country, but the girl clamoured for yet more information. She drank in his words with surprising interest, never once taking her lustrous eyes from off his face. At last, however, he stopped abruptly.

"We have quite forgotten the answer to my question," he declared laughingly. "You will give me some sittings, won't you?"

"I will try," she said. "*Adios, señor.*"

And before he could thank her she had slipped past him, and was running swiftly up the mountain side.

The meeting of that afternoon was the forerunner of many. On the day following their *tête-à-tête* Don Andrea's daughter suddenly appeared in the valley and greeted the artist with a shy smile. She consented to sit for just a few minutes. The minutes became an hour.

Drake had already completely lost his heart to this bewitching little mountain fairy, and he listened with the keenest pleasure to her conversation. Confidence once established, Juanita—for that was the girl's name—rapidly became communicative, and prattled unceasingly.

Drake learnt, in the first place, that she was lonely, unutterably lonely, which explained, perhaps, the interest she had taken in the strange painter *señor* who had penetrated into the valley. Drake learnt that it had been her custom from childhood onwards to ramble over the hill-sides. Her father, she said, was a strange man, a man of wild moods, and of late, but rarely to be seen. There had been a time when he had devoted a certain portion of each day to her education, but now he left her entirely alone, shutting himself up in his study in the watch-tower, where he fed and caressed his pets, the eagles. She was afraid, she said gravely, with a troubled look in her brown eyes, that he was going mad, for his heart

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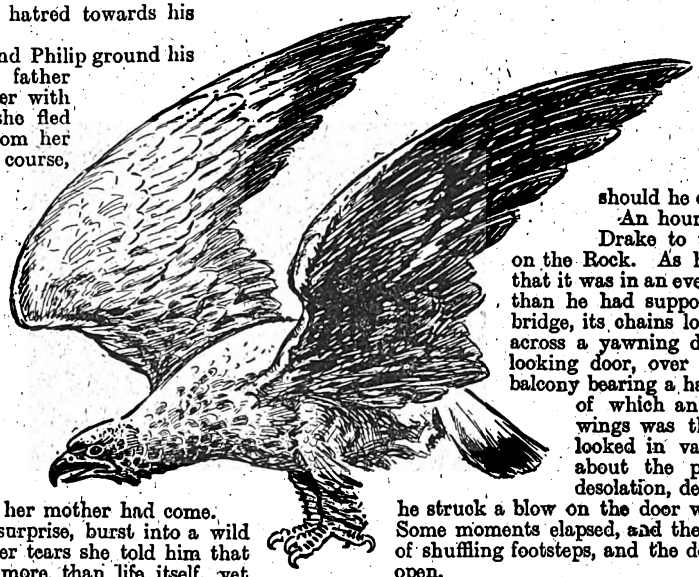
seemed filled with bitter hatred towards his fellow-men.

Sometimes, she said—and Philip ground his teeth at the recital—her father had beaten her, lashed her with a cruel whip, so that she fled from him screaming. From her entire seclusion she was, of course, entirely ignorant of events in the world around her; but she possessed an amazing quickness of observation which enabled her to readily understand and assimilate things that were new to her.



At last there came the climax that might have been expected. Philip told Juanita of his love, and how he wished to make her his wife; to take her away to that northern country whence her mother had come.

The girl, to his utter surprise, burst into a wild tempest of sobs. Amid her tears she told him that although she loved him more than life itself, yet she could never be his; that her father's insane hatred for all humankind would be a fatal bar, for he would assuredly kill both her and Drake when he heard of their intimacy.

"Courage, *querida mia*," said Philip, cheerily, taking the sobbing girl tenderly into his arms. "There will be no killing, I am sure. I will come up and see him, and explain matters, and then I daresay he will give us his blessing."

He spoke brightly, but as a matter of fact he did not quite know how this strange old man was to be approached.

Juanita sat up, her face white with terror.

"You would come to the Castle on the Rock?" she cried. "Felipe, that may never be. Do you not know the fate that overtakes all who come there? Have you no fear of the eagles that come and go at my father's word? They would tear you to pieces! And me—he would lash me, and never let me roam the hillsides again, so that I should never see you more." And she sobbed anew.

"I don't think I'm afraid of the eagles, dearest," said Philip. "Any how, I'm coming up to see him, and if he refuses his consent—well, then, I'll take you without, and we will get the *padre* at Turgiana to marry us. I'm not going to have you run any risks of perpetual imprisonment, or lashings, or any nonsense like that."

His determined tone somewhat reassured her, and the lovers parted, Juanita, however, still pale and trembling.

That afternoon Philip unfolded the whole history of the affair to the good old *padre*, who listened with open mouth and staring eyes. At first he was disposed to chide the young Englishman for having any dealings with the daughter of so strange a man, but finally he became keenly interested in the poor girl, shut up in that ancient castle with a brutal and apparently maniac father.

"Failing her father's consent, *padre*," pursued Philip, "I intend to take her away without it, as it is abundantly obvious that Don Andrea is no fit person to look after her. Moreover, she is of age. You shall marry us, *padre*, then and there, and I will take her away to my people in England. Thank God! I am well able to support her."

The priest had many objections to offer, but one by one these were demolished, and presently something of Drake's own enthusiasm infected him. He was much perturbed, however, at Philip's intention to visit the Castle on the Rock. He pointed out the dangers—no less real because imperfectly understood—that threatened him, and begged him to at least take some one with him. But Philip scoffed at the idea of danger, promising only to take a revolver in case of need. And so he departed.

No sooner had he gone than the old priest sent for Pepe and talked rapidly to him for some time. Ten minutes later Pepe set off swiftly up the mountain, keeping in Drake's track, but yet well out of sight should he chance to look round.

An hour's toilsome climb brought Drake to the vicinity of the Castle on the Rock. As he approached it, he saw that it was in an even more ruinous condition than he had supposed. An ancient drawbridge, its chains long since rotted away, lay across a yawning dry moat to a forbidding-looking door, over which projected a stone balcony bearing a half-obliterated escutcheon, of which an eagle with outstretched wings was the main device. Philip looked in vain for any signs of life about the place — everywhere was desolation, decay, and silence. Finally he struck a blow on the door with the stick he carried. Some moments elapsed, and then there came the sounds of shuffling footsteps, and the door was suddenly thrown open.

Inside the portal stood an old man, a man as tall as Drake, and straight as a die. His head and the lower part of his face were covered with a tangled mass of grey-white hair, but the most noticeable feature was his eyes, which burnt with extraordinary brightness from under his shaggy brows. He was attired in a long, loose-fitting coat of rusty black, belted at the waist.

"Well?" he demanded, in a deep, menacing voice, while his bright eyes looked the visitor through and through.

"My name is Drake," said Philip, unabashed. "I wish to see Don Andrea Almanza."

"I am he," replied the old man, sullenly. "My daughter told me you were coming. Enter, and come with me."

Philip stepped inside the great door, which the old man flung to behind him. He found himself in a wide and spacious hall, full of suits of armour and sculptured shields, all now thickly covered with cobwebs and dust.

The Don led the way to a room at the bottom of the hall. It contained a large oaken table and a few chairs, while light was afforded by a hanging brass lamp.

On one of the chairs the old man seated himself, and Philip, unbidden, took another. The Don stared at him coldly, evidently expecting him to speak.

"I gathered from your remark that your daughter has mentioned my name to you," began Drake, awkwardly. "To be brief, *señor*, I love your daughter, and she loves me. I desire to make her my wife, and——"

Before he could say more the old Spaniard turned upon him, his terrible eyes blazing with wrath.

"Say no more," he thundered. "You shall have my answer now. Against my express commands, that foolish girl has permitted herself to associate with people outside. For that I will see that she is properly punished. My answer to you is No!—do you hear me? No! Juanita lives and dies here with me. I am the last of my race, and my word is passed."

He spoke with extraordinary vehemence and bitterness.

"The man is evidently quite mad," soliloquised Philip.

"You express your views with unnecessary heat, sir," he said, aloud. "Surely you understand that a young girl cannot be cooped up for ever in a lonely house, shut off from all intercourse with the world. If by your reference to punishment of Juanita you allude to physical violence, I can only inform you that I have come here to-night with the firm intention of taking her away—if possible, with your consent, but if not without it. The priest of Turgiana will marry us, and she shall go home with me to her mother's country."

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Don Andrea turned on him, his glaring eyes literally snapping fire.

"You talk to me like that, you young English dog," he shouted. "Do you know that, if I will it, you will never reach yon village alive? Do you not know, fool, that I have sworn never again to hold communion with mankind, but to live and die here among the eagles, the birds of my house? Go, before my anger overpowers me. Juanita I will fittingly punish for her folly. She will never be yours—nor any other man's."

"You talk vainly, sir," said Philip, hotly. "Your insults and threats do not frighten me. It is quite evident to me that you are no fit person to have charge of Juanita. She leaves this place with me to-night, if I have to search every room in the house for her."

With a howl of concentrated fury the old man started to his feet, and something bright flashed upwards in his hand. There came a quick movement from behind, a shrill cry, and as Philip started back a stiletto went hurtling harmlessly towards the ceiling. Juanita, pale and trembling, stood by his side.

"So," hissed the old man, his baleful eyes now fixed on his daughter. "You would save his life, she-cat?"

"Father," said the girl, in a firm, clear voice, "your attempt to murder Felipe has decided me. I shall leave you for ever. You have for years ill-treated me, as you ill-treated my poor mother. Day by day you have got wilder and stranger in your moods, until it has come to this. Felipe," she said, turning to her lover, "I will come with you."

"It is well," replied Don Andrea, slowly, his burning orbs fixing themselves with slow malevolence on the pair. "You have marked out your own path. Go, and may my curse rest upon you, faithless daughter of the Almanzas. Go," he continued in a louder key, "you shall never darken the doors of the Castle on the Rock again."

He made towards the door, Drake and Juanita following him. In the hall he paused and looked back at them, standing hand in hand.

"Go," he said again, pointing with his bony finger towards the great door. "You shall see how the Lord of the Eagles pays his debts." He turned on his heel and disappeared.

"Come, Juanita," said Philip, turning to the girl. He noticed for the first time that she was dressed in her outdoor garb.

Drake unbarred the door, and threw it back. The night was cold and dark, and a faint mist filled the valleys.

Philip led the trembling girl across the drawbridge. As he passed under the shadow of the balcony, something liquid fell upon him—a warm sticky fluid, which made him start, fearing foul play. But no sound came from above, and wiping the stuff from his face he hastily cleared the narrow bridge, breathing a sigh of relief as he left the terrible house behind.

A hundred yards from the house Juanita stopped.

"Felipe," she said in an agonised voice, "What is this on your coat? Is it blood?"

"No, dearest," said Drake, linking his arm in her own. "Something or other dropped on me just as we were coming under the balcony."

"Jesu!" he heard her gasp. "Can it be?" Then she stopped and pressed her face to his coat. "Mother of Heaven, yes!"

"What is it?" asked Philip, struck by her terrified manner.

"He has covered you with the eagle-food," she cried, despairingly. "They can scent it miles away, and they will come to us. *Madre de Dios*, that he should be my father!" She burst out, with passionate energy.

"Great Scott!" said Philip. "Do you mean that this stuff attracts the birds, and that they will——"

He did not finish the sentence, for the terrible fate of poor Beppo occurred to him, and he shuddered at the devilish scheme which had sent him forth, with this hapless girl, to disfigurement and probably to death. It was quite useless to throw away his coat. He knew, but did not tell the girl, that the stuff had soaked into his shirt and had also covered his face and hands. Then he hurried her onward.

The path was difficult and hard to find, butalthough they strayed once or twice, Juanita knew the road too well to go far wrong. She clung tightly to her lover, but said never a word; only the look in her eyes told of her terror. Presently she looked over her shoulder into the blackness behind them. She said nothing, however, only hurried the faster. She appeared to be listening, and Philip found himself following her example. There came a momentary lull in the wind, and he fancied he heard another and different sound, somewhere high above him. Yes, he was sure of it—it was the whirring of wings!

"Felipe," said the girl, and her voice was calmer now. "Do you hear? It is the eagles; my father has sent them after us."

"I've got a revolver here," replied Drake, but in spite of himself he felt shaken by the eeriness of his surroundings. "We may be able to frighten them off if they come close."

The sounds were now manifestly closer, and occasionally a hoarse cry made them start with apprehension. Philip set his teeth and breathed a silent prayer. Danger in any tangible form he could have grappled with light-heartedly, but death from out of the dark—death in its most fantastic and horrible form—he knew not how to combat.

Suddenly there came a rushing sound above him, and a huge body swept just over his head. Quick as thought he snatched out his revolver and fired at it. A hoarse scream showed that the shot had taken effect.

Juanita, with a low moan, fell forward fainting. Scarce knowing what he did, Philip threw her across his shoulder and started to run. There came another rush of wings, and yet another bird sailed down upon him, its pinions striking his face. But again the revolver spoke, and although the bullet went wide the great creature flinched at the flash and disappeared in the darkness.

Streaming with perspiration, the young artist struggled onwards. Ever and anon he stumbled, for the way was rocky and the night black as ink, but now he could see the lights of the village far below him, and he prayed that he might be able to reach them before the eagles returned to the attack. But even as he ran two huge birds launched themselves at him, their cruel beaks and talons working savagely. He dodged the onslaught of one, but the other's claws tore at his shoulder until a third shot drove it away. The other bird then darted at him and with a blow of its wings sent him reeling to his knees, while its beak laid open his forehead. Blinded with blood, Drake nevertheless struggled to his feet, mindful even in this dire extremity of the necessity for keeping in motion. A fourth shot gave him a temporary respite, and he staggered onwards, scarce able to stand.

Again the dreadful noise of beating wings, again the hoarse cries from out the void, and the terrible birds of prey were on him once more. Their number he could not gauge, but they attacked him with incredible ferocity, flying always at his face. Beaten and buffeted by their great wings, his garments torn to shreds and his body bleeding in a dozen places, Philip at last realised that the end had come. A muffled groan from his unconscious burden told that she, too, had not escaped unscathed.

"Good God!" breathed Philip, hoarsely. "Her eyes!"

Too exhausted to run further, and weak from loss of blood, he placed the girl on the ground, face downwards, and stood

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over her for his last fight. He knew that there were but two cartridges between him and death—death by inches. This, then, was to be the end of his wooing—this was how the Lord of the Eagles was paying his debt!

Soon his last two shots were fired, and still the eagles flew at him, screeching shrilly. He was now an unrecognisable mass of blood and wounds.

"God help me! This is the end," he gasped, as with his last remaining strength he struck at the head of a fiendish bird with the butt of his weapon.

Suddenly he became dimly conscious of a running figure carrying a huge torch.

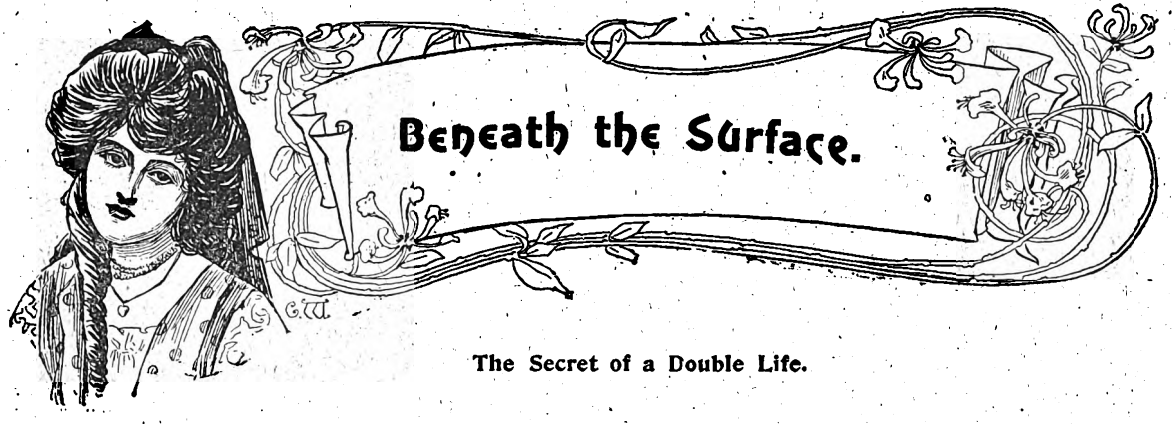
"Courage, *señor*," cried a well-known voice. "Courage. I am coming to you."

In a few seconds the courageous Pepe had reached him, and was striking right and left with his blazing brand. What the revolver had failed to do, the fire accomplished, for the eagles, affrighted at the blaze and heat, drew off sullenly. Pepe presently dragged his master and the girl into a sort of cave under some boulders. With his torch he lit a huge fire of moss and twigs, and then busied himself in tying up Drake's wounds. Juanita, with the exception of a bite in the arm, appeared to have escaped unhurt.

Next morning Pepe left the cave early, and soon returned with a procession of excited villagers carrying litters. Both Philip and Juanita were quite unconscious, and Philip's wounds caused horror-stricken comments among the peasants. Fortunately, however, his eyes had escaped injury. Under the care of the *padre* and a doctor, fetched from the nearest town, both gradually recovered, though for long hours Philip raved in a terrible delirium, brought on by his fearful struggle on the mountain-side.

At last, however, the day came when both were quite recovered, and then they were duly married by the old *padre*. Subsequently he broke to them a piece of news.

"Don Andrea is dead," he said gravely. "He died by his own hands. A large party of villagers went up to the Castle on the Rock to arrest him, as they said, for his unspeakable crime. They found him sitting dead in his study in the watch-tower." He crossed himself devoutedly. "May God rest his soul," he said. "The Lord of the Eagles will trouble you no more."



Beneath the Surface.

The Secret of a Double Life.

"What is this, Nora!—five hundred pounds? Nonsense! Tell Rose from me, that, as her guardian, I should not think of withdrawing so large a sum; just that she may squander it upon some calculating pauper or another!"

"But, Richard! why? It is a large amount, I know; but I think that you may trust Rose; while she seems to have an idea that she has a right to it; and that the one month only now remaining before she becomes legally entitled to the full possession of her fortunes is not worth reckoning with as a reason for not granting her request."

"Woman's logic!"

"Then I am to say to her that you refuse to do as she asks?"

"Yes. Stay, though!" (and he hurriedly turned, and sat down to his desk, drew a cheque-book from a drawer, and proceeded rapidly to fill in a form)—"There, give her that! (holding out the cheque) it's for fifty pounds, and drawn upon my own private account. When I hand over my responsibilities to this very liberal young lady's representatives, I want the trust funds to look as well as possible."

"Of course," said Nora Halpin, a trifle bewilderingly; for what knew she of ambidextrous money-juggling? "but you will have in the end to repay yourself out of the trust fund, won't you?"

"Well—no; this is a present of my own, and Rose is at liberty to make ducks and drakes of it, if she chooses."

"It is very good of you, Richard, to give her such a handsome present, but I am sadly afraid that she will be disappointed at the denial of her request."

"Woman's logic again! But she will thank me in a month's time for that same five hundred pounds."

The two speakers, Nora and Richard Halpin, were brother and sister. Living in a semi-fashionable West-end neighbourhood, they, with the addition of Richard Halpin's ward, Rose Ashenden, were, to all appearance, a fairly happy household.

Some five years before, the orphan daughter of Tedworth Ashenden, gold prospector, New York company-promoter, and of a hundred other equally indefinite occupations, came to England, consigned to the wardship of Richard Halpin, Ashenden's early chum in more than one expedition in the "Rookies."

With the girl came also a matter of £30,000; of which sum, till the heiress should attain her majority, Dick Halpin was appointed absolutely sole trustee.

The nature of the latter's calling, or business, was a mystery, not only to the world in general, but to those domestically connected with him. "Something in the City" might have fitted him, for every other day at least he paid it a visit of a few hours in the afternoon. On fine mornings, and occasionally at other times, he might be met with in Bond Street, or other "society" haunt.

But after the conclusion of the eight o'clock dinner, Richard Halpin's movements were known to no man. He left the house in Barchester Gardens, Earl's Court, in evening dress under a long ulster, and on foot, returning in precisely the same manner at an early hour the next morning. He was supposed to be at his club, he himself endorsing the supposition by an occasional reference to the fact.

There was never any money stint in the Barchester Gardens' establishment, everything being ordered on the most liberal scale. But there was no social entertaining; and for the very good reason that the master of the house was never at home to receive guests. Nora and Rose had one or two girl inti-

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mates, old schoolmates of the former's, but beyond that it was a peculiarly isolated one, so far as "society" was concerned.

The Halpins' father had been a rich man, and, at his death, left a good provision for his daughter, and a not insignificant fortune to his son. And yet, altogether unknown to his sister, Richard Halpin was soon at his wit's end for ready money. Up to that time, he was free living, certainly, but not secretive.

Then, less than a year after his father's death, Rose Ashenden became a member of his household, and there was a curious launching out in every direction. A larger house was taken, an extra carriage added, and a greater display made generally.

It was about a year before his ward's twenty-first birthday that he became conscious of a feeling for her, different from anything which he had hitherto experienced.

Four years had worked wonders, and the sixteen-year-old child had developed into the lovely woman.

She was in direct contrast to Nora Halpin, being tall and singularly dignified in carriage and manner. Nora, on the other hand, was *petite*, and brimful of Puck-like merriment.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the somewhat *blasé* man of thirty-five should be attracted by so charmingly innocent a daughter of mother nature, or that the guardian should give place to the lover.

But, somehow, he seemed fearful of making any advance, and it was not until Nora one day taxed him with it, that he acknowledged his passionate soul-mastering love for his beautiful ward.

The revelation was a matter not only of surprise but of distressful concern to Nora.

"Richard," she said, "apart from the fact that Rose is far too young as a wife for you, there is a reason why it cannot be; a reason which, if you persist, will assuredly mean trouble both for you and—for her."

"Reason! what reason?" he cried angrily. "I know of none; and if you are, as you seem to be, better informed, why have you not told me? Why have you kept me in the dark?"

"I am very sorry," she began.

"That is as it may be," he retorted, with a shrug; "this reason—what is it?"

"Well, I fear—I mean I am sure, that—that—there is—someone else."

"Someone else! But she sees nobody! It's impossible!"

"I am afraid not, Richard."

"Who is it? Tell me that—who is it?"

"You know that young fellow—Mr. Doyle, I think his name is—who comes every month from Varr's Bank—I suppose on Rose's business?"

"A two-penny halfpenny bank clerk!"

"He is really very nice, Richard!"

"Oh, I see! You are one of the conspirators, then?"

"I don't know what you mean," she replied. "There is no occasion for you to be rude."

"Why did not you tell me of this before?"

"I am beginning to regret that I have told you now."

"That is no answer to my question!" he blazed out. "Send Rose to me!"

"Certainly not! She is in the drawing-room, and if you wish to see her, you had best ask her for an interview—yourself!"

The offended little lady then swept out of her brother's "den," and left him to his devices.

The interview which followed between guardian and ward was stormy, but in every way definite.

"Young Doyle," he said coarsely, "wants your money! At least that cannot be said of me."

"Such an insinuation!" she indignantly replied, "is a cowardly slander, Mr. Halpin! And even had I not already made up my mind to reject unequivocally your somewhat condescending offer to marry me, that which you have just said of an infinitely better man than yourself, behind his back, would most certainly incline me to come to the same resolution."

"Well, I shall forbid Sidney Doyle the house, giving the bank people to understand that the appointment of another agent is, from my point of view, desirable. I prohibit any communication whatsoever between you. Remember! until you are finally freed from my control, my word is law!"

"How very courteous!" she, with a peculiar smile, remarked in reply. Then, rising from her chair, she moved towards the door. Reaching it, she turned quickly, and faced him.

"Could I but follow my own inclinations," she said, with fine scorn, "I would leave your house on the instant. But you have the law on your side. However, I think we understand each other," she added, meaningly. "You cannot prevent my loving Sidney Doyle or he me; and I tell you that his little finger is, in my esteem, worth more—a hundred times more!—than are you—body and soul!"

"Understand each other!" he said to himself after she was gone. "What can she mean? She knows nothing! She *can* know nothing!"

Others, beside Richard Halpin, live in the delusive and unhealthy atmosphere of a "Fool's Paradise." Richard Halpin continued so to live, until the day when his sister Nora first began to suspect his honesty and truth; the day of his refusal to Rose of the five hundred pounds she had asked him for from the trust funds.

On the evening of that day, upon the stroke of ten, a card was brought to his "den."

He was ready dressed to go out; was in the act of lighting a cigar.

"Gentleman to see you, sir."

"Gentleman to see me, at this time of night!" he said, picking up the pasteboard from the extended salver. "Mr. Sidney Doyle! I am not at home, Clarkson!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Halpin," said a tall, fair young fellow, who stood in the doorway, "but my business is imperative. I *must* see you!"

"Sir! is this your house!—or is it mine?"

"Yes, I know that my visit is ill-timed probably, and that I am, perhaps, taking too much upon myself, but I deemed it fair to give you the opportunity of making an explanation."

"An explanation!—to you?"

"To me."

"May I ask," said Richard Halpin icily, "the nature of the explanation?"

"I desire to put a question to you."

"And that is——"

"I want you to tell me, Mr. Halpin, here and now, what has become of the £30,000 invested in Three per Cents, and standing in your name as trustee for Rose Ashenden in the books of the Bank of England, the dividend warrants of which have been held by Varr's Bank as security for a drawing account of the Ashenden Trust."

Richard Halpin's face paled ever so little, though his heart stood still, as he said, somewhat mechanically the other thought, "I do not, in the first place, recognise your right to put such a question to me; but if on this day month you can show me to my satisfaction that such a right is yours, I will do my best to satisfy you—then——"

"It might have been better for you, perhaps, to have answered me now. As to my right, Miss Ashenden will, I believe, be willing to make that point perfectly clear—should you care to ask her."

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"I have an appointment, sir, and, therefore, have no time to waste in idle talk."

"So be it, then; I will ask you this question again on this day month. Good evening."

"You young fool!" cried Halpin, as the door shut behind his visitor. "To-night you would have triumphed had you insisted upon the truth. On this day month it will be my turn, for either the trust fund will be found intact, or Dick Halpin will have returned again to the golden fastnesses of the dear old 'Rockies!'"

He relit his cigar, which had gone out during his interview with Sidney Doyle, buttoned his big coat, pulled down his crush hat well over his eyes, passed through the front door, and so into the street; his face turned eastwards.

When a dozen yards away from the house, a man dresed in grey tweed slipped out of the shadow of the next doorway, and followed at a prudent distance stealthily in Halpin's wake.

It was Sidney Doyle, Rose's lover.

* * * * * *

Haul-Bowline Alley is a blind court, or narrow yard, within a stone's throw of Limehouse Church.

It is dirty, fœtid of odour, and contains just ten houses—or, rather, shanties—five on either side.

These dwellings all belonged to one man, whom no one ever saw, the rent collection being in the hands of a local agent. The landlord lived in the West-end, and apparently concerned himself but little with the affairs of his East-end property.

One curious fact in connection with the place was that everyone of its sixty or seventy inhabitants was Chinese. It was, indeed, an Oriental colony.

The five houses on the left hand as you entered, were practically knocked into one, and run as one establishment.

Opium-den, low lodging-house, gambling hell, and what not, it was peculiar in this, that to it, at all hours through the night, until daybreak, there came men of all nationalities; most of them decently, some of them well dressed, who stayed—any time from a quarter to half an hour—in private talk with the master of the house.

The latter was a Chinaman, who, however, was never seen about the place until an hour before midnight.

Chi-Lung was a mystery, even among his compatriots. His business, when on the premises, was to regulate the "fantan" and "poker" tables in the gambling department, and to receive and deal with the night visitors already mentioned.

Sometimes it happened that the caller arrived in a cab, with a bulky cargo. In such a case, the stranger was evidently expected, as one or two low-class Chinamen were invariably in waiting under the entrance archway. These rapidly removed the contents of the cab into the last house on the left of the alley, in which was situated Chi-Lung's sanctum. The new-comer then followed quickly, and the cabman, always paid by one of the Chinamen, drove swiftly away.

When Richard Halpin, on the night of his interview with young Sidney Doyle, left Barchester Gardens, Earl's Court, his course was steadily eastwards.

Along the Old Brompton Road, through Knightsbridge, and past Hyde Park Corner, up Piccadilly. Long Acre reached, he turned into a certain little public-house at the corner of a court, and called for a whisky and soda.

This disposed of, he made a sign to the barman, who, nodding in reply, came through into the bar, and unlocked a door, which led up to the first floor.

Clicking the door behind him, Halpin mounted the stairs, at the top of which was a small bedroom, the door open.

The gas was lit, while on the bed were carefully laid out what looked like a fancy-dress ball costume.

It was a Chinaman's dress, the outer sleeveless jacket being of fine black silk.

Closing the door, and then looking at his watch, Halpin proceeded to rapidly divest himself of his dress clothes, shoes, and shirt.

In less than seven minutes he had donned the Celestial garb, and, when he had deftly and quickly stained his face, neck and hands, put on a scalp wig, with a pigtail attached, that, fitted to perfection, he stood confessed the veriest Chinaman that ever walked the streets of Peking.

When, a minute later, he left the room, the immaculate European clothes had taken the place of the Celestial on the bed.

Going past the door which led into the bar, and through which he had entered, the passage, the pseudo-Celestial, producing a key, opened a door at the end of the latter, and passed into the court.

Cautiously looking about him, he turned to the left, and out again into Long Acre.

All the way from Barchester Gardens had Sidney Doyle followed in the wake of his quarry.

He had distinctly seen Halpin enter the "saloon" entrance of the public-house, and there his quest ended. About a quarter of an hour after he saw a Chinaman in native garb issue from the court into Long Acre, but as to sign of Richard Halpin there was none.

Whether it were intuition or inspiration it is hard to say, but something impelled him to take up the trail of the Celestial.

Right along Holborn he followed him, over the Viaduct, up Newgate Street, Cheapside, Leadenhall Street, Whitechapel, Commercial Road, East India Dock Road, until Limehouse was reached.

It was a long and weary walk for even a strong young fellow like Sidney Doyle, but he was fairly athletic, and held on bravely.

As for the Chinaman, he plodded along in steady fashion, quite oblivious, however, of Nemesis in his rear.

It was not until the entrance to Haul-Bowline Alley came in sight that Doyle, who, up to that moment, could not have located his man, made a discovery.

It suddenly flashed upon him that the walk of the man in front of him was familiar. Where had he seen it?

Then it came to him! It was the peculiar wide-legged stride of Richard Halpin!

Putting on steam he tried to come up with the other; but just as he came within hailing distance, Halpin turned smartly into the alley and vanished.

Doyle stopped, and looked down the wretched place, but the place was silent as the grave.

He ventured a few steps into the alley, but was obliged to confess to defeat, and to turn back.

While hesitating as to what he should do, a four-wheeler drove up, out of which got a sprucely-dressed man, carrying a large "Gladstone."

The usual thing was about to happen, the two Chinamen issuing out of the archway shadows to proffer help if needful. In this instance it was not, one of them merely paying and dismissing the driver.

But the unexpected followed close upon the heels of the usual.

No sooner did the man with the handbag make to pass under the archway, than a cloud of policemen seemed to rise out of the ground.

Two of them seized the new-comer, easing him of his "Gladstone," while two others laid hands upon Sidney Doyle.

It did not take long for the latter to explain his position, the superintendent in charge of the raid consenting to accept the young bank clerk's assistance, in view of Doyle's knowledge on certain matters connected with the case.

"You see, sir," the policeman explained, "there was a big robbery of diamonds down in the country last week; nearly

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seventy thousand pounds worth; belonging to the Countess of Rugby.

"We lost sight of the thieves altogether till this morning, when one of them split, and told us that this joker we've just nabbed would come here to-night with the stuff on him, to do a deal with Chi-Lung."

"You seem to doubt that this Chinese 'fence' is really Richard Halpin, who is more than suspected of breach of trust in connection with the Ashenden Trust Fund?"

"Well, sir, I do; because I've seen this Chi-Lung several times, and am prepared to swear almost as to his nationality."

"A very little time will show," said Doyle, "and then I, for one, shall be intensely surprised, should my surmises turn out to be incorrect."

The police raid on the Limehouse den was abundantly detailed in the newspapers of the next day, and most people must be fairly familiar with the particulars.

The most important detail, however, was the escape of Chi-Lung, otherwise Richard Halpin.

With the daring natural to him, he contrived to reach Barchester Gardens before the police arrived there.

Nora was, of course, asleep, and started with fright to see her brother standing by her bedside.

"Have you any ready money?" he said. "I am summoned unexpectedly to Paris, and must catch the earliest train to Newhaven."

"Richard! you look ill! What is the matter?"

"Never mind what is the matter! It is money I want, as much as you have by you."

"I have a hundred pounds of my own in my desk."

"Give me the key!"

"Here it is! But do tell me what it all means?"

"You will know soon enough. Meanwhile answer no questions. Good-bye!"

A rush into Nora's sitting-room, a seizing of the notes; and leaving the key in the desk, Halpin, who had changed his clothes and disguise at the little public-house in Long Acre, threw a big coat over his arm, and strolled out at the door into the street.

In Earl's Court Road he hailed a crawling hansom, directing the driver to make good speed for London Bridge Station.

He chose this terminus instead of Victoria or Addison Road, cunningly calculating that his chances would be better in the city.

Within half an hour of his leaving the house, the police arrived.

The two girls were both terror stricken, and distressed beyond measure.

Woman's sympathies are always easy to invoke on behalf of even the very worst, who are in danger of the law's grip. Nora, as the defaulting trustee's sister, was, of course, more keenly grieved and overcome. Rose Ashenden, who as yet was ignorant of her loss of heritage, feeling only that general pity, the pity for the hunted, howsoever criminal.

With the police came Sidney Doyle, who did all he might do for the girls' comfort and protection.

He felt bound to confide to Nora the truth of the disappearance of the trust funds, and she, though bitterly conscious of the shame and disgrace which must inevitably fall upon herself, had to confess that the news did not come to her altogether as a surprise. Though certain of nothing, she had suspected for long that something was amiss.

Leaving them to their rest, Sidney Doyle returned to Barchester Gardens the next morning, and at an interview with the two, suggested and carried his point that they should avail themselves, for the present at least, of his sister's hospitality.

Early in the day, the move was effected, and though the young fellow's income is by no means colossal of proportion, still the probabilities are decidedly in favour of an early wedding with Nora as bridesmaid.

Not that the latter is unmindful of the brother who left her, with means of her own certainly, but practically alone in the world.

On investigation it transpired that every penny of the Ashenden Trust money had been transferred to his own account, and that at the time of the *exposé*, it had absolutely melted away. Where it went to has never yet been traced.

Halpin had, it seemed, purchased the Haul-Bowline Alley property soon after he commenced to tamper with the Fund, with the idea—which he eventually and fully carried out—of making it the basis and centre of a vast criminal undertaking.

A marvellous actor, he succeeded for a period of nearly three years to deceive native-born Chinamen with his assumption of the *role* of Chi-Lung.

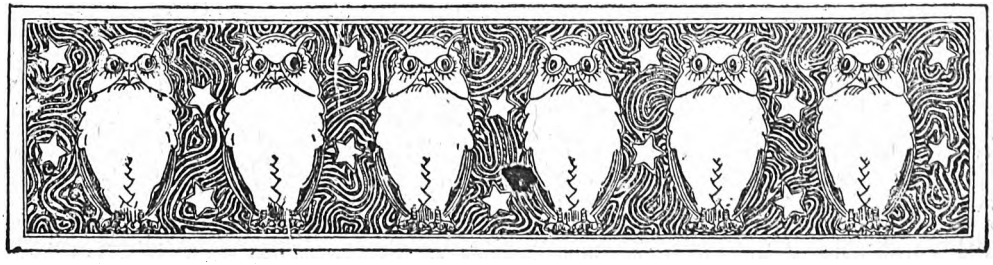
Always using *pigeon* English of the purest variety and accent, he, with a long experience in the North-West provinces of the Chinese Empire deluded the very elect.

He had hoped to recoup some heavy losses by the buying of the Rugby diamonds, but failed, as we have seen, to carry out the transaction.

What has become of him no man can tell. Probably he is in some far-away Western or North-Western State, where gold may be had for the delving, but where life is held in but very little esteem.

That his end will be peace is unlikely; while should he seek to lead the double life in a place where men do not readily brook the imposture which aims at their own throats, it is on the cards that he will meet the fate of his sometime chum and partner, Tedworth Ashenden, who, a rich man, and on the eve of enjoying his wealth, met his death in a Western "saloon" at the hands of the bully of the community.

Ralph Enderby.



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The "Pass-It-Along" Scheme.

FIRST AWARD, £10. SECOND AWARD, £5. THIRD AWARD, £2.

SIX AWARDS OF 10/- EACH.

(A)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMPETITOR WHO SENDS THIS COPY.

When you have carefully read these rules, put an ink line round the instructions in the next column, write your name and address in the space at the foot of this page*, and in the next column; wrap up this copy of SHORT STORIES in a wrapper, fix a penny stamp on it, and post it to a friend of yours whom you think will help you. Then wait until the copy is returned to you.

All you need do is to send out your copy or copies of SHORT STORIES and wait until it comes back to you with the names filled in.

The first prize will be awarded to the person whose copies of SHORT STORIES contain the greatest number of names of people to whom the copies have been sent, provided that the wrappers which carried the copies of SHORT STORIES through the post to each person accompanies the list.

It is not necessary for you to know the people whose names you will find on your list when your copy comes back; they will, of course, be the friends of your friends.

There is no absolute necessity to write a letter to your friend explaining the scheme, but if you did so it would carry more weight.

HOW TO SEND IN.

Keep the wrappers as they are sent to you, and when this copy comes back send all the wrappers together with this copy to the Editor of "Short Stories," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "PASS-IT-ALONG," to arrive not later than Thursday, July 24th.

NOTE.—Competitors may send out at the same time any number of copies of this issue.

The Editor's decision is final, and readers may enter only on this understanding.

(B)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE WHO RECEIVE THIS COPY BY POST.

This copy of SHORT STORIES has been sent to you by a friend who is interested in this competition and who wants to win one of the prizes offered. When you have read this announcement write your name down in the space provided, and then forward this copy *at once* in a penny wrapper to a friend of yours. If you have no friend to whom you can send it, return the copy of the paper, *together with the wrapper in which you received it*, to the original sender.

If the original sender of this paper (whose name and address is written at the foot of this page) wins the first prize, *you* will receive £1; if second prize, *you* will get 10s. The paper must be returned to the original sender on or before Saturday, July 19th.

You must at once return the wrapper in which this copy reaches you to _____

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(Competitor must insert here his or her name and address.)

IMPORTANT.

Fill in your name at once and post it on the day this is received. If you keep it longer it will lessen the chance of the original sender securing the first prize, as the paper will not be able to get into so many hands within the time limit.

If you receive this copy on Saturday, July 19th, fill up your name and post it at once to the sender, whose name appears at the foot of this page.

Why Not Try Yourself?

If you want to enter for this competition yourself, and win one of the prizes get a copy of SHORT STORIES from your newsagent at once, and follow the instructions marked "A."

This offer will be repeated in SHORT STORIES for July 26th (the next number but one), when another £20 will be offered in awards.

Those to whom this copy is sent sign here.

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Those who sign here will get £1 each if this wins first award.

*Name and Address of Competitor.....

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

FRANKIE IS PRESENTED AT COURT.
PERCIVAL HOPE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. Mary Vernon declares that they are exactly as given to her by Lord Kinross, whereupon Kinross breaks off the engagement. The diamonds subsequently appear as a gift from Fluffy to Mrs. Norton, set in a pair of hat-pins. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket-book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Font Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is now to be presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston.

LADY GAVESTON arrived late in the evening of a very rainy day. She was a tall and rather bony person, with a large head, and dressed in a painfully uncompromising fashion, strong-minded from the crown of her deerstalker hat to the hem of her homespun skirt. She arrived in a four wheeler, and altercated fiercely as to the correct fare from St. Pancras. This last much to the scandal of Skinner the butler, Frankie's latest addition to our household. Having worsted the cabman, and abashed Skinner, milady retired in triumph to the house and received Frankie's welcome with toleration if not affability.

"Dear Lady Gaveston, it gives me such pleasure to have you," said my cousin sweetly.

"Thank you," returned the elder lady, "you've a very impudent fellow for a servant, and there's a deal too much flummery about your rooms, draperies I suppose you call 'em—for health, still I've no doubt you are well intentioned." She smiled grimly at Frances, who, for the moment was at a loss for reply.

"She's rather dreadful," murmured she, when Lady Gaveston had departed to her room, "and very hideous, still no one can deny she's unimpeachably respectable," and my cousin went into peals of laughter.

It soon became plain that the relations between Frankie and Lady Gaveston were of a strictly business character. No love was lost between them, neither was there any waste of hate. Milady chaperoned my cousin unremittingly if severely, and received every courtesy and attention in return. The keen, shrewd Scotchwoman, puritan, with a dash of worldly wisdom, did not approve of my cousin, neither her house, nor the company she kept, but having undertaken—for a consideration—to ascertain things, those things her ladyship would carry through.

We were very busy those days at designing new costumes, and discussing the all important *toilette* for Frankie's presentation.

As a rule my cousin spent but little time in choosing her frocks, she knew exactly what suited her, and never hesitated as to style, colour, or cut. But over her Court gown she deliberated long and gravely. The result paid handsomely for her pains.

One afternoon, the day before the presentation, we were sitting in the drawing-room, Lady Gaveston, Lord Kinross and myself, when suddenly Frankie appeared in her court dress.

"I thought you'd like to see my frock, Cynthia," she spoke

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to me but looked towards Lord Kinross. "It's just come home."

She stood near the window, tall and slim and fair, the spring sunshine falling on the red gold of her hair, her soft white neck and arms glittering with jewels. Her gown was satin, of a deep shade of cream, falling softly from the waist and wonderfully embroidered with silver *fleur-de-lis*—a purple petalled iris peeping every here and there, or a faint-hued leaf of green. The bodice was veiled with lace, kept in place by tiny butterflies of emerald and amethyst with golden wings. The train also of satin lay in rich folds a yard or so upon the floor, showing a glimpse of the lining of mauve silk with dainty frills of pale green chiffon. A fine necklet of gold and emeralds was clasped about her throat; on her hair were diamonds.

I think we all admired her, though each showed their admiration in such different ways. Lady Gaveston stared hard, and gave a little sniff; Lord Kinross smiled in the leisurely approving fashion that most men adopt at the sight of a handsome woman well gowned, while I uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Frankie, you are perfect. Isn't she, Lord Kinross?"

"Quite," he said softly, "quite," then bending towards her, half smiling. "Shall I send you round the family jewels? You said you'd like to wear them at your presentation."

Frankie laughed and shook her head. "I wouldn't run such a risk for all the world. Suppose I lost them?"

"That wouldn't matter, they are insured."

"All the same I should feel responsible."

"The fact is you don't like to appear in borrowed plumes—or rather jewels."

"Perhaps."

"Well there are other diamonds beside the Kinross heirlooms—emeralds don't suit that gown, Mrs. Norton."

"I don't agree with you."

"At all events that necklet isn't becoming, the style is too severe, not like you a bit. It reminds me of Sir John—had he anything to do with its selection?"

"You are inquisitive, Lord Kinross."

"Interested merely, Mrs. Norton. Sir John's taste is too simple, I understand what suits you much better. I am convinced you should wear diamonds."

"I am not sure——" she began.

He interrupted her. "Suspend your judgment till to-morrow."

She glanced at him interrogatively, but he merely bowed and smilingly took his leave.

Sir John did not call on us that day, he was very busy company promoting and spent nearly all his time in the City.

His work seemed to agree with him however, he looked younger every time he came.

"I'm sorry Sir John can't see you, Frankie," I said, "you look so very nice."

"Oh, he's sure to look in to-morrow before we start. He'll find a spare half hour for that. Eh, Lady Gaveston?"

But the Baronet's widow made no reply save for a slight sniff.

The next day was bright and sunny, and my cousin in high spirits and good humour; Lady Gaveston in her court gown of stiff grey silk trimmed with Irish point, if not prepossessing, was undeniably good style, Frankie had never looked better in her life.

Sir John called early in the morning, with an exquisite bouquet of orchids, pale mauve shaded to a deep purple, with trails of asparagus fern. Just after his arrival there came a special messenger with a small parcel addressed to Frankie in Lord Kinross' writing. I took up the parcel and the bouquet to my cousin's room.

"Sir John's downstairs Frankie, he's brought these orchids—aren't they exquisite?" and I handed her the flowers.

"Yes—what's this packet?"

"A messenger just brought it from Lord Kinross."

For a moment Frankie hesitated, colour flushed her cheeks and she fingered at the string.

"Sir John's waiting, Frankie," I urged quietly.

"I know — but I *must* see what's inside." She opened the packet as she spoke. It contained a jeweller's box of red morocco leather; with an exclamation she pressed the spring, against the satin lining lay a necklace, shining and glittering in the sun, a necklace of diamonds.

"How beautiful, how beautiful! She took the necklace in her hands holding it against her throat, against the fine gold chain, simple and severe, that Kinross had found fault with. Watching her face reflected in the glass, I saw her expression slowly change. She seemed to grow hard and cold before my eyes, hard as her diamonds.

With a sudden gesture Frankie unclasped the chain and laid it on the table, then with a curious uncertainty she took up the diamonds.

I could not bear that she should wear them, I could not bear that she should fling that other gift, Sir John's, so contemptuously aside.

Downstairs he was waiting, watching for her with impatient, eager eyes.

Would she go to him wearing another man's jewels?

"Sir John's waiting, Frankie," I said once more, and wondering at my own audacity, I placed the diamond necklace in the box, and snapped the spring.

Frankie watched me with a funny little smile, then with a shrug turned away.

"Silly child," she said. "You're as sentimental as Sir John himself. No, I won't put on his emeralds, if I can't wear what I like, I'll have nothing." She stood for a moment by the door, then called me to her quickly.

"Bring the necklace down, Cynthia, the diamonds I mean. Sir John won't stay long, and——"

"You're going to wear it after all?" I cried.

"Of course, did you suppose it was only to be looked at?"

She ran quickly down the stairs, paused for a second outside the room where he was waiting, then entered—I doubt not with the smile he knew and loved so well.

Their interview was short. Lady Gaveston, the soul of punctuality was impatient, and but a few minutes elapsed before I was called down.

"Yes he's gone, give them to me." Turning, she clasped the jewels about her throat, careless of Lady Gaveston's gravely disapproving air.

I watched her down the steps into the carriage—on her way to Court.

I was puzzled for something to do for the next few hours. It was too fine to sit at home, and yet I had nowhere particular to go; it is so dull to walk by one's self, this perhaps accounted for the pleasure I felt at sight of Fluffy.

"Suppose we go and have a look at the *débutantes*, Miss Cynthia. The carriages stand for hours along the Buckingham Palace Road and I should like to see your cousin."

"What a splendid idea. I'll get ready now and come with you. I was just longing to go out."

Fluffy suggested a hansom to Victoria, but it was too fine a day to waste, so we walked up Piccadilly and down Grosvenor Place to where the stream of carriages commenced. There were plenty of sightseers, besides us, young girls of the middle class eager to criticise their more fashionable sisters, to envy and admire their clothes; some there were of the very poor; women with babies in their arms, and children

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"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
New Series of Stories.

dragging at their skirts, flower sellers, hawking sweet violets, a British matron or so, and a plentiful sprinkling of street boys.

I cast an inquisitive glance at the inmates of most of the carriages, fair girls dressed in white, young married women blazing with jewels, stately dowagers with severe head dresses.

"Well, what do you think of the show, Miss Cynthia?"

"They all look nice, but none of them touch Frankie."

"No? Well I think you're right, there's your cousin, Miss Cynthia." He pointed out the carriage, but made no attempt to draw any closer. "By the by, she's wearing some fine diamonds?"

"Yes, Lord Kinross sent them," I answered unthinkingly, remembering too late that I was forbidden to speak of my cousin's affairs.

"Ah? Your cousin's lucky, Miss Cynthia."

"I think so. Is Lord Kinross very rich, Mr. Thomson?"

"He has about £20,000 a year."

"As much as that?" I sighed; poor Sir John, why had he only fifteen hundred?

"Do people get rich quickly in the City, Mr. Thomson?"

"Some do, Miss Cynthia, smart men make their pile as quickly there as anywhere else."

"Could a smart man make as much as £20,000 a year?"

"He might make more."

"Really? I am glad of that." He smiled at my enthusiasm, but I did not mind, I felt happy to think that after all Sir John might not have to wait so very long to marry Frances.

A great many people came to Pont Street that afternoon after Frankie returned. Some of Lady Gaveston's friends dropped in, Lord Kinross turned up with two or three men, and Mrs. Curtis Blount brought the man in glasses. The drawing-room seemed quite full, everyone was chatting and laughing, congratulating Frankie on her success and admiring her gown.

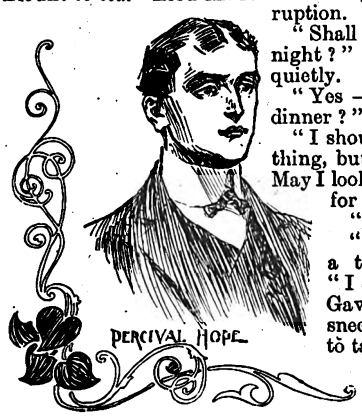
She had it seemed made a sensation, and it was reported that a certain royal personage had signified his admiration in a marked manner.

"You've made a tremendous hit, my dear," said Mrs. Curtis Blount. "Lady Chanleigh declared there was no one there to hold a candle to you—or your diamonds." There was a note of malice in the last remark that did not escape my cousin.

"It's nice of you to admire me, Vi dear," she answered sweetly.

"Did you see Mary Vernon?" continued Vi in a loud tone of voice, "I am told she was there—in white, you know, all virgin innocence and pearls, I wonder she chose pearls, paste's more in her line—eh Frankie?"

Frankie, however, closed the conversation by pressing Mrs. Blount to tea. Lord Kinross seemed grateful for the interruption.



"Shall you be at home to-night?" he asked my cousin quietly.

"Yes — won't you stay to dinner?"

"I should like to above everything, but I can't manage it. May I look in about nine, in time for coffee?"

"We shall be delighted."

"We?" he repeated in a tone of dissatisfaction. "I don't want to see Lady Gaveston, or," he gave a sneer, "Sir John. I want to talk to you, shall you be alone?"

Frankie flushed, hesitated—the opportunity for reply was lost, Fluffy quietly but firmly demanded tea.

"Cynthia, why don't you look after people," said my cousin sharply.

"I offered Mr. Thomson tea some time ago," I answered, "but he wouldn't have it."

"A thousand pardons for troubling you, Mrs. Norton, but you always remember how I like my tea; Miss Cynthia forgets."

Fluffy smiled serenely and helped himself to sugar.

For the remainder of the afternoon he kept quite close to Frankie, and somehow prevented Lord Kinross from further confidential conversation with her, though his Lordship did his best.

Opposition made him but the more determined. He waited until nearly everyone had gone; then, turning his back to Fluffy, approached my cousin.

"I may hope to see you, then, to-night?" he asked.

Over his shoulder Fluffy telegraphed a most emphatic "No," but Frankie frowned at the signal.

"*No*," reiterated Fluffy, with eyes and hands and head.

My cousin smiled. "I shall expect you," she said sweetly, "about nine."

I had occasion to fetch something from the drawing-room, about half an hour later. Fluffy and Frances were still talking.

"You'll take your own way, of that I am aware," he was saying as I entered, "but remember, I've warned you."

"What is your reason?" she retorted. "Why should I not see him to-night? 'Tis your insane jealousy, nothing else."

Fluffy laughed. "I rather think I'm past that sort of thing," he said quietly.

"What other explanation can there be?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Explanations are things I carefully avoid," he said. "I merely give advice, or, rather, offer it."

"You must be more explicit."

"Pardon me, there is no compulsion."

"But——" she paused, silenced by what she read on his face.

"You prefer not to take my advice?" he said. "Very well, it is your affair. I shall, however, look in some time after nine. You may be glad of me."

He spoke quite softly, amiably even, but Frankie, with heightened colour, swept from the room, without a backward look. I saw her no more till after dinner; she was tired, and had some food sent to her room.

No wonder, I thought, if she were worn out, considering what an eventful day she had passed through. To have been presented at Court, to have achieved so marked a success—her gown would be reproduced in all the fashionable papers, and her diamonds were mentioned in the *Queen*—these things, if exhilarating, were fatiguing. Still, the day had been a triumph, and now, to crown her victory, behold Lord Kinross at her feet, praying for a private interview.

"Lord Kinross is here, Frankie, are you going to see him?"

"Yes, this minute. And, Cynthia, don't let anybody interrupt us."

I followed her downstairs feeling most unhappy. "Frankie," I said as we reached the hall. "Frankie——" then hesitated.

"Well, what is it?"

"You're not going——" I paused. "Sir John——" I stammered, but could get no further.

"Now look here, Cynthia," said my cousin sharply. "I'll have no more of this. It is no business of yours who I see or what I do. Hold your tongue, and don't dare to interfere with me, or back you go to Bruges," and brushing past me into the drawing-room, she smartly closed the door.

My cousin had been with Lord Kinross for about ten minutes when there was a sharp ring at the visitors' bell.

"Mrs. Norton can't see anyone, Skinner," I cautioned the butler, "she's particularly engaged."

"Very well, miss," said Skinner with a grin, and passed on to the door.

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Apparently his representations were unavailing, for the next minute a tall figure passed up the hall.

"Sorry," said a pleasant voice, "but I know Mrs. Norton's at home, and I'm bound to see her."

The intruder was just outside the drawing-room. I sprang forward to detain him.

"You can't go in!" I cried. "Why, Mr. Hope, is that you?"

"Yes, I've come to see your cousin on an affair of some urgency."

"I will tell her. Will you wait a minute?"

"Who is with Mrs. Norton?" he asked. "Oh, I know the question's an impertinence. Still—I *must* speak to her, Miss Hamilton."

"Lord Kinross is with my cousin," I answered stiffly. His manner puzzled me.

"Kinross *here*!" Percival Hope deliberately walked past me, and threw back the door.

My cousin was sitting in her favourite lounge chair by the fire, Lord Kinross bending over her. He was flushed, and his eyes were bright. There was a look of expectancy on Frankie's face turned up to him, her lips half parted as though ready to answer some anticipated question. It seemed to me that, had our entry been delayed ever so little longer, Lord Kinross would have asked that question. As it was the words were stayed.

"Cynthia!" cried my cousin in annoyance. And "Hope!" said Kinross. "What on earth do you want here?"

Percival paid no heed to him, but marched straight up to Frankie. "I'm a late visitor, Mrs. Norton," he said quietly, "but I am charged with a special message from a friend—Miss Mary Vernon."

"Yes? I did not know you were acquainted." Frankie's tone was insolent, her look contemptuous.

"I have known Miss Vernon for years," he said. Then "I should, perhaps, speak to you in private?" he asked slowly.

Frankie flushed, and for a moment seemed to hesitate; she glanced inquiringly at Kinross, but his lordship, leaning stolidly against the mantelpiece, stared into space.

"I have no secrets with you, Mr. Hope," she said at last; "unless Mary charged you to speak to me alone, I don't see the necessity."

"I was not thinking of Miss Vernon," Percival answered quickly. There was a suggestion of unpleasantness in his manner and in his voice.

"Pray deliver your message!" Frankie rose, something of defiance in her attitude.

"You have so great a friendship for Miss Vernon that she feels sure my news will give you pleasure."

"Anything that pleases Mary will gratify me."

Percival bowed.

"Miss Vernon desires that I should tell you this: she has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. And——" he broke off short.

Frankie, ashen white, was clinging to Lord Kinross for support.

[Next week Percival Hope makes some startling revelations.]

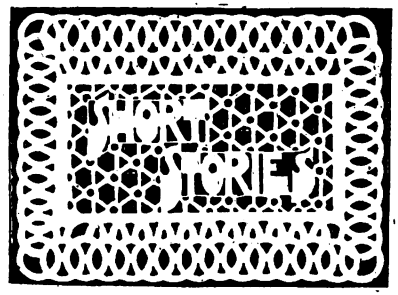
Your Editor Chats.

This week you will find the announcement of the new scheme which I mentioned last week, and I feel sure that, on reading through the conditions, you will agree with me that no simpler method of making a little money could be devised. All you have to do is to send this copy of *Short Stories* to some friend of yours, and then await developments. Your friend will, in turn, forward this copy, after signing it, to a friend of his or hers, so that you do not have to trouble any more about the copy until it is returned to you by the person who last signs his or her name.

If you care to drop a line to the friend to whom you send this copy, pointing out the reason why you forward it, there is no objection to your doing so, and it may certainly carry weight and increase the chances of your succeeding in winning the first prize. If you *do* write a letter don't forget to mention that, in the event of your winning the first prize, your friend will get a sovereign, and in the event of your winning the second prize, your friend will get ten shillings.

The scheme is open for a fortnight, so there is no time to lose. You must post this copy to-night. Don't procrastinate. If you don't do it now you will keep putting it off until it is too late.

The winning design.

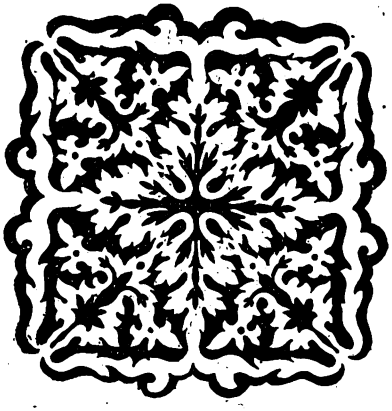


The second best design.

In the letters R, R, E, E, L, O, T, N, I, N, G, A, G, P, E, U, O, U, there are three English words, and for this week's competition I want you to tell me what they are. The reader who first sends in the correct words using up all the letters will receive a handsome gold-plated pencil-case, while the twenty readers whose attempts are next received will get consolation gifts of rolled gold hearts and dainty little charms.

Post-cards only, please, and these must reach us not later than the first post on Tuesday morning, July 15th, addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C. Post-cards should be marked "Three Words."

I am now able to give you the result of the Design Competition, and to reproduce the three best efforts which I received. The first prize goes to E. Payne, 73 London Road, Clapton, N.E. The second and third awards are taken by Mr. Walter P. Neighbour, 55 Lanercost Road, Tulse Hill Park, S.W., and Mr. Fred Tole, 57 Hope Road, Sale, near Manchester, while the fourth and fifth prizes go to Mrs. J. Millership, 16 Blowman Street, Rugby, and to Mrs. Fisher, 63 Bold Street, Altrincham, Cheshire.



Winner of third prize.

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Extremely Awkward.

"I HEAR there's trouble between you and Miss De Trop." "Yes; everything is declared off." "What was the matter?" "We went into my usual restaurant the other evening, and I ordered lemonade for two. The stupid waiter served it in such a manner that she got hold of my glass, which contained something more."

Her Reason.

"How did you come to marry him? Were you in love with him?" "Oh, no, but another girl was."

Love's Greatest Test.

SHE: "What makes you think he loves me so desperately?" Simplex: "Oh, a thousand things! He always looks pleased, for instance, when you sing and play."

A Poor Money-Maker.

SAMSO: "He is not rich, and yet he makes a great deal more money than he spends." Rodd: "How can that be?" Samso: "He works in the Mint."

Too Early to Tell.

FIRST FAIR ONE: "So Fred and Arthur both proposed to her? Which was the lucky man?" The Other Fair One: "They don't know yet. Fred married her."

Considerate.

LADY (to nursemaid): "Caroline, see you don't let the children sit on the wet grass, they might catch cold. If they are tired you can sit on it yourself and take them on your knee."

One Better.

CRŒSUS: "When I came here I didn't have a penny in my pocket." Midas: "When I came here I didn't even have a pocket." Crœsus (admiringly): "How?" Midas: "I was born here."

Her Real Object.

"SURELY, mademoiselle, you have not come here in search of health?" said a gentleman to a young French lady at Trouville last summer. "Not precisely. To tell the truth, I came here with the object of finding a son-in-law for my mother," was the candid reply.

A Dangerous Tie.

STRAWBER: "Old man, I'm going to take the fatal step to-night, and propose to Miss Quillcutter." Singerly: "Are you going to do it in that necktie?" Strawber: "Why, yes, of course." Singerly: "Then if she says 'Yes,' old fellow, you may be sure it is a case of true love."

How He Knew.

SHE: "That couple in front of us—do you think they are married?" He: "Yes, I am sure they are. They have been married a long time, too." "Why, how do you know?" "Have you noticed that when a pretty girl comes on the stage she always hands the opera glasses over to him?"

Fellow Feeling.

MR. AND MRS. FITTS were out driving. "I wonder," said she, "just what the poor horse's feelings are. It must be just horrid to be driven and dragged about without any idea as to where one is going, except as someone else directs." "I think I can appreciate his feelings," replied Mr. Fitts. "I imagine that he feels just about as I do when you take me out on a shopping trip."

Very Cutting.

ETHEL: "I confess that my sole object in life is to kill time." Maud: "So that he can't tell anyone your age, I suppose!"

He Did His Duty.

HE: "How chilly it is to-night. I could hug a stove, I feel so cold." She: "Is that so? Why, I'm so warm I feel just like a stove."

A Money Hunter.

"AND why, Jennie, did you tell Willie you wouldn't be his little wife?" "'Tause he didn't ast 'till he knowed I had a new sixpence."

To Keep the Balance.

HE: "Is my hat on straight?" She: "Yes. The idea! Why do you ask such a question?" He: "I'm going out in a canoe, and don't want to overbalance it."

The Streets were up.

"I GOT tired of riding home in crowded 'buses, so I bought a bicycle." "So you are going to ride home on that hereafter?" "Well, I don't know. I got it only yesterday, and last night I rode home in an ambulance."

But the Baron Didn't.

MISS BRENTON: "I'll marry you under one condition." Baron Hartz: "I vill agcept any condition, mein own." Miss Brenton: "Get Dick Westend's consent. I've been engaged to him for a week, and he might want to keep me."

You Never Know.

JEWELLER: "The inscription you wish engraved on the inside of this ring, I understand, is 'Marcellus to Irene'?" Young Man (with embarrassment): "Yes, that's right. But—er—don't cut the 'Irene' very deep, I may want to use it again."

As Much as He Could Expect.

HE: "What allowance do you think your father ought to make us when we are married?" She: "Well, I think if he makes allowance for your faults he will be doing as much as can be expected of him."

The Marks of Love.

MISS LUVLY: "Do you know Mr. Stevens by sight? I left the verandah after having a little flirtation with him just a moment ago, and now I can't find him anywhere." Miss Waspish: "I saw a man hurrying along with a great pink and white mark on his coat lapel. Perhaps that was he."

It Didn't Work.

YOUNG Mr. Muscle left at a very late hour, and the old man stood at the head of the stairs, chuckling in fiendish glee. Then there was an awful disturbance in the front garden, and the aforesaid old man laughed, "Ha, ha!" Then came the cry of "Help!" "What's wanted?" shouted the aged sinner. A clarion voice rang out, "I want somebody to help me bury a dog!"

Catching an Expression.

PHOTOGRAPHER (to sitter): "I saw you at church last Sunday, Miss Smith." Sitter: "Oh, did you?" Photographer: "Yes, and also your friend, Miss Brown—if you could raise your chin a trifle, thanks—and what an atrocious-looking hat she had on." (After a pause.) "There, Miss Smith, it is over, and I think we have caught a very pleasant expression."

The Drawbacks.

TOM: "Yes, we swore to remain true to each other. Then I went away for a long time." Jack: "And she was always in your thoughts?" Tom: "I thought a good deal of her—I mean I thought of her a good deal." Jack: "And when you met you embraced her fondly, of course?" Tom: "I would probably have done so were it not for our surroundings." Jack: "The encounter was public?" Tom: "Yes, and both her husband and my wife were present."

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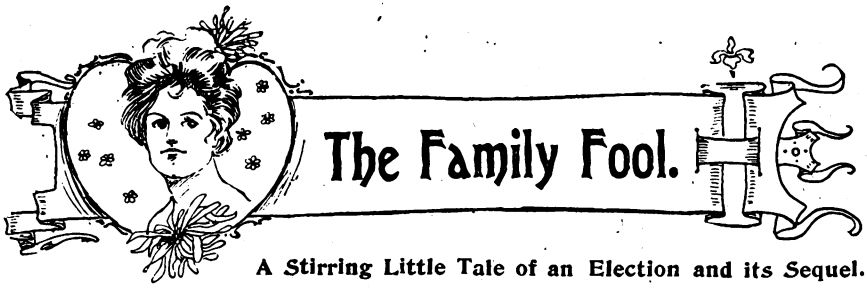

The Family Fool.

A Stirring Little Tale of an Election and its Sequel.

"I've made up my mind! so there's an end of it!" said Mr. Alderman Gulliver, Drysalter and Magistrate, by virtue of his office, for the City of London, setting down his coffee-cup noisily, and his foot figuratively. "If he ever comes before me for any seditious act, I'll treat him as a rogue and a vagabond! I'll out-Brutus Brutus!"

"Papa, you are very hard on poor Dick! It is not as if he had done anything wrong."

"Not done anything wrong! What do you call his senseless throwing up of a fine position in my business—that he might do what? Mix himself up with a parcel of noisy East End Radicals, who never do any work, but swill beer, and spout treason, while their wives and children are starving! And you say he hasn't done anything wrong!"

"But, papa, he believes himself to be right in what he is doing."

"Does he? Then he's a bigger fool still! To think that my son—my only son!—with advantages greater than any nine out of ten, should deliberately set himself to thwart me in this way. It's a pity he has that five hundred a year of his mother's; without it, he'd be forced to come to me, and study my wishes."

"Well, papa, Gerald says that——"

"Ah! *there's* a young fellow of a thousand for you! Gerald Haynes would never have had my consent to marry you, had I not been convinced of his good and respectable principles."

Mr. Gulliver was so filled with admiration for his future son-in-law, for himself, and for the said good and respectable principles, common, as he fondly imagined, to both of them, that he quite failed to notice his daughter Mabel's badly-concealed expression of mirthful dissent.

"I was going to say," she observed soberly, "that Gerald has heard some news of Dick lately."

"Nothing to the young rascal's credit, I'll be bound!"

"Oh! I don't know! Falling in love isn't so very discreditable a proceeding; at least it has been more or less the fashion from Adam's time until now."

"Falling in love! Dick! Some factory girl or bargee's daughter, I suppose!"

"Well, I do not think our Dick would look quite so low as that; although I don't see why a factory girl or a bargee's daughter shouldn't be as good as—well—as Lady Marjorie Underwood, for instance."

This was probing the Alderman in a peculiarly sore spot.

"You're as bad as your brother, girl, every whit as bad. Lady Marjorie, indeed! The—the daughter of a hundred Earls! Poor the last two or three of 'em, I grant, but the blood was and is there—and it's the blood that's the thing! The blood that tells!"

"Oh! I am not belittling Lady Marjorie; I like her. She's an especial friend of mine."

"I had set my heart upon a match between her and Dick!" went on the Alderman. "Money and blood! But she wouldn't look at the young fool now!"

"Perhaps she wouldn't, for Marjorie has, I know, set *her* heart upon mating with a wise man."

"Sensible girl! sensible girl! But how is Gerald's canvassing getting on? It's a pity that he is putting up for an East End constituency, even though it be in the Conservative interest."

"I fancy that he has made an advance during this past week," replied Mabel. "But I hear his voice in the drawing-room. I knew he was coming here early on his way east; but not quite so early as this."

She tripped out and ran upstairs.

"Gerald," she said, with a roguish smile, and after the usual lover's greetings, "Papa has been going on terribly about poor Dick—it is a shame!"

"Yes it is—rather—but we mustn't forget, dear, that your father is deeply disappointed in Dick. I am sadly afraid, too, that, were he not my old college chum, the prince of good fellows, and—my Mab's brother, I should be sorely tempted to regard him in anything but a friendly light."

"Why?"

"Why? Why, because he is about the worst enemy—politically—that I have in Whitechapel, and because, unless the gods are very good to me, he is the one man in all the world who will be responsible for my defeat, should I lose the day."

"Are you sure of this, Gerald?"

"I am. He is moving Heaven and earth now, in the organisation of a monster meeting, to be held somewhere in the neighbourhood of Tower Hill. This is to be a decisive demonstration against my candidature, and I am only afraid that it will end in riot and trouble for Dick."

"Are you going eastwards now?" she asked.

"Yes, I am going to try and see Dick, in the hope that I may persuade him, if possible, to adopt a more moderate course."

"Will you take me with you?"

"Do you think, Mabel, that it would be advisable?"

"I have my reasons—strong reasons, for wishing to go."

"Come, then, by all means, dear! But you'll find it anything but a pleasure-jaunt."

Seeking her father again in the dining-room, Mabel made her petition for leave of absence.

"Gerald will take care of me—and—and I want to go! So you must let me!"

"Well, if you must—you must, I suppose. But tell Gerald to be sure and not to take you anywhere near the scene of action."

"Trust Gerald for that, papa! He is nearly as bad as you are in thinking me to be china—of the easily-breakable sort."

* * * * *

Everywhere in the immediate neighbourhood of the morrow's contest, there were outward and visible signs of what might then be expected. Not that there was much noise or disturbance, it was simply that printer's-ink, in every colour of the rainbow, flowed and overflowed from wall, and hoarding, and window.

But there was another, and, to the intelligent spectator, more portentous spirit abroad—a spirit that whispered in alleyways, and at street corners; a spirit that was wholly ignorant, and might, therefore, be wholly dangerou .

When Gerald Haynes and Mabel left the train at Aldgate, and faced the malodorous shamble-stores of "Butchers' Row," the pavements of the big thoroughfare seemed alive with the threatening silence of the coming storm.

Knots of two or three, or of half-a-dozen denizens of the district, stood about at every vantage point, discussing in low tones, some evidently weighty matter. Flitting from group to group were a few better-dressed men, whose mission it seemed to be to keep popular interest in the subject under discussion up to standard point.

At the corner of Commercial Street the knots of men appeared to crystallise, the police good-humouredly taking little notice, so long as the road traffic was not interfered with or impeded.

"Gerald, there's Dick!" exclaimed Mabel, as they were preparing to cross the road.

She was pointing excitedly towards a tall man in a coarse tweed suit and a golf cap of the same colour.

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The man was talking to a lady, who had just descended f om a hansom, that waited by the kerbside.

Tall, dark, and stately-looking, and dressed in well-fitting tailor-made dress and jacket, the latter was rapidly exciting in the male East End mind undisguised admiration for her aristocratically handsome face.

"By Jove! So it is!" replied Gerald Haynes, "and if I'm not very much mistaken, the lady who is engaging his attention is Lady Marjorie!"

Pushing a way for himself and Mabel through the fast-increasing crowd, he soon came abreast of the man in the tweed suit and his companion.

Their eyes met simultaneously, the whole four of them, quite oblivious of the comments of the man in the street, giving themselves up unreservedly to the pleasure of the unexpected meeting.

Unfortunately, Richard Gulliver, the Socialistic pioneer, the leader of men, the man who, it was rumoured, had given up a fortune to help his East End brother, was recognised by an enthusiastic follower.

The news spread like wildfire. In an instant Dick and his friends were hemmed in so closely, that to get clear of the press seemed an absolute impossibility.

Now, Dick was a giant among men; stood, indeed, Saul-like, above his fellows from the shoulders upward.

This fact stood him in good stead now, inasmuch as it enabled him to look round for a means of escape from his admirers.

On the side of the Mile End Road where they stood, was the entrance to a large hall, wedged in between two shop fronts.

It was in this hall that the meeting referred to by Gerald Haynes was to be held at two o'clock on that day.

Whis ering to Gerald to take quick advantage of his next move, Dick squared his shoulders, and elbowed himself backwards towards the door of the hall. Putting Mabel and Lady Marjorie before him, and thus between himself and Dick, Gerald followed up, step by step, the former's retreat doorwards.

The moment Dick Gulliver reached the door, he, deftly taking a large key from his pocket, felt behind him for the keyh le, and before the crowd could realise that their idol had disappeared, he and his friends were safely inside the closed door of the hall.

Suddenly there was a sound as of an ever-nearing roar of a human Niagara! Ten thousand throats seemed splitting—ten thousand voices seemed shrieking in hideous discord in the street outside.

"Follow me!" cried Dick, as he sprang up a steep flight of stairs to the left of the entry. This brought them on to a landing, the window of which overlooked the main road.

Looking down, they saw a huge seething crowd, principally men, frantically struggling to reach one objective point—the entrance to the hall.

Scattered here and there throughout the throng, and hanging, Uh an-like, on to the fringe of it, were individuals whose political opinions were manifestly not in accord with those of the great majority. These indulged in vexatious wordy warfare with the "reds," who, roused at last to frenzy, took the matter into their own hands, and started a campaign of fist and foot reprisals.

"Dick," said Gerald Haynes, "you have let loose the flood! But can you stop it?"

With that, he threw up the lower sash, leant both his hands on the window-sill, and made as if to speak.

"Are you men or brutes?" he cried, in stentorian tones. "I neve taught you to tear each other's throats! You are a disgrace to the cause you profess to champion! Ah! you coward"—as a stone, flung from the centre of the crowd, struck him on the forehead. "You are as fickle as women, without woman's excuse! From this hour I renounce yo i and all yo r works! Lead yourselves, and see where you wi l arrive! Henceforth, I go to the Gentiles!"

There was an attempt at silence during this speech, but with the last word, the uproar renewed itself with tenfold o ce.

Mabel and Lady Marjorie were too terror-stricken to speak, although the latter, directly Dick started to address the mob, drew nearer to him. When he was struck, she quietly produced her handkerchief and wiped the blood that streamed from a nasty wound in his forehead.

In ten minutes the police arrived in sufficient force to disperse the crowd.

An inspector and two constables demanded admi tance at the hall door in the King's name.

Dick went down with the keeper of the hall and answered the summons.

"Is your name Richard Gulliver?"

"It is."

"Then I hold a warrant for your arrest," said the inspecto-, "for inciting to sedition the King's subjects, and for conspiring against His Majesty's peace."

Gerald Haynes, with the two girls, accompanied the prisoner to the Guildhall, where the sitting Alderman happened to be Horace Gulliver, Esq.

A few formal preliminaries and Dick, Lady Marjorie's handkerchief as a bandage still round his head, stepped quietly into the dock and faced his father.

There was hardly a soul in the court but knew the history of the Alderman and his son. It was common property.

"Gaoler! The prisoner's name."

"Rich—Richard Gulliver—your worship, begging your worship's pardon."

"You needn't beg my pardon! What's the charge?"

"Inciting to sedition, and conspiring against the King's peace, your worship."

"Have you anything to say, prisoner?"

"I did my best to stop it," was the reply.

"'Um. Didn't find it so easy as egging 'em on to it."

"No, I am sorry to say."

Two policemen and a witness who professed to having heard the prisoner the night before uttering at a meeting violent threats against the Government, having given evidence, the Alderman, in the absence of any rebutting test mony, expressed his intention of dealing with the case a week from that date.

"I should like to say a word," interrupted Gerald Haynes, standing up in the well of the court.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Gulliver, looking *through* his future son-in-law as if not seeing him. "What have you to say? Is it anything in the prisoner's favour?"

"As the Conservative candidate for the district, I may perhaps be permitted to say, that, being present the whole time, I saw nothing—practically nothing, which could in any way support a charge of sedition. More than that, the prisoner, whom I have personally known and esteemed for many years, acted in a manly way to quell the disturbance; so much so, that, should I be elected to-morrow, I shall regard his action as having materially contributed to my success. I may add that I am prepared to offer bail to any amount for Mr. Richard Gulliver."

Gerald Haynes, when he sat down, distinctly felt a warm little hand steal into his, and though he looked for no reward, his sweetheart's appreciation was very sweet to him.

"Well, I shall remand the prisoner for a week, and shall require one substantial bail to the amount of a thousand pounds."

Needless to say that it was immediately forthcoming.

But Dick never appeared on the remand, other than to be at once discharged, for, in the meanwhile, the Alderman had received an intimation from the Home Office that his conduct savoured largely of the ridiculous, and that his granting a warrant at all for his son's arrest on such slight grounds, placed him in rather an awkward position.

Poor man! he had a peculiarly warm time of it at home, what with one and another; and he was not really comfortable till the day of the double wedding; when Lady Marjorie, to the old man's great delight, took Dick for better and for worse; and then the new Conservative member for Whitechapel and Mabel Gulliver followed their friend's very good example.

E. Ralph.

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YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

For New Readers.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

In the meanwhile, Scarsdale, who has got into trouble for attacking a warder who jested with him about Esther, is taken seriously ill, and placed in the prison hospital, where he succeeds in writing a letter to Esther and giving it to a convict named Ben Needham, who has finished his sentence and has promised to deliver it to Esther upon his release. He accomplishes his mission a week or so later.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself in the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on Revelle and Benny drive up in a dogcart, and suddenly, while talking to Esther, Revelle turns deadly pale. Crump is standing by, and quickly sees the reason for his emotion. Vance is approaching. She goes straight up to Revelle. It is a critical moment, but once more Revelle's iron will wins the day. Again apologising for her mistake in calling Revelle her husband, she allows herself to be led away. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump. It is while returning from this concert that Revelle proposes to Esther but is refused.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum. Crump advises them to go straight to the reservoir.

CHAPTER XXII.

Escaped.

CRUMP'S advice was taken. One man dismounted his smoking horse, the other pelted forward at a break-neck pace, bound for the reservoir. Crump was looking seriously distressed as he turned to where Mrs. Cobb and Pollie were standing.

"Mrs. Cobb," he said, "this is very sad, this. I'm going to ask you to excuse me. I don't suppose that I shall do any good, but I must help look for this poor woman. Now, if you will just go into the grounds, I shall hope to join you later."

He nodded to the two constables, and hurried off, bent on taking a short cut to the reservoir. From his previous experience of Vance, he told himself that she was far more likely to be found there than in the grounds. He reached the reservoir to find the asylum attendant already there; but no sign of Vance. The little man at once made for the spot where, when in company with Esther, he had seen Vance standing on the edge, staring down into the water. He stooped down and examined the ground.

"I don't think that she has been here!" he said to the attendant.

"Well," answered the man, "I don't quite see how you can tell that by just examining one particular spot for foot-marks!"

"A poor creature bent on suicide would, I fancy, make a direct line for the water. In particular if she were conscious of pursuit. The bridle-path is the only approach to the water from the north, the asylum side. But I may be wrong. I am open to correction!"

Crump was a stranger to the attendant.

"You might be a detective from the way you talk!"

Crump shook his head, and handed the man a card—the "Penworthy" card, on which was inscribed "Landscape Gardener and Horticultural Specialist."

"I am interested in the poor woman, because I found her that morning when she wandered here. If, as a private individual, I might make a suggestion, I should communicate at once with the police at Ashbrook, and ask that a man might be told off to keep an eye on this reservoir. It is possible that she may arrive here later. And in the meantime I should be very pleased to wait here. I think it would be as well!"

"Thank you. Much obliged!"

The man rode off. Crump remained, staring meditatively at the water, occasionally shaking his head. He had looked forward to a day's enjoyment with Mrs. Cobb and Pollie, and the episode had cast a shadow. On the arrival of a policeman in plain clothes, he returned to the grounds.

The balloon had ascended again with another load of passengers. Crump glanced up at it and the figure seated in the rigging.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "if you've heard yet of this poor creature's escape! I may be wrong in my estimate of your character, but I look upon you as a heartless, cold-blooded scoundrel, Mr. Seaton Revelle, exceptionally so, in fact. And I do hope that sooner or later—preferably sooner—I shall have the supreme satisfaction——"

The stern look that had momentarily crossed the little man's face melted into a smile.

"He's a blackguard; but his impertinence tickles me!"

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OUR NEW SERIAL.

He had caught sight of Mr. Faversham. Lady Eliza Normanhurst was with him, and had taken his arm. She had been charmed with his performance at the concert, and was he not of the Norfolk-Faversham stock? It was rather an ordeal for Benny. "Upper circles," as he put it, "were not much in his line; and he was uncertain on matters of etiquette. It was a case of trusting to luck. It was all very well for the Marquis. He took to the upper circles as a duck takes to water."

"You're not a balloonist?" said Lady Normanhurst.

"No!" said Benny, "I prefer to have my feet upon my native heath; feel far more at home on *terra cotta!*"

Benny wondered why Lady Normanhurst laughed. He was under the belief that *terra cotta* and *terra firma* meant the same thing; but having the reputation of being a funny man, his ignorance passed for funniness. It happens so sometimes.

At that moment they were joined by Lord Normanhurst.

"I've just heard," he said, "that there's been an escape from the asylum. There's just a chance that the poor woman may have made her way here, and got into the grounds with the crowd."

"Who is she?" asked his wife.

"That unfortunate servant of Mansfield's who so suddenly went out of her mind."

Benny thought of the Marquis. Revelle had assured him that he had never set eyes upon the woman before that evening when he was dining with the Mansfield's; but, for all that, Benny had been haunted by certain doubts on the matter. He was, as Crump had put it, a blackguard; but he was not entirely without a conscience, and there was a humane side to his character. He had no scruples on the subject of cracking a crib, if the affair ended there; but it was another thing when it entailed undeserved suffering on innocent people. Much as he admired the Marquis, and very much under his thumb as he was, there were moments when the relations between the two men were liable to be strained; and, moreover, Benny was inclined to be jealous of the silent Railton whose praises Revelle had a way of singing, and who was completely in his confidence.

The balloon was being hauled down. After the disembarkation of the passengers, Revelle himself sprang out. Since the rejection of his proposal, he had met Esther frequently. He had behaved as if no such thing had taken place. Afterwards he had told himself that he had acted prematurely; but he flattered himself complacently that Esther's rejection of his advances was half-hearted; that it was not so much the remembrance of Alec Scarsdale, but rather the worldly dread of what people might say. He was hopelessly out in his calculations, and his error was largely due to his infinite belief in himself. Besides himself and Esther, only one person (not counting Benny) knew of the proposal—Crump. Esther had told him. She had also told him of the letter that had reached her from Alec through that rough diamond, Ben Needham. The little man had grown right into her heart. She had come to look upon him in the light of a second father. There was a delicacy about him, a certain tenderness, that made her feel somehow that she could tell him things which she would not for worlds mention to anyone else.

The *fête* provided many attractions; but the balloon was the greatest, and Seaton Revelle undoubtedly the hero of the hour. He was rapidly becoming a very popular person in the neighbourhood.

Many eyes followed him as, having left the captive balloon in charge of some attendants, he made his way through the crowds to Lord Normanhurst.

"Just taking a bit of an easy!" he said, "I have been making money fast. Normanhurst, you must come up with me next time. I'm thankful that there's no wind to speak of, and what little there is looks like dropping. A captive balloon's no good in a wind."

Lady Normanhurst had carried off Benny to a small tent where a lady of title, who had made a study of palmistry, was reading characters and foretelling the future.

"Now," said Lady Normanhurst, as the lady palmist took one of Benny's hands in her own, and started to examine the lines. "I'm going to hear your true character, Mr. Faversham!"

"Heaven forbid!" said Benny to himself; and, after it was all over, again to himself, "Heaven be thanked! Not a bit like it!"

Lord Normanhurst accompanied Revelle back to the balloon. Some stir was created when it was known that his Lordship was going to make an ascent.

"By the way," he said, as they neared the car, "have you heard of this escape from the asylum? That poor woman, Vance."

A momentary shadow darkened Revelle's face.

"No, I hadn't heard. When—when did she get away?"

"Some time this morning. There's a rumour that she may be somewhere here in the grounds. I trust not. She's only dangerous to herself, they say; but if the rumour gets about, I'm afraid it will cast a gloom over the proceedings, and so far everything has been going splendidly!"

A cheer went up as Lord Normanhurst climbed into the car. Revelle shouted out an order. The engine started to pay out the wire cable. The balloon rose up. Presently Revelle signalled down. The engine stopped. He took a pair of field glasses from a case, and handed them to Lord Normanhurst. After sweeping the horizon and the crowd below, he handed them back. Revelle, having adjusted the focus, glanced away to the distant County asylum. His face hardened a little. He had fancied that she was safe enough there. Then he, too, scanned the crowd below.

Was it possible that she was somewhere down there? Was it possible, that before the day was out, he would have to face another such ordeal as he had gone through that morning outside John Mansfield's house?

Lord Normanhurst was becoming accustomed to his novel situation.

"I say, Revelle, would it be possible for you to make your free ascent a little later—after dusk in fact. You see, we are going to illuminate the grounds, and I've been wondering if you could manage to blaze off a firework or something when you were up aloft!"

Revelle was still staring through the field-glasses.

"Well, yes. I could go up just before dusk, and show a coloured light or something, don't you know!"

Was she somewhere down below—this woman who was his lawful wife?

He cursed the asylum people under his breath. What had they been doing to let her escape?

Where was she?

* * * * * * *

"Up in a balloon, boys, up in a balloon!
Flying up sky-high, boys,
Trying to reach the moon!"

The words, crooned out in a weird monotone, came from behind a great clump of gorse where a woman, her dull eyes dilated and fastened on what, in the distance, looked like a tiny globule suspended in mid-air, crouched—a lonely, hidden figure on the desolate common that stretched away on all sides. Presently she rose up, glanced round her furtively; then crept away to another clump, a little further along, and, crouching down again, crooned out the same refrain.

"Is it Jim up there?" she whispered. "It reminds me of old times. He loved me for a little time; then grew tired. But I love him still, so much that I won't betray him. But, oh, how he looked at me! Those eyes of his, that old hard stare!"

She shivered; then, straightening up again and glancing round as though she were afraid of pursuit, she crept forward to another clump. Her movements were those of a hunted creature.

"He wants me out of the way, wants to be free to marry her. Shall I go to her, tell her that he'll only break her heart as he broke mine? Warn her against his handsome face?"

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For a moment the dull eyes lighted up with a look of jealousy, but it flickered out. She sank down on to the turf, and buried her face in her arms.

"They would only take me back, and laugh at me. I'm mad. No, I'll wait till the darkness comes, and then I'll go to the water. Rest's waiting for me there, looking up from under the water, and beckoning, always beckoning, and holding out its arms to me!"

When the sun, like a great red ball of fire, seemed to be resting on the line of the horizon, the demented woman was sitting in the shadow of the gorse, her knees drawn up to her chin, waiting for the darkness, and again crooning to herself the old refrain.

The great red ball sank out of sight, leaving the sky a crimson-yellow hue that softened into greyness. Then heavy, ominous-looking clouds crept up over the horizon-ridge.

"Hooray—hooray—hooray!"

The distant cheers stole over the deserted common like a faint whisper.

In the far-away grounds a great crowd had gathered round the balloon. The cable that hitherto had held it captive had been detached. A number of men were holding on to the car that was heavily weighted with ballast. The grounds were beginning to twinkle with fairy lights.

Seaton Revelle had entered the car. The cheers had been for him. The wind had dropped completely.

"Can't quite say" he called out to Lord Normanhurst, "where I shall come to ground. But if I can strike the current I want I shall probably drop on to Aversham Common—plenty of room there!"

"I shouldn't like to be going up!" said Pollie to Crump, whose hand she was holding.

"Nor should I, Pollie!" answered the little man; then he was seized with a violent fit of sneezing that necessitated an immediate recourse to his handkerchief. It was quite a prolonged fit, and for some little time his face was completely buried in his handkerchief.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Cobb, who was on his other side, "I'm afraid that you've caught cold, Mr. Penworthy!"

"I'm afraid that I have!"

But, as a matter of fact, he had not caught cold; but had caught sight of the face of a man who had edged his way through the crowd, and was standing near him—a man with an expressionless countenance and rather fishy eyes, Railton, Mr. Seaton Revelle's valet. Only when he had pushed his way still further ahead, and was well in front of him, did Crump cease to blow his nose.

"Hooray!"

"O-o-h!" cried Pollie, "it's going up, going up!"

Straight as a die, amidst ringing cheers, the balloon shot up into the evening sky that was growing more grey and dark with every moment.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Crump as he stared up watching the balloon growing smaller and smaller, "I'm sorry. This rain will spoil the evening for many people, I'm afraid!"

A drop of heavy rain had pattered down on to his face. It was a prelude of a downpour, so heavy that a few moments later there was a general stampede for the many marquees and tents that dotted the grounds.

Had the evening been clear, the balloon would have been distinctly visible, but the blackness of banking rain-clouds darkened the sky.

"As long as there's no lightning," said John Mansfield to Esther, "Revelle will be all right. I think we are in for a regular downpour. I'm glad that I ordered the carriage early. But I'm sorry. I'm afraid the evening is spoilt!"

Several letters awaited the banker when he reached home. One of them was from an old friend.

"Esther," he said, "a letter from Sawyer. Most kind of him. He suggests that we should pay him a visit at his place at Gurlstone Bay, while the summer's still at its best. He's got a yacht down there, and proposes a coasting cruise. I think we ought to go!"

He stroked her dark hair tenderly.

"I don't think my little girl is quite looking herself. Yes, I think I'll write and accept for both of us!"

"I think I'd rather stop here, father. We only seem to have just come back."

The banker shook his head.

"No, Esther, I shall accept!"

Esther still hesitated. Warham was the scene of action, the field on which she felt the battle was being fought; yet she was conscious of a longing to get away for a little while, away from that man whose almost daily presence sometimes became well-nigh unbearable.

"Father, will you give me till to-morrow to make up my mind?"

She meant to consult Crump.

"Very well, Esther, you shall sleep upon it!"

That night, when alone in her room, Esther drew back the curtains and stared out into the darkness. The rain was still pelting down steadily. Her heart was heavy within her. She had heard of Vance's escape. Where was she? What had happened to the poor woman?

Then her thoughts changed into another channel. The silence of the darkened room was broken by a woman's voice that cried aloud—

"Alec, my love, my love, if I could only see you, speak with you!"

Silence followed for a while.

Then came the cry of many men and women—the cry of the captive craving for freedom, of the lover for his love, of genius unrecognised. A cry that has often winged its way to the throne of the Omnipotent!

"Oh, God, how long, how long!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Jim!"

Above, moon and stars were shining out; below, what looked like a billowy silvered sea; below that, darkness and rain. The balloon, with its solitary occupant was in the upper heavens, above the clouds that blackened the world below. With some men, the awful loneliness of space, the myriad constellations, the baseless, silvered cloud-ocean below, would have conjured up a deep sense of awe, a feeling of one's own micrososmic pettiness, a breathless wonder at the mysterious vastness of the universe!

Revelle, his coat-collar upturned, peered over the edge of the basket-car. The vastness, the immensity of it, all made no impression upon him.

"Curse the night!" he muttered, "I had calculated on a clear evening. Once I drop through those clouds I shall be in pitch darkness. I haven't the vaguest notion where I am. It will be all a matter of guess-work!"

He glanced at the barometer. It was possible to read it by the clear moonlight.

"Nearly four thousand feet up, I shall have to chance my luck! Goodness only knows where the currents have been drifting me to. There's nothing to gauge my position by!"

He pulled the valve-rope. There was a hissing sound of escaping gas. The balloon dropped downwards towards the fantastic, silvery billows below. A moment later it was shrouded in a cold, damp, black mist. Moon and stars were blotted out. Then the mist gave place to an intense, but clear darkness and a steady, pelting, rain. The balloon had dropped through the clouds. With a sound like the *frou-frou* of a society lady's skirt, the balloon's silken envelope swished under the lash of the water.

The sound of escaping gas ceased. There seemed no breeze, but an imperceptible current was bearing the balloon along.

Revelle was staring down. Immediately below was darkness, but here and there in the distance lights were twinkling out. One set of lights might have been a pattern picked out by glow-worms. Even as he stared down light after light went out.

"The grounds," muttered Revelle. "They've given it up as a bad business and are putting out the lights, or the

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OUR NEW SERIAL.

rain's doing it for them. Reckon by the position of those lights, and the darkness below, that I must be about over the common!"

He swung overboard a three-pronged anchor. The balloon tilted over to one side, then he opened the valve again.

Again the hissing sound of gas and a gentle, downward motion.

"Thank Heaven for that!"

The continuous cloud-bank overhead had suddenly rifted. The moonlight, struggling through, illumined the drifting balloon with a pale light. Revelle could almost distinguish the nature of the ground beneath.

"If it will only last I shall be able to see what I am doing. I'm over the common right enough!"

Down, gently down, and drifting slowly along! So close to the ground now that the trailing anchor almost brushed the top of the gorse. The pale light of the moon was still holding good.

The valve was closed again. Revelle, his hand on the rope, was leaning half out of the car watching his opportunity.

Suddenly he saw a figure rise up, more like a ghost than human being, from out the shadow of a clump of gorse.

"Jim, Jim," crooned up a voice, "is that you? Have you come for me?"

"My God!" hissed out Revelle.

The figure was no longer visible, hidden beneath the car. The next moment there was a jerk as if the anchor had clawed the ground; the car heeled over to one side, but went on drifting, dragged down at an angle.

A woman was clinging to the anchor, being dragged along, her feet sometimes clear of, sometimes scraping the ground.

Revelle relaxed hold of the valve rope, sprang across the car, and stared down, the moonlight was upon the clinging figure the pale, upturned face.

It was the face of his mad wife!

"Jim!" —the panting words reached him—"Up, up, up, let's go up together! Up—away—from the cruel world—to Heaven—to rest!"

The man's face was an ashy colour now. With a swift movement he dashed the sweat from off his forehead, then stooped, snatched up something, and heaved it overboard—a bag of ballast.

The balloon shot up.

"Jim!"

He stooped again. A moment later another bag of ballast struck the common with a dull thud. He peered over the edge of the car. The moonlight was full upon the white, upturned face of the mad woman as she swung along through the air.

"Jim!"

His wife! Cruelty, terror, was shining from his eyes, but not mercy!

Then, as suddenly as it had opened, the rift in the cloud-bank closed up, and all was darkness again and rain.

"Jim!"

A third bag of ballast slipped through the air, and struck the ground with a dull thud. Then a current of wind caught the balloon and drove it towards Warham reservoir.

The basket car still listed heavily to one side.

Then, suddenly, it righted itself, and the balloon, relieved of a heavy weight, shot upward like an arrow!

The man in the car was the grey colour of death now. His teeth were chattering. Clutching the edge with a shaking hand, he forced himself to peer over. Once again the cloud-bank rifted, and for a brief moment the fickle moon showed her face. Something shimmered below coldly. Water!

CHAPTER XXIV.

Scarsdale is Transferred. "Change 'ere for Gurston Bay!"

"WHY am I to go before the Governor?" asked Scarsdale wearily. "Have I been reported again? Does it mean another dose of punishment cells?"

The warder, who had replaced Pettigrew, had entered Scarsdale's cell with the information that he was to go before the Governor. He was cast in a different mould from Pettigrew, and was friendly-disposed towards his charges.

"No; it's not that, this time. But the Visiting Director's here, and the papers have been made out transferring you to some other establishment—you'll know which, soon enough."

"Transferred?"

"Yes; it's a little way they've got with fractious prisoners. The Governor was fined fifty pounds on account of Gentleman Jack's escape, and he doesn't want to lose another. He's a bit anxious, and won't be sorry to have you off his hands."

Scarsdale smiled grimly, and glanced down at his leg-chains.

The warder's statement was confirmed when Scarsdale was brought before the Governor and the Visiting Director. He was formally told that he was to be transferred to another convict establishment.

A prisoner under Special Orders is neither allowed to write nor receive any letters. But Scarsdale was informed that on his arrival at his new quarters he would be allowed to write one letter informing his friends of his transfer.

This in itself was something. When he was back again in his cell, Scarsdale felt a feeling akin to excitement. Any change was welcome after the terrible monotony of the past, although he knew that he was to be transferred to a Public Works Prison that had a notorious reputation for the stringency of its discipline. He had met prisoners who had "done time" at Wrackam Convict Prison, and they had never spoken of it but to revile it. One of them had called it "the hell of English prisons." Situated close to the banks of a great river, the prisoners were mostly employed in building fortresses, docks, and basins.

That evening when the warder entered his cell, he told him that several others besides himself were to be transferred to Wrackam. He would have companions on the journey.

Scarsdale slept but little that night; and when he did snatch a few moments, he obtained no rest. The same wild dreams of escape tortured him—vivid dreams that haunted him when awake.

He was up and dressed and feverishly pacing his dark cell long before the prison bell jangled out its harsh note. He climbed to the iron bars and watched the grey light of dawn spread across the moor. Recollections crowded through his brain, all grim and dark. What might be in store for him in the future, he did not know; but he thanked God that he was leaving that horrible place with its rankling associations of injustice.

When the bell rang out he remembered how, when first hearing its notes, it had chilled him with the hopelessness of despair. He listened to the slamming of the doors, the rattle of feet along the corridors, and the cries of the warders as they shouted out "Brooms in!" How strange it had all seemed to him at first—how horribly familiar it had all become now!

Silently he took in his breakfast—an eight-ounce loaf of bread, sodden with some gruel that had been slopped over it, and the pint of "skilly." He had scarcely tasted his first prison breakfast; now he devoured it ravenously. He was marched down into the receiving ward. Besides some half-a-dozen other convicts, the Governor, the Chief Warder, and a small crowd of principal warders and warders were present. His letters were taken from him, and he was marched into an adjoining room, where he was stripped to the skin and thoroughly searched. Returning to the ward, his name, sentence, and official number were called out, and he surrendered up his official ticket. The identification of each convict having been assured, the little gang was then marched off to the chain-room, more commonly called the jeweller's shop.

Scarsdale was still wearing his leg-chains, but they did not save him from being handcuffed. There were seven convicts, all told, and, when each man had been handcuffed, they were formed into two groups of four and three, fastened

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together by a long steel chain attached to the handcuffs of the left hands.

Then each man was given a haversack containing a couple of eight-ounce loaves, a small piece of cold beef, and some quarter of a pound of cheese. A long day's journey lay before them, and they were not expected to reach Wrackam till late that night.

A clumsy-looking omnibus was drawn up in the parade-ground; the men entered, two warders with them. Two other warders took up their positions on the steps outside, while another climbed up beside the driver. They were all armed with cutlasses, and carried revolvers in their pockets.

Once beyond the confines of the prison-walls, the convicts began to talk to one another in low whispers. The warders did not attempt to prevent them. So long as the gloomy blot on the moor remained in sight, Scarsdale felt compelled by a strange fascination to watch it. He gave a deep sigh of relief—why he could not have explained—when at last it disappeared from view. The road was hilly, and once the men were ordered out to walk.

To Scarsdale it was like a brief glimpse of freedom. He forgot his hideous dress, the fetters and handcuffs, as he tramped up the hill, drinking in the invigorating air. There was a wild, rugged beauty about the surrounding country. There was no prison, no civil guard, no sentinel-box in view now to mar the effect.

Even the warders seemed to have relaxed, for they did not prevent conversation, and occasionally joined in themselves.

"Bust me tight," exclaimed one convict, a wizen-faced, keen-eyed little Cockney, who had been sentenced to five years for being found with his hand in somebody else's pocket, "bust me tight if this ain't a reg'lar Heaster Monday Bank 'Oliday picnic!"

"Yes," said one of the warders, "only there aren't no pockets to be picked round about here, 564!"

Whereat most of the others laughed heartily, 564 included. It was the laugh and the jest that recalled Scarsdale to himself. It grated upon his nerves. It brought him down again to a sordid level.

The hill had been climbed, and, once again within the vehicle, Scarsdale took stock of his comrades. Though they had all come from the same prison, none of them were known to him. He himself composed one of the little gang of four—each man of a different and distinct type. Next to him was an old man, grey-faced and haggard; there was a weary, broken aspect about the droop of his head. The features were refined and intellectual; there was a deep pathos in their expression of passive suffering. His neighbour was the little Cockney, sharp as a needle, full of native wit, and utterly devoid of conscience. He had picked pockets before he came to prison, and he meant to start picking them again as soon as he had served his time. The fourth man was of a tall and commanding appearance; he had been a promoter of bogus companies in his day; he had ruined homes and robbed hundreds of their hard-earned savings. He had been sentenced to ten years' penal servitude. It was said that when he came out he would be immensely rich. The spoil that he had amassed had been transferred to someone else's banking account before the crash came.

The other little group of three was composed of a man who had been sent to prison for manslaughter; a lad of twenty who had fallen into the hands of racing sharps, and had stolen money to pay his debts; and the head of a notorious gang of London coiners.

Such were Scarsdale's travelling companions. It was the man next to him who interested him most. He glanced at his badge. He was serving a sentence of fifteen years. He wondered if he would live through it, and what his crime had been.

But his thoughts were temporarily distracted when the omnibus entered the outskirts of Plymtown. Every convict face was pressed against the windows—to obtain a glance of the free and outer world.

It was so long since Scarsdale had seen anything but convict-clad men and uniformed officials, that the sight of men and

The Most Singular Town in England.

Berwick is the most singular town in the British dominions inasmuch as it is really both a town and a country to itself. Elwick, a neighbouring place, has recently become almost equally interesting on account of a remarkable cure worked there by Bile Beans. Mrs. Matthewson, the wife of an Elwick farmer, related the facts of the case as follows to a "Berwickshire News" reporter:—"My daughter Mary suffered from anæmia for many months. The illness came on by slow degrees, so that for some time no one regarded it as being serious. But as she grew more feeble, we became alarmed. She could not take her usual food, complained of a weak stomach, seldom had any appetite, and became awfully emaciated. This went on for months. I tried several vaunted remedies, but they proved worthless. Then a doctor prescribed for her, and attended her. She got better for a while, but ultimately went back to her old condition. The doctor said she was bloodless, and attended her for several weeks.

She was then ordered to have some teeth drawn, which had a good effect, but the improvement was again merely temporary. Seeing an advertisement of Bile Beans we resolved to get a box, and give them a trial. The effects of the first box were most gratifying. Indeed, before it was finished, there was a noticeable improvement in her condition. By perseverance with the Beans, she grew stronger bit by bit every day. Her appetite increased, and very soon she was better in many ways than she had been before. To-day, thanks entirely to the Beans, she has been quite cured, and both looks and feels remarkably well and strong." The remedy which worked this cure is the world's specific for anæmia, debility, headache, lassitude, weakness after influenza, indigestion, female ailments, and all liver and kidney disorders. Of all chemists for one and three-halfpence or two and nine per box. Never sold loose. The above is but one instance out of thousands of their marvellous power.

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HOME NOTES

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PRICE ONE PENNY.

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OUR NEW SERIAL.

women in ordinary clothes seemed quite strange. The very advertisements on the hoardings were full of interest.

"Lor' bless us," said the little Cockney, "if *Charley's Aunt* ain't still running; but it strikes me people has taken to washin' more, or pretendin' to. I've already seed three advertisements for new soaps as I never heard of afore I come in."

The omnibus had already begun to attract attention. A number of ragged little urchins had begun to keep pace with it; people in the streets turned round and stared after it. Scarsdale turned away his head from the window, a crimson flush of shame on his cheeks. But worse was yet to come. The moment the vehicle drew up in Plymtown Station, a crowd gathered round and pressed so close upon the convicts as they passed in that the warders had to push them back. They were stared at as if they had been wild beasts or freaks of human nature. Audible remarks were passed.

"Look at that one with chains on his legs as well as his wrists. My eye, I shouldn't care to meet him alone in a dark lane at night!"

On the platform it was no better. A hundred eyes were bent upon them. Well-dressed men and fashionable ladies behaved as the rest—all seemed filled with the same prurient curiosity.

To Scarsdale it was all so much horrible humiliation. Never had he felt his degradation so keenly as at that moment. But others of the gang, less sensitive than he, seemed rather to enjoy their notoriety—the little Cockney in particular.

"All right, marm," he said to one old lady, who was glaring at him through a pair of spectacles, "you may come a bit closer; nothink ain't charged for 'aving a look at us, and we don't bite!"

And suddenly rattling his handcuffs, he caused the old lady to take three quick paces to the rear.

Scarsdale's head was bent forward, his eyes fastened on the ground. He could not endure to look around him. But he thanked God that there was no one there who had known him.

A third-class saloon had been reserved for the convict party.

The moment the train ran into the station the warders gave the word, and the prisoners, passing between two lines of spectators, entered the carriage. The little Cockney scattered his chaff right and left; the coiner begged one or two of the men for a morsel of "baccy."

The windows of the saloon were open, and the people still crowded round and glared in. Scarsdale prayed for the moment to come for the train to start.

"'Ere," cried the Cockney, "you've had a good stare at us for nothink. Shy in a handful of baccy!"

A man on the platform took a handful of tobacco from his pouch and threw it in through the open window. In an instant all was confusion and uproar. The warders endeavoured to get hold of it; the convicts struggled and fought among themselves for it, in spite of chains and handcuffs, and, when at last order was restored, every vestige of tobacco had disappeared. However, more than one convict's cheeks were bulging out suspiciously, the little Cockney's in particular.

There is always a certain amount of latitude on the occasions of transference of prisoners; and the warders allowed them to enjoy their luxury in peace.

Amongst others who stared in at the window was a clergyman, evidently taking mental notes for the following Sunday's discourse.

"Hullo, Mr. Sky-Pilot," cried the irrepressible Cockney, "don't forgit to put me in the sermon as the bad little boy wot wouldn't do no work and growed up to be a bad man and was sent to quod!"

Scarsdale gave a deep sigh of relief as the train steamed out of the station. Those hard, staring eyes had recalled to him the day when he had stood in the dock of the Old Bailey. He glanced at the old man beside him. Their eyes met.

"As if," he said, in a low, unsteady voice, "our punishment was not great enough without this last humiliation—to be stared at like wild beasts—to be made the subject of jest and scorn. Have men and women no decency?"

The old man lapsed into silence. It was a dreary, monotonous journey, and presently Scarsdale dropped off, in spite the surrounding discomfort, into a doze.

The next thing that he realised was that the train was stopping, and a porter was shouting out:

"Roxeter Junction! Change 'ere for Wrackam!"

Then, after a pause:

"Change 'ere for Gurlston Bay!"

CHAPTER XXV.

Found!

"Good morning, Mr. Penworthy."

"Good morning to you, Miss Mansfield!"

Crump raised his hat, and, breaking off the discussion in which he was engaged with Banks, the gardener, joined Esther. The morning sky was clear, and the heavy rain of the night before had given a peculiar freshness to the air. Banks moved away to another part of the garden.

"I hope," said Crump, "that you avoided getting wet last night, Miss Mansfield. The sad news about that poor woman's escape and the sudden rain-storm cast quite a gloom over yesterday's proceedings!"

"Has anything been heard of her?"

"I'm sorry to say—nothing!"

The little man shook his head sorrowfully. Knowing the woman's tendencies, he dreaded lest something serious had happened.

"And I'm sorry to say," he went on, with a distinct note of annoyance in his voice, "that I have just heard that the policeman who was told off to keep watch by the reservoir was withdrawn after dark. A most unwise act. I wish I had known before."

Esther's dark eyes dilated with a look of horror. Crump saw, and changed the subject. He asked her advice as to the shape and arrangement of a certain flower-bed.

"And now," she said, the question settled, "I want to ask your advice!"

She told him of the invitation to her father and herself to pay a visit to Gurlston Bay, of her father's wish to accept.

"But I feel," she said, in a low voice, "that I oughtn't to go away from here. Yet, for some reasons, I should like to get away for a little time."

"My dear young lady," said Crump, "if I were you, I should certainly go!"

He saw that the strain was telling on her. A change would do her good. Fresh surroundings, fresh faces, would help to distract her thoughts.

"You see, your interests—and his—will be looked after in your absence to the best of my poor ability. I should go. I think you would be the better for getting right away from this immediate atmosphere, if only for a short time. I know—I know how great the strain has been. I know how much almost daily contact with a certain person must have affected you!"

"Then I will go!"

"That's right, quite right. And we—that is, Tom, and that young rascal Freddie, and your humble servant—will be doing our uttermost for you while you are away. And I shall take the liberty of writing to you frequently."

The little man shook his head.

"It's slow work—very slow work; but we must be patient, all of us!"

They moved away to the end of the drive. Esther leant upon the gate.

"Good morning, miss!" said a passing farm-labourer, as he touched his cap. "The balloon come to ground all safe and sound at Ocklington last night, close upon midnight. I've just seed Mr. Revelle. Good morning, miss!"

And the man went on his way.

"Do you think," questioned Esther presently, "that we are—are moving forward?"

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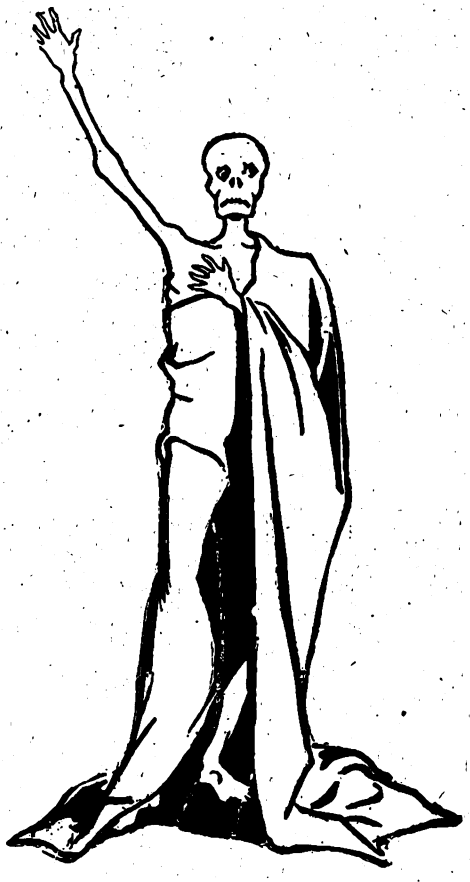

THE BLACK DAY.

The black day is fast approaching—the day which will long remain in the publishing world as a day of mystery—for the Publishers of Professor Boyd Laynard's world-renowned work, "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE," have received instructions from the author to withdraw all cheap editions of his famous book on the last day of this month. The present stock is not over large, and the publishers feel that all SHORT STORIES readers who have not yet secured a copy are entitled to this offer, which will be their last opportunity.

To those readers who are not acquainted with the contents of this world-renowned work, the following list of subjects will give some slight idea of its scope. A complete syllabus, showing the contents of the whole of the **127 CHAPTERS**, enumerating upwards of **500 SUBJECTS** and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the publishers. The complete work, if ordered direct from the publishers on Order Form below, will be forwarded, carriage paid, for **ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE**, the same edition as sold in the ordinary way for Two Shillings.

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"To be quite frank with you, at the present moment we are standing still; but I believe that, sooner or later, we shall be moving on again. I am expecting something to happen. What at present I am not justified in telling you. You see, my dear young lady, unfortunately the rascals who robbed your father's safe, had the start of us. I do not doubt that the diamonds and banknotes were turned into hard cash at once. In spite of the assistance of some very able former colleagues of mine, who helped me for the sake of old times, we have not succeeded in tracing the stolen stuff—as yet. If we could find the man through whom it was disposed, we should soon bring the guilt of the robbery home to the guilty parties; but perhaps we shall——"

He stopped abruptly. He had caught sight of a man, coming from the direction of the reservoir, who was hurrying along the road. A scared look was on his face.

Crump jumped at a conclusion—a terrible one.

"Miss Mansfield," he said quickly, "perhaps you had better go back to the house!"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"I'm afraid something has happened. Please go!"

The man was close up to the gate now.

"The poor woman that escaped from the asylum—she's wearing the dress——"

"Please go!"

Esther, with a shudder, turned and hurried away to the house; but she had guessed.

The panting man had paused for breath. He had turned, and was pointing behind him.

"In the reservoir!"

A further thrilling instalment of this story appears next Tuesday.

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Ask and it Shall be Given Thee.

"ETHEL, dear," said Bessie Brown, with proud eyes, "my brother, Philip Estes Brown, from South Africa."

Lieutenant Phil bent over the dainty hand of his sister's chum, mentally contrasting her radiant fairness with the sunburnt faces of the Boer ladies, his principal feminine society for two long years.

"I am pleased to meet you," he said simply. "Bessie has often written of you. I can't express how glad I am to be shaking hands with a genuine English girl again after so many months of desolation."

"And I," said Miss Mackay, with charming seriousness, "am glad to meet one who has given up home and business to uphold his country's flag. My father fought for it in the Crimea. Bessie told me," she continued, when the three had adjourned to the veranda, "that you received your wound in saving one of your men. Would—would you mind telling me about it?"

"There isn't much to tell," said Phil with an embarrassed laugh. "Bessie," with a fond glance at his sister, "has constructed quite a romance out of it, with me for principal character, but it was the other fellow who was the hero."

"We ran into an ambush about a dozen miles from camp—twenty of us, myself, the only officer, in command; and only by the greatest good fortune escaped annihilation, but we managed to reach cover with only half a dozen wounded.

"It was a sort of natural pocket in the rocks, a regular little citadel; but while the enemy couldn't rush us out of it, we couldn't get out either, for we were completely surrounded, and they numbered ten to our one.

"For two days we lay on those broiling rocks, hoping for the help which didn't come, till the heat and the want of water—for that had given out the first day—began to make the men go off their heads, and the suffering of the wounded made my heart ache.

"Things looked so black that I had about made up my mind to give up in the morning of the third day, when one of the men—Rogers his name was, a splendid fellow—came up to me and saluted.

"'Lieutenant,' he said, 'there's water out there about two hundred yards to the left of us. I saw it as we were driven in. I can take half a dozen canteens, and when the moon goes down behind that cloud make a rush. If I get back we can last another day; if I don't—well, it's a man's death, that's all.'

"I wrung his hand impulsively. 'Spoken like a gentleman and a soldier,' I said, for I had long known he was a gentleman, though only a common soldier.

"He reached the water safely, but half-way back the Boers saw him as he crossed a patch of moonlight, and fired; then he fell and lay still, and—and," continued the lieutenant lamely, "I went out and brought him in."

"He brought him in on his back," broke in Bessie, "with two bullets in his own shoulder. And what do you think, Ethel—the man's name wasn't Rogers at all, but Mackay."

Ethel had risen with staring eyes.

"What was he like, this man?" she whispered. "Was he he tall and fair, and did he have a scar across his emple—so?"

"Why, yes," said Phil, wondering at her agitation. "He was just like that—how did you——?"

"He was my brother," she cried. "He left home angry with father. I can't tell you why now; but father was in the wrong He isn't dead—he will get well?"

"Oh, yes," said Phil; "he's all right, and there is a commission waiting for him when he gets out of the hospital."

"I must go at once and tell father," said Ethel hurriedly. "Won't he be glad—and proud! But you," turning suddenly; "what can I say to you, who saved my brother's life?"

"Perhaps," he said, audaciously; "when I come back for always I may ask you for something. May I hope that——?"

A sudden flood of red dyed the girl's pure face.

"Ask, and it shall be given thee," she quoted softly.

J. P.

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IN CONFIDENCE

By MADGE MORRIS.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Would it be Etiquette?

"FIVE O'CLOCK" is at home two days during the month, and generally has a good many callers. She asks my advice as to how to tactfully get out of the following predicament: She is engaged in a very interesting conversation with one guest, when a fresh caller is announced. Should she leave off the conversation and devote herself to the new caller? While this would be strict etiquette, would it not be rather hard on the person with whom she was talking, to suddenly leave her?

❦❦❦

I think a little tact would soon put the matter right. On the new guest arriving, "FIVE O'CLOCK" should exchange a few well-chosen remarks, nice and to the point, should see that tea was given her, and, if possible, that she was left talking to some other guest, and then return, with an apology, to the guest with whom she was talking. To leave the latter for any length of time would be in bad taste, though only too many hostesses offend in this particular, out of supposed adherence to etiquette.

❦❦❦

Won't Raise His Hat

"RABY" is in sad trouble. She recently met "WALTER," to whom she took a great fancy. This she told her friends. Now, "WALTER," though a very nice boy, has the very slightest knowledge of good manners. Whenever "RABY" meets him she bows very nicely, but "WALTER" never raises his hat. This has gone on for such a long time that "RABY" asks my advice as to how to convey to "WALTER" his proper duty when meeting a lady.

❦❦❦

Let "RABY" go out with her brother, or cousin, or male friend, and when next they meet "WALTER," and she recognises him, let her request her escort to raise his hat in a very conspicuous way. If "WALTER" does not see from example what is the proper thing to do, then he must be lacking in intelligence as well as knowledge of good breeding, and would scarcely be a nice man for "RABY" to wish to cultivate.

❦❦❦

The Too-Dignified Barmaid.

MY correspondents include a great many different kinds of people, and this week I have to solve a little problem for "BELLA," who is a barmaid in Tooting. Now "BELLA" believes she is a pretty and attractive girl, but finds that three years have passed away and she has never found a young man to be attentive to her. She says she has always behaved in a very dignified way at the bar and never been familiar with anyone. On the contrary, she has always maintained the bearing of a lady, and kept obtrusive people at proper length.

❦❦❦

Well, "BELLA," has it occurred to you that you have carried that idea of being a lady rather too far, and that this is the reason for your non-success with the men? There is no need for a girl in your position to be familiar with your customers, but a nice charming manner towards everyone would do you no harm at all, and would be just as lady-like as "aloofness." After all, your position makes it necessary for you to serve men. Why not do it gracefully and agreeably? Try it for a time, and if someone does not start paying attentions to you I shall be very surprised.

❦❦❦

A Matter of Dress.

"LUCINDA" dresses very smartly, but her husband goes about attired like a labourer, whereas he is a man in a good position. How can "LUCINDA" induce her husband to dress in a becoming manner, as her own social position is handicapped by his appearance. Whenever she broaches the matter to him, he replies that he cannot afford to spend money on clothes, a statement which, "LUCINDA" assures me, is untrue.

❦❦❦

I know a woman who cured a similar tendency on the part of her husband in the following way: She took a suit of his clothes to a tailor and told him to make another to the same measurements, of a superior pattern. When her husband arrived home one evening, he was confronted with his new suit. After roaring about the expense for some time, his wife said she was very sorry, but was quite willing to pay it out of her own allowance if he wished it, rather than see him continue so shabby. He tried on the clothes, which fitted him well, and went out with his wife, who kept up a running fire of compliments on his appearance the whole way. This so pleased him that from that moment he begun to take an interest in his appearance, and soon a good many more suits came from that tailor. "LUCINDA" might try the same scheme.

❦❦❦

Wants a Wife.

"WESTRALIAN" is sixty-six years of age, and wishes to know if he is too old to marry. He is well off, and wants a wife not too old. In his own words the nice girls ("those up to forty") are soon picked up by younger men. "WESTRALIAN" has no infirmities.

❦❦❦

Of course in the Colony in which my correspondent resides, he may find a dearth of promising widows or spinsters of from forty upwards. I do not know the conditions out there. But I do not think he would find any difficulty if he went the proper way to work. Of course, even a widow of forty-five might rather shrink from the idea of marrying a man of sixty-six, but let "WESTRALIAN" just propose to a few of them, and if, in face of the actual proposal, somebody does not (after the usual correct remark about its being sudden, etc), consent, I shall be surprised. I know several charming ladies of mature age who would be only too willing to marry such a man as "WESTRALIAN," and if that is so here, perhaps it is the same in the Colonies.

❦❦❦

The Literary Prodigy.

I DO not wish to discourage you, "ISABEL," from writing stories, but you are only fifteen, and therefore cannot yet have the experience of life and manners necessary to publish fiction. At present you should seek the criticism of well-read friends, and abide by their opinion. There are so many professional story-writers whose experience covers years that the path of so youthful an aspirant as yourself would be full of disappointments.

❦❦❦

In any case, you should spend your time during the next few years in closely observing life and character and keeping your imagination constantly at work in trying to discover new and interesting situations. Do not be in too great a hurry. If you start actually writing four years hence you will be in ample time, as experience in quite as necessary in a writer as talent.

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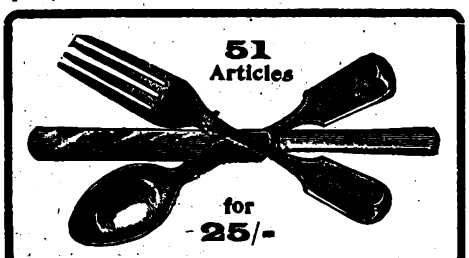

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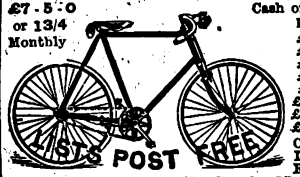

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For the Week Ending July 19th, 1902.

Murder by Speaking Tube.

A Powerful Narrative in Two Parts, of which this is the first.

By EDWIN S. HOPE.

CHAPTER I.

There was a skeleton in the house of Dr. Featherstone, where old Mrs. Peake, a wealthy old lady who had lost her only child, a son, in the South African War, was staying as a paying guest—not, be it understood, in the character of an invalid. Mrs. Peake was not the skeleton. She was rather the elderly household fairy who, without knowing it, frequently waved the magic wand which kept the skeleton mostly invisible.

Mrs. Featherstone was pretentious and extravagant; that was one part of it, and for another her husband was accustomed to instal a *locum tenens* from time to time without regard to holiday seasons, and hie him to London and elsewhere with a frequency highly detrimental to his dwindling Boscall practice.

The doctor was supposed to be engaged on a great medical work, and the eccentric Mrs. Peake, who seemed to be gradually transferring to him the love she had once lavished on her son, took a fussy but unintelligent interest in his unspecified studies, and petted and coddled him on his brain-weary returns from the excursions referred to. She had, through her cheque book, a part in the furtherance of the great "work" of which she was extremely proud.

Mrs. Featherstone observed this comedy with furtive contempt. She knew that her husband's lapses from regular work were due to distaste for steady exertion and a passion for cards and horse-racing which were relics of more prosperous times. Consequently, she had for his "studies" an attitude of alternate sympathy and reproach, according to whether they temporarily made him or broke him.

One way and another things had now reached a crisis, and Doctor Featherstone had been experiencing a domestic bad quarter of an hour.

"If it were not for that dear old lady upstairs we should have been in a pretty mess before this, my dear," he said. "It was a fortunate day when she insisted on helping me in my researches; and a happy turn that made her cause that help to be periodic. You always get a share of the money, you know, so you have little room to talk."

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Mrs. Featherstone flushed. "It makes me feel horrible, Fred," she said. "It *is* mean of us! It would be nicer for me, you will admit, if you could make the money properly out of an increasing practice such as yours ought to be. And suppose anything happened to this paying guest of ours? If she died? In your position, which they will define, I am sure, as her doctor-in-charge, you have no right to accept such large gifts. I am afraid you could be made to disgorge."

"Don't!" Featherstone winced and flushed.

"You deserve to have the fact put brutally."

"There is no fear, as it happens. I will tell you. Do you know why I show such delicacy about taking her help?—why I say I could not cold-bloodedly take a cheque to the bank and receive her money?—why I declare that if anybody had a hint of the thing I should die of shame?"

"I have not accused you of real delicacy, have I? Why have you gone through all that performance? It has hurt me, Freddie dear, more than the taking of the money."

"I have gone through that performance, woman——"

"How dare you——"

"I have gone through that performance, *woman*," he repeated, and his face took on an ugly blotchy pallor, "because it has always ended in the poor deluded creature drawing the cheque to self, cashing it herself and bringing me the money. She respects my feelings"—a tinge of colour came back to his face—"and never a soul knows but ourselves that the money comes to me at all. Poor Mrs. Peake, she is a bit wearying."

Mrs. Featherstone, mimicking the old lady, smoothed her husband's brow with her jewelled white hand and murmured affectedly, "The dear doctor!—his poor tired brain! I know what these headaches are."

"She's as good as gold, though."

"You certainly find her so."

"And you. I won't have a word said against her," said Featherstone in a sharp outburst of loyalty; "she has been a mother to us both since she came here. *Now*, what have you to say?"

"Only that you make me a little bit sick, Freddie dear."

Featherstone smarted over this for hours. Before the day

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was out, however, he had an unexpected triumph which he felt would restore him somewhat in the esteem of his pretty, extravagant wife. The paltriness of his conduct he knew he could never justify, and he had in him manliness enough to make him shrink in the consciousness of it. But he knew that his wife would overlook much if only the family finances could be placed on a sounder basis.

The event of the day was a respectful summons to the office of Mrs. Peake's solicitors.

The firm, assembled both in an impressive manner, began by congratulating him—one kindly, fat-headed, white-whiskered old gentleman on either side holding a hand and working an arm up and down with a suggestion in the act peculiarly significant of first aid to the drowning.

"It is a bit unusual," began the senior partner pressing him gently into an easy chair, "but the fact is, it is by the wish of our client, Mrs. Peake, that we have asked you to make this call. Her emotions would not allow her to impart a certain—ah—matter to you herself, so we are desired to acquaint you with the fact that she has to-day executed a will in which she leaves you everything."

"Ab-so-lute-ly everything!" said the junior in an unctuous echo. "It is, of course, very unusual——"

"Very," said the senior, "but Mrs. Peake insists upon it, and what can we say? I mean," he added hastily, "unusual to have the one benefitted informed—particularly in such circumstances as these. You are overcome, my dear sir, and no wonder! A glass of wine, perhaps?"

"It is all right now," said Featherstone faintly, and he turned abruptly round in his chair and laid his head on his hand.

Strange to say, his first thought had been—the thought arising from his perfect knowledge of Mrs. Peake's character—"A thousand to one but the old girl, with all her emotion, will want to see me at the earliest possible moment to judge how I have taken the news!" And as he was thinking he caught sight of the dim shape of her towering bonnet bows intercepting some of the light which fell from the corridor windows on the glass panel of the door. The "old girl" was eavesdropping.

"I refuse it!" he exclaimed. "Why, great heavens, Hylton—and you know it, Wilks—if this were known I should be ruined."

"A ruin worth forty odd thousand pounds," said Hylton softly as he eyed him keenly.

"I value my reputation at a higher price than that," said Featherstone hotly. "You surely don't think I refer to my beggarly Boscall practice, do you? I am working quietly for something wider than that. My book — but, really, gentlemen, this is kind of the dear lady. She has been a mother to me."

"Well, this looks particularly like it, doesn't it?" said Mr. Hylton rubbing his hands and smiling pleasantly. "Wish somebody would be a mother to us, eh, Wilks?"

The old boys chuckled in unison and poured out for each other glasses of port.

"I can't accept it, I can't!" said Featherstone in a tone of anguish suggestive of refusing a dose of cod-liver oil. "There will be nasty talk—undue influence ——"

Mr. Wilks coughed. "I certainly suggest," he said, "that you join us in persuading our client to make her home anywhere but in your house. It would look better. The old lady has not a relation in the world and if she chooses to make you her son by adoption who is to say nay? She has all her wits about her; and as for influence—we can speak about that. We have questioned her most earnestly, and her accounts of your diffidence over accepting a sixpence more than the payments for her board—extremely moderate charges, I must say—show us that you have taken no advantage whatever of her infatu—I beg pardon, her intense regard for you—er—hum—ah—what do you say, Mr. Hylton?"

"From what I can see, you have lost money by her, doctor, up to the present."

"Don't! don't!" said Featherstone, thinking what a brick the old lady had been on this very delicate point. "You can't tell how good she has been to me or you would not say such a thing!"

"The dear, dear fellow!" The soft whisper went up to the grimy ceiling of the glass corridor, the old lady's eyes turned up raptly in the same direction, and several weak tears ran down the pretty old apple-streaked cheeks in the direction opposite, while the upstanding bonnet-bows quivered in every silken length with a most luxuriant emotion.

"Of course," said Mr. Hylton, "we are not going to shout the provisions of our client's will from the housetops, but for your sake, when it comes out afterwards, it would be better for Mrs. Peake to resume housekeeping on her own account."

"Never!" arose the whisper without. "He must drive me like a beggar from his doorstep first—and then I will not alter the terms of my will. The dear, dear, doctor!"

Dr. Featherstone had succeeded in making the best of good impressions on the lawyers before he left their office. If there was a suspicion of over-acting about him, the good old gentlemen did not see it, and sent him away with heaps of fatherly advice.

There was a scene at home with the sentimental old lady, out of which Featherstone came with a half submission to Mrs. Peake's wishes, and a character with her for disinterestedness higher than ever. He had actually persuaded her to leave a few thousand pounds to King Edward's Hospital Fund!

"You fool!" gasped his wife when she heard the news, and her joy in the coming wealth was lost in the tears she shed over the odd thousands thus wilfully thrown away.

"You do not see my great wisdom, dear," said he sweetly, "because you are a little blind."

Six months passed before his "studies" called him again to the metropolis—six months of financial worry, deepening debt, and spasmodic fits of household extravagance. Mrs. Featherstone enjoyed a round of galeties during the time, and her husband was in continual dread lest a crash should come and lower him in the eyes of Mrs. Peake, who still remained with him, in spite of gentle and even loving remonstrances.

Then, with a gift of fifty pounds from the old lady, a gift not this time shared with his wife, Dr. Featherstone went up to London for a three weeks' stay.

In three days he returned.

"Minnie," he sobbed, putting his arms round the wondering wife in the hall, "it's all over. We are ruined!"

"Come in here," she said, pulling him into the little dispensary, out of danger of being overheard. "Now what is it?"

"Good-bye to our fortune!" he said wildly. "I have seen young Peake, alive—no mistake, Mary Havers with him—alive, I say, and we are ruined!"

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Featherstone covered her face with her jewelled hands, leant against the wall and wept bitterly, and her husband watched her with reddened, blinking eyes while he beat out the devil's tattoo on the table beside him.

"When will he be here?" faltered the wife at last, wiping her eyes and trying to force a feeling of calmness.

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"I don't know."

"Didn't you speak to him?"

"I hadn't a chance. It was at Earl's Court. They were across the lake, and when I got over the bridge they were gone."

"What!" said she, "have you lost your senses? To decide on a mere glimpse like that! It was not young Peake. Why"—she laughed hysterically—"you had been drinking. Go to your room, dear, and wash those silly tearmarks off your unmanly face. The idea! Upsetting me like that. It was Mary's new lover. She has known him a long time. Flirted with him before young Peake went away, they say."

"It was George Thornton Peake, I tell you!" he said with sullen fury. "I have eyes like a falcon. It was George, thinner and with a moustache, but still—George!"

Mrs. Featherstone had certainly heard rumours that Mary Havers, the pretty, peachy-faced, brunette sweetheart George Peake had left behind him, had found another lover since she had gone from Boscall. She had been seen with him by one of the gossiping natives. Less than a week ago this had happened, though—the other particulars had merely grown on to the original piece of gossip.

Mrs. Featherstone had listened with only a languid interest, and had remembered imperfectly. Mary Havers was no favourite of hers, and she had helped to widen a little breach which had grown between the bereaved sweetheart and mother owing to the former having disparaged the doctor before his fond and foolish worshipper. When she had gone with her people from the neighbourhood she was practically forgotten by the doctor's wife.

Again Featherstone insisted on the recognition—he knew the type of face through all the changes.

"Perhaps," suggested his wife, with a sudden fear of her own, "Mary has spited you by looking up some unknown cousin, who may one day contest—stay; have some tea and try to be easy about it. I will contrive to visit Mary Havers—message of reconciliation from Mrs. Peake or something—and I'll find out all I can. Leave it to me."

Featherstone tried to feel hopeful on just that small point of possibility, but he was heavily dejected, all the same.

His wife contrived to call as suggested, but returned in a very much perplexed state of mind.

"That girl is like a black sphinx!" she said angrily, "I can make nothing of her and her maddening, stony smile. It would not do to press too much, but I feel doubtful now. There is something impending. I am getting alarmed!"

"She may well smile, and she would smile wider if she knew about that very useless document—the will."

"Why useless?"

"Because the old cat will have no use for it when her own kitten comes home. It is George right enough. In spite of the ignorance of the War Office I feel sure of it."

"You want to think the worst," said his wife. "I think it is a cousin, dear, I do, really. It may mean contesting the will, but you must be cautious and make the undue influence harder to prove by any next of kin. Hylton and Wilks believe in you?"

"Yes, for I have already borrowed a couple of hundred on the strength of the 'certainty'!"

"You villain! And not a farthing to me! How have you got rid of it?"

"Mind your own business. There are more serious things to think about now."

That was true. They were their two hearts nearly out brooding over them. Mary now began to cultivate the old lady's friendship again, and journeyed over for a brief visit three days in succession. She seemed surprised at the interest shown in her affairs, and was more sphinxlike than ever.

There was an air of thick gloom over the Featherstones, lightened only now and then by lurid flashes of forced gaiety. Poor, flighty-headed Mrs. Peake did not observe any difference in their manner towards her. Perhaps if she had noticed the gloom she would have put it down to their anxiety concerning her health. This for a time had been low, but it was remarkable that the more healthy she became the more of an invalid she believed herself to be. She grew more flighty, conceited, self-centred and fussy every day, and at times was a great trial to the "dear doctor."

"If she would only die!"

That was an unspoken thought. Featherstone had been sitting with the ladies for half an hour without uttering a word. Mrs. Featherstone, also, was more silent than usual, replying to Mrs. Peake's almost ceaseless chatter with a mere word now and then, while she stole anxious looks at her husband's dull eyes and drawn, dragged face.

"The dear boy!" said the old lady, following the younger lady's glance and observing the worried look of the doctor, "it's those nasty, difficult cases, I know it is. They are dreadfully trying, Minnie, I assure you."

She spoke with an air of imparting knowledge to the doctor's wife.

With a tender expression, but an all too fussy manner, Mrs. Peake crossed over and stroked Featherstone's forehead. "There, there!" she said.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Peake, your touch is so soothing," said he in a half whisper; but the look in his melancholy eyes as he turned them furtively and exchanged glances with his wife was full of anger and disgust, and the thought in his wife's mind was that Mrs. Peake looked like a silly hen fussing over a sick lizard.

"I have a lot of difficult cases," admitted Featherstone, "they take much thought; but I ought not to bring my worries into the drawing-room."

"Can I help you?"

"No," he said aloud—"at least, not *yet*." He remembered that she had offered to study up so as to one day help him, and that he had given her a lot of obsolete medical works to fool herself with against the day when he should take up that West End London practice.

"Ah," said Mrs. Peake solemnly, touching her own forehead as if posing for a country photographer, "that reminds me. I meant to give an hour to my books this afternoon—half an hour's reading and half an hour's meditation. Forgive me, Frederick, I know I am too ignorant at present! I am—I will not be contradicted—I am far too ignorant! But wait awhile. Be patient with me, and one day I will astonish you!" The stiff black silk dress swished through the *portière* and she was gone.

"If she could only die!"

The words were not yet spoken, but as the lean-faced little man raised his melancholy eyes to his wife's, some mysterious intercommunication between the two brooding brains awakened the same thought in her head. But Mrs. Featherstone uttered aloud the words which he only formed in his inner soul.

"Minnie!" he said in horrified reproach, but she gave him a glance of defiant recklessness, knowing that he echoed the wish.

His eyes lowered.

"With her money," she said, "you could lift me from Hell to Heaven."

His chin fell lower on his breast.

"She has already given it," pursued the woman, "and it is in a sense ours. It is unfair for it to be taken from us again!"

It must have occurred to her that young Peake, if he truly

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lived, had some rights in the matter. Her husband must have felt so too. Yet they shared the feeling expressed in her words. Even a thief who picks up a fat purse, but has it reclaimed before he can move off with it, has a sense of being defrauded.

Featherstone now spoke openly.

"If she had only died first! In a couple of years or so it would most likely happen in the ordinary way. She is not strong. Without my constant care—you know how I have done my duty, Minnie?—she would not have lasted eighteen months altogether. I have really doubled the last years of her life."

"It is cruel!" she wept. "Why should this fellow turn up now to rob us?"

"You mean," said he desperately, "why has Mrs. Peake lived so long?"

"Only two years to live," she whispered, searching his troubled face with eager eyes—"two years, anyhow. What does it matter? Could you—you are accustomed, every doctor is, to give things to ease, even if it hastens certain death. You know what I mean," she said hurriedly, her eyes groping after a look from his averted face. "It is considered merciful to hasten it in some cases. Many of our ideas about these things are mere conventions—to hasten by minutes is right—by months wrong. I—I should not love you less, Frederick"—she nestled to his shoulder, leaning forward—"it would not make me shrink from you—I swear it solemnly!"

He shrank from her, and shuddered from head to foot.

"Forget what I said," she added quickly, "I am half mad!"

"Never *think* such a thing again," he whispered, kissing her, and the next moment he had left her.

He was passing Mrs. Peake's sitting-room and was arrested by the sound of the old lady's shaky, high-pitched voice. The door was ajar, and he stood at the turn of a corner beyond to listen. Mrs. Peake was boasting to a caller, another elderly lady. Sad to say, she was, in her silly vanity, telling little untruths in an unblushing manner.

"I am quite a doctor myself, Julia, I am really. Perhaps it would be more correct for me to say doctor's assistant. The dear doctor always—or rather, often—asks my opinion in difficult cases. And, do you know, I repeatedly assist him in the dispensary."

"How delightful!" said the other old lady.

A grim smile stole on the face of Featherstone. There was some foundation for the latter boast. To flatter her vanity, the doctor, when, as now and then he did, he made up a bottle of medicine for a patient, would let her imagine she was helping him! It amused him to see her excitement and childish delight when he would say—"Now, dear Mrs. Peake, be very careful, I implore you—fourth bottle on the right—no, not that shelf, but the one above, and fourth from the other side, not that. Bravo! Thank you. I can use it without looking at the label, though a mistake might easily kill one of my poor patients."

Then she would say, "No, no, doctor! Frederick, you must not trust to me too much. Look at the label, I insist!" And he, pointing to the name on the bottle which had taken three shots to find, would say, "You see, I can trust you!"

A beautiful superstructure upreared itself on this small foundation. It was capped, domed, spired, or cupolad with the following boast:

"I am now beginning to make up prescriptions alone!"

This was startling, and a little annoying. It might be damaging. But the listener reflected that Miss Fryar doubtless did not believe a word she was told.

"'*Sul. Quin.*,'" said Mrs. Peake affectedly, "I read that, say, and I know at once, of course, that it means *Sulphate of Quinine*."

"How clever of you. I should never remember!"

"Yes; then, suppose it is '*Io. pot.*'—that's *tincture of iodine*, Julia."

"I should have thought," said the other old lady meekly, "that *Io. pot.*' meant *Iodide*—or *dine*, or something—of *potash*."

"Oh, dear no," said Mrs. Peake irritably, "you are quite mistaken. That has another little mark over it—and then it means *potassium*. 'S-i-u-m,' dear, not 'h.' You see the difference, don't you?"

It cannot be denied that Julia's tone in reply bespoke some measure of doubt, and Mrs. Peake's further remarks sounded flurried.

Featherstone tip-toed away.

Later on Mrs. Peake sought him out in the surgery.

"Will you—oh, will you—do me a great *great* favour?"

"Anything you like to mention," he said recklessly.

"I have been very wicked," she said, wiping a tear from either eye; "I have been boasting and going a little—very little beyond the truth."

"Great Scott!" he thought, "does she think I'm going to be a father to her?"

Her next words showed that this was a very odd penitent. She proposed to cover up the one little sin with another piece of deceit broader and more substantial.

"Show me how to make up a draught for one of my headaches, and let me make it up myself afterwards in the dispensary—without you. Julia is coming to see me again to-morrow afternoon, and she does so greatly admire the outlook from the little dispensary on to the garden. I proposed giving her a cup of tea there if—if—I said to her if I should happen to be in charge during that hour, as I expected to be."

Featherstone looked his surprise.

"Do help me in this," she went on pleadingly. "Julia, Miss Fryar, you know, doubts my having assisted you to dispense. I want to convince and astonish her as well as annoy the spiteful, unbelieving—excuse me, doctor, but I saw her smile in a furtive, unpleasant way, and I was so irritated. Do help me, Freddie! It is a very harmless little deception. You could mark the bottles with numbers '1,' '2,' '3,' and so on, so that I need make no mistake. And more than that, you could tell me something about the more dangerous things, so that I could lift a bottle or two down and talk of their effects so as to make her scream—at least, make her flesh creep a little."

"It cannot be thought of," said Featherstone, with professional sternness. He was so truly in earnest—so annoyed at this injurious sort of foolishness—that Mrs. Peake was frightened and began to weep.

A change came over Featherstone's face as he looked contemptuously down on her. Certain words, his own thoughts a while ago, his wife's outspoken utterance, throbbed in his brain—in time to the rhythmic tortures of a swinging headache.

"If she could but die! If she could but die!"

And here was chance making to his hand!

The conclusion of this story appears in next Tuesday's issue.

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THE WHITE WITCH OF HENLEY.

An Up-River Love Story.

"ANOTHER quarter of a mile, Sid, and I'll show you just the loveliest thing to be seen on all the river, from Lechlade to Sunbury!"

"What! at this time of night?" (it was striking ten by Shiplake Church clock) derisively replied Sidney Lane over his shoulder, to his companion.

"Ah! there's the beauty of it!" said the latter, triumphantly, "for it's only when the stars are out, that the Queen of the Night is to be seen in all her glory!—as she really is."

Oh!—then it's a woman?"

"A woman!—why, of course!—what else would so move me to enthusiastic praise?" said Ray Maskell, with the suspicion of a sneer in his tone.

"Faith!—I don't know!" said "stroke" drily, "except it were a new edition of the old creation."

The pair-oar was passing Shiplake as Lane uttered this "cut" at his friend's well-known susceptibility of temperament.

Henley, with its snugly anchored house-boats, came dimly into view round the bend, there being just light enough to see the after-dinner crews amusing themselves on deck, while through Nature's silence sounded the tinkle of mandoline or guitar, the merry ripple of girlish voices, and the untranslateable joyous hum which hangs like a summer cloud over the hereabout boat world at this hour.

"There, Sid!—what do you think of that?" whispered Maskell, as their craft came abreast of an unusually large house-boat, moored, alone, under a canopy of leafy greenness. Sidney Lane held his breath, as he ceased rowing, and saw a vision!

Unmistakeably it was a woman—young—fair, and divinely tall—whose almost unearthly pallor gave point to the name by which she was known among the pleasure-loving boating crowd, "the White Witch of Henley."

She had all the appearance of a statue carved in white marble. Everything about her dress—features—hair—gleamed ghost-like, in the misty half shadows of the summer night.

Not a single light showed on the house-boat, so that this figure—weird in its mysterious whiteness against the background of dark trees—standing, statuesquely still, by the outer rail of the upper deck, startled Lane by reason of its utter unlikeness to anything that he had ever seen.

Old Colonel Sir Harry Vinden, K.C.S.I., was the one up-river mystery, people had as yet failed to solve. He—or rather they never sought the society of those who literally burned to penetrate their secret.

Ray Maskell's solution of the problem seemed to be the most popular, as it was certainly, all things considered, the most feasible.

He imparted it to Sidney Lane as they drifted past the silent, dark water-dwelling.

"Who is she?" he said, in answer to a whispered query of his companion's. "Why—the old Colonel's wife! May and December, you know."

"Unless you know anything definite on that head," replied Lane. "I should say that you are wrong."

"I don't think so," said Ray Maskell, testily, "whenever they indulge in an excursion inland (which isn't often) Esmé Vinden invariably takes the old gentleman's arm; while his attitude toward her has the true matrimonial hall-mark."

"That is no proof!" answered the other. "For my own part, I should be inclined to say that she is the old man's daughter."

"You're wrong, old chap! you're wrong! and this, in spite of the fact that the majority of the men are crazy about her."

"And you—are you, too, one of the victims?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"I am sure I don't know; only that falling in love with married ladies is just a wee bit—well—bad form, isn't it?"

Sidney Lane, as he bent to his oar again, could not see the evil expression in the other's eyes, so that his thoughts, so strangely stirred by the glimpse he had caught of Esmé Vinden's beautiful, yet death-like face, were undisturbed; while his determination to know more of its fair owner, intensified with every dip of his blade in the rippleless water.

As for Ray Maskell, the implied imputation of bad "form," had viciously sealed his lips.

It was practically two dumb men, therefore, who headed the pair-oar for the boat-house on the left shore.

Lane, who had been staying at Penton Hook, had left there during the afternoon in his friend's boat, for the Henley Regatta week. There was not much in common between the two; Sidney's openness of disposition, and sunny, good-humoured nature, appealing but little to the *blasé* man of the world.

Still, it is just possible that the former would have gone to his rooms at the "Red Lion" and Maskell to his diggings without, in the case of either of them, anything other than a mere hand-cloud, which the next morning would assuredly dissipate—but for a chance remark of Lane's at parting.

"Do you know the Colonel, and—and Lady Vinden?" he asked.

"Well—no!—I don't," was the evidently reluctant reply.

"But you know about them?" persisted Lane.

"I know, as nearly everybody else knows, that both Sir Harry and—and the lady are absolutely social hermits—that he is quite seventy years of age, while she—Esmé Vinden—wife, or what you will, is barely out of her teens, and that to penetrate the mystery surrounding them, nine men—and for that matter, nine women out of ten, would give more than they could probably afford to lose. But why are you so eager for information with regard to them?"

"Oh, I have a fancy for mysteries—especially one such as this, where the central figure is so weirdly, yet so magnetically fair."

"My dear fellow!—I wouldn't follow up this particular history, if I were you—there's nothing in it—nothing!"

"Perhaps not!—but my curiosity is piqued, and since you it was that raised it, you certainly ought not to be the first to discourage any desire on my part for satisfaction."

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"Well—do as you please!" retorted Maskell, with an unpleasant laugh, "but take my advice, and bar the Romeo business—and midnight out-pourings of the soul; for people say—and—rumour does not always lie—that the old knight carries his antipathy to all intruders, to the extent of a belief in firearms as an effectual, if not exactly legal preventive. Good-night!"

* * * * *

In the sitting-room of the *Iris* house-boat, an hour or more after the pair-oar had passed it on the way from Penton Hook, a lady and gentleman sat at a well-appointed supper-table. Although the cabin was well lighted by hanging and bracket crystal lamps, not a ray of light escaped to the outer world, so effectually screened were the windows by means of thick curtains—ventilation, and a free air current obtained through an automatic overhead "punkah."

Erect, alert, and well-preserved to "dandy" point, Sir Harry Vinden looked to have no nonsense about him—was indeed the *beau ideal* of an old soldier.

His companion, a beautiful girl of eighteen or thereabouts, was remarkable, with regard to her features, for an extraordinary lack of colour. This was accentuated by her style of dress which made in loose, yet clinging robe fashion, was of some soft, dead white material.

The first thought of a stranger would, not unnaturally be—"ill-health."

But Esmé Vinden's ringing laugh—her smile—her infectious flow of joyous, almost child-like spirits, gave the lie to this, and proclaimed her to be a splendid example of Nature's handiwork.

"Esmé!" said Sir Harry, as he drew a wine decanter towards him, "it seems that this desire of mine for perfect peace, and rest, after the heat and turmoil of Indian military life, is going to land you and me—you especially—in a very awkward position."

"How, dad?"

"Why, I heard indirectly to-day, that folks take us, you and I, that is, for husband and wife!"

"Well, I always told you, dad, that to isolate yourself in the very heart of a social colony, such as this is, was a mistake, and that it would most surely have unpleasant, or at least, undesirable results."

"But why should the fact of other people's being fools, prevent me from doing as I like?"

"That's all very well in India, dad; but you see it will not work here."

"No, I see it won't. But my dear, what shall we do? Break out in the opposite direction, and invite all Henley and his wife to feast and frolic?"

"No!—I don't think we will do that, for it would entail the presence of a gentleman whom I especially dislike, although we are personally unacquainted."

"That's odd!—do you know his name?"

"Yes. Prynne discovered it, when she went into Oxford for me yesterday."

"And it is——?"

"Maskell; Ray Maskell. He is most rude."

"In what way?"

"Why, he lets his boat drift past here if he sees me on deck, or at a window, and stares in the most objectionable manner."

"Does he?—then I shall probably have something serious to say to Mr. Ray Maskell, unless he ceases annoying you in this fashion."

"You know how I like to be on deck in the late evening-time?—he has, I suppose, found out this little fad of mine, and for the past three or four evenings, has behaved abominably."

"Has he!—well, it is not far off mid-night now, and the air is lovely. I'll go up with you for a bit, and wait developments. Has this—this gentleman honoured you as yet this evening with his attentions?"

"Not exactly. A couple of hours ago, he passed, with another man, in a pair-oar, and for decency's sake, I suppose, behaved himself."

"Then we may expect another, if a later visit. Brookes! some cushions for my folding chair on deck!"

When the handy man-servant had, under Esmé's directions, placed his master comfortably, the girl leant upon the outer rail, relapsed into silence, and fixed her eyes up-river.

Sidney Lane was one of the best-hearted fellows breathing; one, too, who never "nursed" a wrong done to himself. So it was, therefore, that when, a few paces from the door of the "Red Lion," he overtook his late boat-companion, he persuaded him in to sup with him.

"No!—I won't take any denial! We'll just have a social snack and a pipe, before I turn you out, and turn in."

Ray Maskell would far rather have gone to his own rooms, and talked with himself; but the other was so genially insistent, that he saw no other way out of it, save by a rude refusal.

In free and easy fashion, in their flannels, they discussed their meal, and sat by the open window in Lane's sitting-room, to finish their modest bottle of claret.

"I can't get that girl out of my head," said Lane, after a five minutes awkward silence. "Do you mean to say that nobody knows anything about her?"

"Nobody, and—nothing. Old Sir Harry has been in India, I believe all his military life, and beyond a week in London after his arrival from Calcutta (where, by the way, he saw nobody) this is his first appearance upon the scene."

"I've got an idea that my old governor knew a Vinden in India, but I've been so long in England that I've forgotten."

"Even if it was the same, you would not know the lady, for, as I've said, she is quite young, and could only have married the old chap within the last couple of years, at the very least."

"Ah!—I still hold you to be in error, old man!" said Lane, deliberately—"that girl is no more a wife, than I am a benedict."

"Well, after all, it doesn't matter so very much—she is nothing to you—or—to me."

"No, of course not, how could she be? I don't know her—but there's no saying, I may—I may."

This harping on the one string was evidently having an irritating effect on Ray Maskell, and making him to materialise ideas which, otherwise, he would have let sleep.

"And so may others!—so may I, perhaps!" he blurted out aggressively. "Meanwhile"—lifting his glass above his head—"here's to the lovely mystery of the Upper Thames!—to the "White Witch of Henley'!"

Sidney Lane, who, till the last half dozen words were spoken, was prepared to do honour to the toast, brought his glass down upon the table with such force, that the stem was splintered.

"That," he said hotly, "is surely an insult to the lady. Such a name cannot be applied without offence intended and implied."

"Oh!—as to offence—I meant none!" said Maskell. "I merely—well—gave utterance to a jest."

"Which, on second thoughts, you must agree was ill-timed, if nothing else."

"If you like to have it so—although every man is entitled to his own opinion, isn't he?"

"I suppose so—within limits."

"Come!—don't let us quarrel, Lane, and spoil the good time we hope to have——"

"Quarrel—not I! There's my hand upon it! But I do not feel in the least like going to bed!—I am half inclined to take a midnight spin for an hour—I think I know where my man has stowed my boat."

"Then you're more mad than I gave you credit for being. Good-night!"

* * * * *

It must have been nearly twelve o'clock, when Esmé Vinden suddenly startled her father out of a nap.

"Dad!" she cried. "Dad!—wake up!—there are two single sculls coming down!"

"Hoh—hoh!—this is getting interesting!" said Sir

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Harry, sitting up, and looking in the direction his daughter was pointing.

"See!—the first one is not Mr. Maskell!—I am *sure* it is not! The second one keeps a good distance behind—and in the shadow of the bank. I don't think the first one sees him."

"Number two must be watching number one, then, I should say," remarked the old gentleman.

"Now number one puts on a spurt!" cried Esme, excitedly, "and the other is pulling out into mid-stream!"

By this time, the foremost boat was within snap-shot distance of the *Iris*.

The sculler, who was now clearly conscious of his pursuer's presence, showed no sign of slackening speed, and, though casting an earnest look at the house-boat, would, no doubt, have kept on his course.

But the man in the craft behind had soon, by dint of strenuous exertions, brought the bow of his boat right up till it touched the stern-post of the one in front.

His object was to get the inner or left bank side. This, number one did his utmost to prevent, shouting out to the other to keep clear.

"You rascal!" roared Sir Harry from the deck of the *Iris*—"I'll find out who you are, and have you posted everywhere!"

Then, a shriek from Esme—the overturning of the second boat, and the disappearance of its owner in the water.

"Hi!—Brookes!—scull out the dinghy!—the fellow mustn't drown! Why, the chap he tried to run down has gone in after him!—Good boy!—good boy! He's got him into his own boat! He's sculling to us! Here!—Esmé—go down, and see about some hot flannels, and things!"

In less than ten minutes, Ray Maskell was lying, breathing stertorously, on the couch in the sitting-room of the *Iris*.

It must be confessed that Esmé, womanly and tender though she was to her finger-tips, gave the most of her attention to Sidney Lane's watery condition.

Here was a man, she said to herself, who actually risked his own life to save that of the coward who had done his best to drown him.

"Yes, sir," said Sir Harry, emphatically, and when Lane had duly introduced himself, "I'm proud to know you! and if you were only the same flesh and blood as my old comrade Archie Lane, commanding in Poonah ten years ago, why! I'd be the happiest man in all England."

"Do you mean General Lane, now commanding in Ceylon?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Well, I am his son, if——"

"His son!—Archie's son!—God bless you, my boy!—you've just done what your father would have done!—Esmé!"

But Esmé had gone up on deck again.

"Go up and bring her down, Sidney—why, of course. I remember you know, as a baby—baby Sid, your father used to call you!—go up and bring my Esmé down!"

But it was a longer operation than the patience of the old soldier could stand, so stumping up the companion, he broke in upon their *tête-à-tête*.

He found them—both leaning upon the rail; Sidney pouring into her ear, Othello-wise, some wonderful story, maybe, of adventure by flood or field.

And this was by no means the end of it, for, the spell being once broken, Sidney Lane took good care that, so far, at least, as he was concerned, it should never again haunt the *Iris* or its mistress.

Ray Maskell came to himself before daylight, and getting into his recovered and "righted" boat, pulled away, and was seen no more.

* * * * *

Lane—Vinden.—On September the 5th, at St. George's, Hanover Square, Esmé, only daughter of Colonel Sir Harry Vinden, K.C.S.I., to Sidney, only son and heir of General Sir Archibald Lane, K.C.B., D.S.O.; commanding in Ceylon.

It is *not* curious, that from the night Ray Maskell was saved from drowning by Sidney Lane, the "White Witch" disappeared from Henley, and, to the astonishment of the wiseacres, has never been seen there since.

Ralph Enderby.

Hugging.

A North country paper, to encourage hugging in the locality in which it is published, says: "A Liverpool man, while hugging his girl one evening, received a telegram stating that he had fallen heir to a fortune."

The paper is right in its efforts to stimulate a healthy sentiment in favour of hugging, but it does wrong to hold out such inducements, as it will not be one time in ten thousand that a man, while hugging a girl, will receive such a dispatch.

He will oftener receive a dispatch bound in leather, from the girl's father, which will inform him that he has fallen over a doorstep, and is heir to a lame back.

There should be no money consideration in a case of hugging, and no hope of falling heir to anything. It is fortune enough for a man to have a girl to hug.

Hugging can never become what it should be, our great national recreation and enjoyment, our picnic, as it were, until all thought of outside matter is eliminated from it, and the hugging is simply done, for instance, because there is a good opportunity and no one to say nay.

The difference in hugging can readily be seen by those who have done a little of it themselves, if they go to a theatre and watch the actors and actresses.

It is not once in a hundred times that hugging on the stage is done because both parties like it, but it is always done for money, at so much a week, and wardrobe furnished.

The actor puts his arm round the actress as though he were holding up a sign, and the actress smiles a two-for-a-penny smile and looks as though she was taking pills.

We have often seen a couple of lovers in the audience, who probably know scientific hugging when they see it, look at this stage hugging and curl up their lips with scorn, and look at each other as much as to say:—

"If we were on the stage playing that scene we would give the audience something for their money."

Occasionally a couple of stage lovers unbend themselves, and get in a hug or two that breaks a string; but in those cases one or the other blushes and looks round at the wings to see whether the actor's wife or the actress' husband is looking.

There has got to be a certain amount of fellow-feeling between the hugger and the huggee, or it is a mere matter of form and not worth the price of admission.

Sometimes we think we would like to go on the stage and give some of those actors a few points that would be of great benefit to them in their business; but if we should offer to do so they would probably impute sinister motives to us, and hit us.

It is not that we would care for the hugging, but the advancement of art.

There are some actresses that the best hugger in the world could not hug and feel that he had got the worth of his money, and there are others when an actor would be justified in playing without a salary and boarding himself, just for one hug per evening, and Wednesday and Saturday *matinees*.

D. Huggins.

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A TERRIBLE ERROR.

Which, after Nearly Ruining Three Lives, was Happily Rectified.

"THANK Heaven, that burden has rolled off my shoulders at last!" exclaimed Matthew Wadleigh, as he counted out and rolled together £30 in Bank of England notes. "That," he continued, as he placed an elastic band round the roll, and put it in his breast pocket, "pays the last penny of the mortgage on the little home, and it shall be a birthday surprise for the wife. Dear little Nina," he thought, "how hard she has tried to help me, and now, please God, we can take things a little easier for the rest of our lives," and with a lighter heart than he had possessed for the past five years, he locked his desk, took down his hat, gave it a thoughtful brush, and flecking some dust from his coat, left the office.

So happy was he that the dear little home was at last to be all his own, freed from all incumbrances, that he could not refrain from whistling a merry air as he waited for his 'bus, and all the way home his mind was busy with what Nina would say, and how her face would light up with pleasure when he should show her the money, and tell her that the only cloud which had in any way darkened their five years of wedded life, would at last be lifted, and that henceforth nothing but the bluest and brightest of skies would shine upon her; for Matthew Wadleigh was still very much in love with his wife, in spite of those five years.

"I think I'll wait until to-morrow before I tell her, and then Metcalf will be gone and we shall be by ourselves once more," he said to himself as he ran up the steps of his home.

Metcalf was a friend of his boyhood days, of his youth, and of his manhood; a most eccentric fellow, of a sombre, taciturn disposition, and few liked him, because few knew him well enough to know the finer qualities of the man. There was something repellant in his manner, a something which seemed to surround him in mystery, which none dared for an instant to try to penetrate. Yet, for all this, he and Wadleigh had been drawn together most strangely when they were boys, and as they grew to manhood and Wadleigh never questioned him regarding himself or his family, the friendship had continued, and after Wadleigh had married and had a home of his own, both he and his wife had always made Metcalf most welcome, whenever business or inclination called him in that direction.

Now Metcalf was going away for an indefinite period, and had been making his farewell visit. To-morrow he was to leave, and Wadleigh was not a bit sorry, for the cosy, pleasant evenings that Nina and he spent together could once more be resumed. All this was passing through his mind as he entered the hall, and there he saw a man's hat and overcoat on the rack. For an instant he wondered to whom it could belong, and then saw it was Metcalf's. "Wonder what brought him home so early," he muttered, and then remembering he was to leave early the next morning, continued: "I suppose he came home to pack up." He was about to pass up the stairs in search of Nina, who evidently had not heard him enter, when his attention was arrested by the sound of voices which reached him from the drawing-room. Pausing a moment until he made sure it was his wife's voice he heard, he crossed the hall to the drawing-room door, which was slightly ajar, but across which a curtain was drawn, hiding the inmates from view. His wife was speaking and with no intention of listening, the words he heard held him spellbound. "I never dreamt of this, Herbert!" he heard her say, and then he only caught a word or two—"you can never know—happiness—two people"—— Here Metcalf's voice broke in—"could only persuade you—never regret—life-long—to repay——"

Wadleigh's brain whirled, and for an instant he was powerless to move. What could it mean? He could not even think; but one thought was in his mind, could it be?—here he grasped the back of a chair for support, while an iron ball of a ton's weight seemed to drop into his heart.

A movement behind the curtains, the voices coming nearer, the words: "God bless you, little woman, for the comfort your assurance gives me," brought him to himself. With long strides he noiselessly crossed the hall entered his own "den," and locked the door.

He sank into a chair, and sat there like one in a dream, and as one in a dream hears voices, so the words he had heard sung themselves over and over in his brain.

At length his reason came to his rescue, and, springing to his feet, he shook himself and muttered: "What a fool I am making of myself! What if I can't explain it—Metcalf, my old friend, the last man in the world for me to mistrust, and the last man on earth to make love to anyone! And Nina, my own little Nina, of whom I have never had a suspicion! Yes, I must be a fool!"

He determined to put the whole thing away from him; he would not even ask her about it; he knew she would tell him when she had an opportunity, after Metcalf had gone; and then as he heard her coming towards his room, he rose and opened the door for her.

"Why, Matt," she exclaimed, putting up her lips for his usual kiss, "I didn't hear you when you came; why didn't you call me, dear?" As much as he determined to forget the incident which had so unnerved him, he could not help noticing the flush upon her cheeks, and a little nervousness in her manner. He drew her into the room, and putting his arm around her, lifted her face to his as he answered her, "Yes, dear, I came home a little early, as this is to be Metcalf's last evening with us," and then as he looked long and earnestly into the blue eyes, he asked: "Tell me, darling, will you be sorry when Metcalf is gone?"

She looked at him in surprise for an instant, and then laughingly said: "What a queer question for you to ask me, Matt! I am indeed sorry for the poor fellow, he seems so alone in the world, and always so sad. I am sure he must have had some great trouble in his life, and if he can find any comfort with us, I am always glad to have him come; but you have heard of people who make you twice glad, haven't you? Well, he is one of that kind. I am always glan when he comes, and glad when he goes, for, Matt, dear, you know we can always have much nicer times when we are all by ourselves!" and she nestled up to him in such a purring little confiding way that, as he stroked the shining

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brown head, he despised himself for ever having had a thought of ill regarding her.

In spite of himself, he watched Metcalf a little closely during the evening, and knew that it was not his imagination that Metcalf's unusual cheerfulness was forced, and that at times his mind seemed ill at ease and far away. Long after Nina had retired for the night, the two men sat together over their cigars, and more than once Wadleigh caught his friend looking at him with a most peculiar expression. At length he drew a long sigh, and said: "Well, old boy, we have been friends a long time, and you have always been good to me, have always trusted me, and I want to say to-night that you little know the good you have done me—but—I feel that this is the end"—speaking slowly, and then he continued, his voice filled with emotion: "God only knows how and when we shall meet again—if ever—but I want you to always think as kindly of me as you can, for you who have everything that makes life dear to a man, can never know the desolation of my heart and life!"

While he had been speaking, Wadleigh's face had been growing paler and paler, his lips were dry and colourless, and now he sprang to his feet, his breath coming thick and fast, and exclaimed: "For Heaven's sake, Metcalf, do you know what you are saying? In Heaven's name, what do you mean?"

Metcalf was a little surprised at the undue excitement manifested by his friend, but looking at him intently, while he gently blew the smoke from his mouth, he answered: "Some time you will know, old chum; perhaps sooner than you think. Many a time since I have been here, I have been tempted to open my heart to you—but no, the time will come when you will understand all. Let the mystery, which you have never sought to penetrate, remain. Why, Matt, old boy, don't look like that; here, drink this," and he poured him a glass of wine, "and then we'll change the subject." Wadleigh's brain had grown more and more confused as Metcalf's strange words came to him, and he could only formulate one idea, until at last he found himself trembling in every limb. Metcalf's reference to his condition, and the wine which he eagerly swallowed, brought him to himself, and calmed his nerves somewhat.

He forced a harsh and cheerless laugh as he said: "Your words were enough to give anyone the horrors! What are you going to do, commit murder or suicide? Perhaps it might save trouble all round if you did open your heart to me, and perhaps I could help you!" But, no; Metcalf, seeing in what state Wadleigh's nerves were, led him away from the subject, to talk of other things.

At last Wadleigh was left alone, and then all the suspicions and fears which had so harassed and unnerved him since his return from the office came back to him with renewed force. Again he went over the words he had heard fall from his wife's lips; again the thought of the something odd in the manner of both during the evening, a strained effort it had seemed to him, to act natural, and then the unfathomable mystery of Metcalf's words!—was there a connection in it all—why was he left so alone in the dark, if they did not intend to—! "O, pshaw," he finally exclaimed, "it can't, it can't be that; beside, a man doesn't generally come to a man and tell him so, if he contemplates—robbing him! and that makes me think," he continued, and pushing back his chair, he took the roll of bank notes from his pocket, that he had placed there with such gladness of heart, and crossing the room to a little desk, placed the money in a secret drawer and locked it, thoughtlessly leaving the key in the lock.

The sight of the money, and the remembrance of its mission, served in a measure to divert his mind from the problem he had been trying to solve, and resolving to ask Nina what it all meant, the next day, he turned out the gas and sought his own room.

* * * * *

The next morning it seemed ages to Nina before Metcalf and her husband finally took their departure. As Wadleigh left the house, he turned back to give Nina another kiss, remarking as he did so: "I shall be home earlier to-night, and I have a little surprise for you; be careful of yourself, and now good-bye"; but the next instant, as he turned to join his friend, he saw a glance of understanding pass between the two as Metcalf raised his hat to her.

An hour or so later Nina came down stairs dressed in outdoor things, a small bag in her hand. She called to the servant and told her she need not prepare lunch for her, as she could not tell at what hour she would be home. As she passed the door of the "den," she glanced round the room, and her eye fell upon the keys still hanging in the private drawer where her husband had left them the night before. Of course her woman's curiosity prompted her to unlock and look into the drawer, before she put the keys away for safer keeping, and she gave a cry of delight when she spied the roll of notes. "So this is the surprise he had in store for me," she said to herself as she took the elastic band from the roll and counted the money. "Perhaps he will be the one to be surprised, after all," she continued, as she lovingly fingered the bills, and then her better self whispered to her and told her to place the money where she had found it—but no, she had hesitated too long, the temptation was too great, and taking the roll again from the drawer, locked it, put the keys where they were kept, and left the house.

If she could only have known the bitter misery which was to overwhelm three lives on account of her silence in regard to the errand that sent her forth from her home that morning she would have hesitated long before she had yielded to Metcalf's persuasions.

That was an awful day for Wadleigh. After seeing the train depart which bore Metcalf away, and feeling at the time as though he never wanted to see him again, he turned his steps towards the office. It was in vain he strove to fix his mind on the duties of the day; between him and the piles of papers on his desk floated the fair face of his wife, and when he tried to read the morning's mail, the words all blurred before his eyes, and then formed themselves into the snatches of words Metcalf had uttered. Every time the telephone bell rang, every time a rap sounded on the office door, the perspiration stood upon his forehead in great drops. He was over-shadowed during all the long, troubled day with a foreboding of coming ill, of some calamity which he was sure was to overtake him before many hours. Time and time again he found himself wondering if Nina was all safe at home, and more than once was on the point of sending a messenger to the house, to find that all was well, and then thinking better of it, would try to assure himself that it would be utter nonsense, and that it would only startle Nina. And so the weary hours dragged themselves away, and with the most hysterical haste he prepared to leave the office. It seemed an interminable length of time before the 'bus came along, and when it did come it crawled along so slowly that he jumped out and hailed a cab. In a few minutes his home was reached, but to his dismay it was in darkness. This need have given him no alarm, but the feeling of some horror about to fall upon him, and which had hung over him all day, so increased in intensity that it

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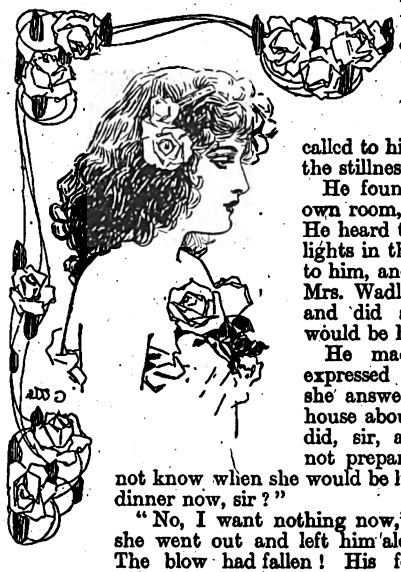

was with the trembling limbs of an old man he ascended the steps. He entered the hall—darkness and silence—no cheery voice called to him, no sound broke the stillness.

He found the way to his own room, and rang the bell. He heard the servant light the lights in the hall, as she came to him, and then, "When did Mrs. Wadleigh go out, Kate, and did she say when she would be home?"

He made no movement, expressed no surprise when she answered: "She left the house about an hour after you did, sir, and told me I need not prepare lunch as she did not know when she would be home. Shall I serve dinner now, sir?"

"No, I want nothing now," he answered, and she went out and left him alone with his misery. The blow had fallen! His fears were realised, his impressions had been correct; Nina was as false-hearted as every other woman that ever lived—they were all alike, not one could be trusted—and Metcalf—his friend—the man who had shared the comforts of his home, had sat at his table and eaten his bread! "O, fool, fool, fool!" he exclaimed, why didn't I understand and kill him before he ever left the house?—and he had just the same as told him—told him what—that he was about to rob him of his all. Was that what he had meant by his mysterious words of the night before?—and he wanted Wadleigh to always think kindly of him! What a smooth villain he was, to be sure, to make such a fool of him! But Nina, he might have saved her—but no, if she preferred such a contemptible thing as Metcalf to himself, why, what could he have done?—but Metcalf? Yes, he understood it all now, and even as Metcalf had said, sooner than he expected. O, if he had only killed the man—but there was yet time. Oh, yes, he would surely kill him sometime. Then he glanced round the room with the eyes of a raving maniac, to find the little note he felt sure Nina had left for him; it would be pinned to a pin-cushion, or perhaps in a corner of the mirror; that was what they always did, and it would read something like this: "I hope you will forgive us, but I have learned to love him better than I do you. I know you will soon forget me, and try to be happy without me." And then he gave forth a laugh that was horrible to hear.

How still the house was, as though death was there.

Hark! a carriage was driving slowly towards the house—perhaps there had been an accident and they were bringing Nina home dead to him. Would to God they were—she would still be his! But no, the carriage had passed the house. As his eyes turned from the window they lingered a moment on the desk. Hardly knowing what he was doing, he rose and tottered to it, and after a moment's feeble work, he unlocked and drew out the private drawer—it was empty, the bank notes were gone! With one long, bitter wail of "Nina, oh, God, a thief beside!" he threw up his hands and fell heavily to the floor.

How long he lay there he never knew, but when at last he opened his eyes, the first faint streaks of a dull, grey morning were creeping in through the windows.

It was with great difficulty that he raised himself and crossed the room. As he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, he gave a startled cry, for the face he saw reflected there, was drawn and shrivelled like that of an old man, and his hair was white as snow!

What did it matter, he said to himself; it was better so. The old life, the old self, was dead, dead, dead, and now the only object in life was to seek out and to slay so foul a thing as Metcalf, and then—oblivion forever.

* * * * *

A year had passed. One evening a stranger entered a hotel in the North of England. He asked for a room, and after signing the register, strolled into the smoking-room, took up a newspaper, and began to read. Soon his attention was called to two men, engaged in earnest conversation, seated not far from him. The one facing him was short and thick-set, while the one whose back was turned was tall and slight of build, had bent shoulders, and a head of snow-white hair.

"That's queer," the stranger said to himself, as their voices became louder, "I would have taken my oath that was Matt Wadleigh's voice, and it looks like his form, only so much older—it can't be him with that white hair!" And he turned to his paper again. But the next instant he heard the stout man exclaim: "I'll tell you what it is Wadleigh——" The stranger waited to hear no more, but hurriedly rose from his seat, and crossing the room laid his hand on the shoulder of the man he had heard called Wadleigh, and said: "Can this be you, indeed, old friend—why—Matt—in Heaven's name, what does this mean?"

At the touch and the first words uttered by Metcalf, for it was him, Wadleigh had sprung to his feet, his face like that of one dead—a cold, cruel glitter in his eyes; his breath was drawn in hard, dry gasps, and his lips and hands twitched convulsively. He shuddered again and again as he shook off the hand upon his shoulder. At last he hissed between his tightly-closed teeth:

"So I have found you at last, you ——! Five minutes more and my work will be done, and you—you will be in perdition, the place you came from, you black-hearted scoundrel!"

His hand stole towards a bulging pocket.

"I have been prepared for you a long time, you see, but before I send you to your doom, you shall tell me what you have done with the woman you——"

"For God's sake, Wadleigh," broke in Metcalf, "you are either insane or else you are under some horrible delusion."

Metcalf's face had also grown white as was the other's, and, as Wadleigh mentioned a woman, a terrible fear of he knew not what came into his heart; but he controlled himself, and, without showing any personal fear, he continued:

"I don't mind your using that weapon on me any time you like, for God knows my life is bitter enough; but if you are going to give me five minutes, let's use it in straightening out this affair. You have suffered enough to kill ten men, I can see that by your looks; but as that God, before whom I am so soon to stand, is my witness, I have had nothing to do with it, so far as I know, and it is only just to me that you should explain yourself!"

The earnestness with which the man spoke, the utter absence of anything like guilt in his eyes, his fearlessness, all served to sooth and calm the excited man. He was still trembling, and he handed his neat little revolver, a weapon he had carried ever since the fatal day, to one of the by-standers, saying: "Take it, lest I kill him before his time." Then turning to Metcalf, he said: "You fooled me once with your smooth-tongued lies, and escaped me, but now you shall tell me the truth, and then—you shall not escape me!" And he ground his teeth and his eyes flashed fire. After a moment of silence, in which the two men stood looking into each other's eyes, Wadleigh continued, while a sob choked his voice: "Tell me what you have done with the woman you stole from my home, and whose soul you will have to answer for."

A look of horror came into Metcalf's eyes, as he stepped nearer to Wadleigh and said: "Matt, I don't know, I can't imagine what you mean, but I have never laid eyes on your wife, have never heard one word from her since that morning, a year ago, when I left your house in your company. I always had the deepest regard for your wife, but there was never anything between us, and this I know, old man, that oxen could not have dragged

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her from your side, with her consent. You were her world, and in that world alone she lived and breathed, and I would stake my life on her honour and faithfulness!"

As Metcalf finished speaking, his words having brought more peace to the aching heart than it had known for a year, Wadleigh suddenly grew faint, and sank into a chair. He lifted up his agonising face, and exclaimed: "Then, God in Heaven help me, what did become of her?"

Little by little, he told Metcalf the whole story, the conversation he had overheard, all his suspicions, and as much of the year's agony as he could put into words. While he was speaking, a great fear began to grow in Metcalf's heart, but of this he said nothing to his friend. He took his watch from his pocket and studied it, and then nervously consulted time-tables, and finally said to Wadleigh: "Will you take the midnight express with me, back to Hampden? I may be able to help you find some trace of your wife; and on the way I will tell you everything, the meaning of that conversation you overheard, and the words I spoke to you that last night we were alone. Come, will you go?" And once again he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

So completely exhausted by the reaction of his feelings, so overcome by the words he had heard, and so broken down by the awful anxiety that he hardly could keep his senses, he seemed perfectly willing to do as Metcalf bade him.

After the train rolled out into the black night, Metcalf said: "I won't bother you with any details, Wadleigh, but will make my story short. There were four of us in our family, and none ever lived to reach his fortieth year without being insane. Insanity was born in us, was our inheritance. Two of my brothers died in the asylum, and then my sister, a most beautiful girl, and to whom I was always greatly attached, grew so bad that I knew the time had come when the asylum must be her home. Many and many a time she has begged me never to let her be carried there, but what could I do? Well, she grew worse so fast, and had so completely turned against me, that I knew two things must be done. She must be carried there before I went away, and someone else must go with her, for she would never have gone with me, and so—God forgive me—I asked your wife to go with her. I had made every arrangement, even to engaging the carriage, and she, blessed angel that she was, promised to do for her as she would had she been her own sister. That night she was going to tell it all to you. I was always a selfish fellow, Matt, and I didn't want you to know it, for fear you would not let her go, but if I had ever dreamed that any harm would have come to her, I would have cut off my right hand before I would have asked her. That my sister arrived there safely I know from the authorities of the institution, from whom I have heard every month. Yet there is a chance——"

Here he stopped, as he caught sight of Wadleigh's face; for an instant he could not speak, for he felt the whole burden of that agonised soul roll on to his own heart, and the horror of all that he had in a measure made his friend suffer swept over him. At last he said:

"This is terrible, terrible, Wadleigh, and even now you must feel like killing me; but my whole life shall be given to finding your wife." A sob choked his speech, for then he realised that perhaps she could never be found.

At last the journey was at an end, and they entered the living tomb which held so many to whom life was worse than death.

"Yes," the matron was saying, "Mr. Metcalf's sister was as well as could be expected, and, to tell the truth, did not seem at all insane except on one subject. From the very first she insisted that a great mistake had been made, that she was not Miss Metcalf, but that her name was Wadleigh——"

"Take me to her, take me to her at once," cried Wadleigh, a new light and a new hope springing within him—and then, as the next instant he was gazing once more on that beloved form, he cried again: "God is good, it is my darling wife!"

* * * * *

With all the cuteness of an insane person, Metcalf's sister had made the authorities believe that Mrs. Wadleigh was the real patient and that she had brought her there, and had appeared so sane that she had not been doubted.

Nina soon regained her accustomed health after she was back in the old home, safe in her husband's love. The sister was never heard from again, although they left no stone unturned to find her.

Like the remainder of the family, Metcalf's mind gave way, but fortunately he lived but a short time, and it was Nina's voice that soothed him, and Nina's hand that closed his eyes.

J. P. Wood.

OUR COLOURED COVER FOR NEXT WEEK'S NUMBER.

A pathetic incident in a powerful tale which appears in next Tuesday's "SHORT STORIES."

"EMILY, if William to-day asks you to marry him, you must tell him to speak to me." "Yes, mamma; but if he does not?" "Then tell him I want to speak to him."

"JOHN," exclaimed the nervous woman, "do you think there is a burglar in the house?" "Certainly not. Why, I haven't heard a sound all night." "That's just what alarms me. Any burglar who wasn't foolish would keep perfectly quiet, so as not to excite our suspicions. Indeed, John, I do wish you would get up and look through the house!"

CUSTOMER (who has just purchased a wonderfully cheap set of furniture): "Do you always pack furniture carefully before delivering it?" New Boy: "This kind we do, 'cause the jarring would shake it to pieces."

A GROUP of children had been attentively watching the antics of a dancing bear that looked very much the worse for wear. At the close of the performance one of them presented the owner with a bright new sixpence. "I hope you will get enough," she said, "to buy the bear some new furs. The ones he has on are awful wore out."

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The Temptation of No. 49.

A Thrilling Tale of a Convict's Escape.

"Suppose you sit here, ladies," said the new governor of the prison, drawing chairs near the window, "and you will see the convicts as they file in from the workshops and from outside. It is just leaving-off time. You will see as good a collection of rascals as you can hope to set eyes on anywhere!"

The two elder ladies sank into the proffered seats with languid murmurs of: "How interesting!" The girl who stood on the other side came hesitatingly. The horror of prison life, as she had seen it that afternoon for the first time, filled her with fear and pity, pity even for those who, she knew, were criminals of the worst class. It was a living death, and she was a highly-strung, impressionable girl.

"Come, Edith!" said Captain Burnett, the governor. "This chair will do nicely for you."

Captain Burnett had only been appointed one month, and the appointment was due rather to influence than to any special qualifications for the post; he had distinguished himself in a post of military administration abroad, and this was a kind of retiring situation. He had a good salary instead of retiring on half-pay.

His daughter, Edith, had been living with her aunt, one of the ladies seated near her, since the death of her mother, and the new governor now intended to have her with him. Edith had arrived that morning, with her aunt and uncle, and half a dozen other guests—these latter of the masculine gender—in time for lunch and had done the round of the prison in the afternoon.

"Here they come!" said one of the ladies.

The convicts now filed across the yard to the main building in order to go back to their cells for the night. Edith shuddered at the sight; they were like so many machines, clothed in a uniform with its distinguishing broad arrows, men whose identity was sunk in a number and who were remembered by their crimes.

To an impressionable girl the sight was a saddening one, saddening to an almost incredible extent. She grieved to think that men could fall so low as to render their incarceration a matter of duty. Then there were others who had made one false step, for which they repented bitterly, but who were here to expiate their criminal folly and whose lives would be spoilt for ever by that one wrong act. Her vivid imagination conjured before her mental vision the monotonous round of existence, apart from the world, shut off, entombed, yet so very near it. Always under supervision, their every act controlled by regulations, the same routine day after day. It was too terrible! She stifled a cry by a great effort and slipped from the room unobserved.

She made her way through corridors from this, the official portion of the governor's wing, to the private rooms, and reached the dainty sitting-room panting with haste and excitement. This afternoon's experience had upset her so! She felt that she could never live here; yet her father wished it and—she *might* get accustomed to it! At least, she would not see them every day, although she was sure that she would think of them.

She caught the reflection of her face in a glass opposite her and she started at her own paleness and at the broad arrows that danced before her eyes and seemed to be moving all over her own dress. That mark was the stamp of ownership, and those men were so many chattels belonging to the government, they did not belong to themselves.

She closed her eyes for a minute; when she reopened them she gave a little scream of fear, for she saw the reflection of a convict in the glass. Springing to her feet, she faced about and saw him in the flesh, standing in the doorway. She tottered and fell on the couch in a swoon.

A refreshing coolness on her forehead was her first sensation on regaining consciousness; then she saw a kindly face bending over hers—a clean-shaven, clear-cut face, regular features and keen eyes; a handsome face, it deserved to be called.

"Where is he?" she asked, as she remembered. "How did he come here?"

"I hope you are better now, miss. I will go. I regret that I should have frightened you. I shall get into trouble for dipping that antimacassar in the water, but there was nothing else handy."

The voice was that of a cultured man. She rose to thank him, but the words froze on her lips and her hand dropped. It was the convict himself!

"I am going," he said bitterly, noticing that she shrank from him. "I am a convict, an everyday sinner, a thing of contamination from which all shrink as from a dread disease! You ask why I am in this part of the—prison." He hesitated at the word. "I am one who has behaved himself well and has earned a privilege. Ask the new governor if you wish to know more! I am not a fit person to be near a lady like yourself! Yet, five years ago, I—it was different!"

The bitterness and pathos in his voice moved her. She recognised that she was confronted by one who had held a good, social position. He might be one of those who had made the one false step that ruins a life. How terrible must be this prison life to him! She inwardly reproached herself for having caused him pain by her involuntary sign of aversion and abhorrence, and she approached him with an outstretched hand.

"I am sorry that I hurt your feelings, Mr.——" She stopped and coloured slightly; in her impulsiveness she had forgotten the immediate circumstances.

"I have no name here," he said, the bitterness in his tones becoming more intense. "I am No. 49!"

He stood erect, in spite of the humiliating confession, and she could not help observing how handsome he was. The sort of man who would be a leader of his fellows; she could imagine him as a dashing cavalry officer and a hero. Yet he was a criminal, an everyday sinner, as he himself had said. No! He was more sinned against than sinning!

"I am No. 49," he continued. He spoke in a low voice, more to himself than to her. "I am permitted to do odd jobs in the governor's garden and even in his house, free from the watchful eye of the warder, but only now and then. Captain Burnett and my father were brother officers and he recognised

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me—and stretched a point or two in my favour, for the sake of my dead father and my poor invalided mother!" He faltered as he uttered the last words. "My mother! They told me in the last letter that she might not live to see me released, although that will be only four months. I shall have served five years and a quarter out of seven years and then have a ticket. Mother! I may live to make amends to my sister for what I have brought upon her, but for mother I shall have no chance of doing anything—perhaps I may not have the joy of hearing her say that she forgives me. I know she does, but I want to hear her say it!" Edith could not move or speak; she listened as the man poured out his heart unconsciously.

"The misery of this life," he continued, clenching his hands passionately. "It is sometimes more than I can bear. I——"

"Have you never tried to escape?" interrupted Edith breathlessly.

"Escape?" He came back to his immediate surroundings. "No! I have known two men to try it and I have no wish to share the same fate. How can one escape with these clothes? To run away is to be hunted down, shot at and dragged back. But I must be getting back to my cell! I thank you—Ah! You are like the governor, you must be his daughter. Heaven! That we should meet in this manner when — when our fathers had — had such plans!"

She scarcely realised the full significance of his words, but she laid a detaining arm on his as he turned to leave.

"Could you escape if you had other clothes?" she asked in short, quick accents.

He stared at her.

"I might!" he almost gasped.

He looked into the pitying eyes and prudence fled. He would have a better chance and he would see his mother. Something else seemed to float through his mind, but he could not remember it, something that appeared to have a restraining influence, but was crushed in the fierce desire to escape that now possessed him.

"I can give you other clothes and money," she said hurriedly. She plunged her hand into her pocket, but her purse was not there and she gazed at him curiously, an incipient revulsion of feeling coming over her.

"I have not taken your money!" He drew himself up haughtily. "I am a convict, but I am not a thief!"

Then she looked towards the couch and saw the little purse lying there; she must have dragged it out of her pocket with her handkerchief, when she wiped her damp forehead.

She snatched it up, caught his arm and drew him into the corridor.

"I have wronged you. I will make amends by helping you to escape from this living death. Come!"

She led him to her father's room, where a travelling suit lay on the bed; a new suit, just received from the tailor.

"Dress yourself in that, quick! I will wait outside!"

She shut the door and waited. In an incredibly short space of time he came out, entirely changed; only the closely-cut hair betrayed the convict.

"Come this way," said the girl. Her heart was beating fiercely. "You can pass through the garden and out beyond the boundary. You will pass warders, but you can evade them. Take this cap, which my father has bought for travelling. There! You are quite altered!"

It was a fact. The cap covered the cropped hair and he might have been taken for one of the governor's party. His face wore an expression of grim determination.

"If I am to get away, I must have your assistance, Miss Burnett. You must walk with me and chat, so as to draw attention from my features."

She hesitated a moment, but her scruples vanished as she saw the set cast of his countenance. Picking up her parasol, she walked by his side into the open.

"The sun is warm still," he said with the ease of manner that betokens the man of society. "Allow me to open your sunshade."

They were coming into full view of anyone who might be about. He opened the sunshade, carrying it with ease and in such a manner as to shield her and hide his own face.

"I wonder if I shall see you again after I'm free," he presently remarked, "then I shall feel that the light has not altogether gone out."

The girl remained silent. Her pretty face showed her terrible anxiety lest the warders should find out before her companion had left the prison.

No. 49 noticed this and begged her to talk so that the warders they were now approaching should have no ground for suspicion.

She rose to thank him, but the words froze on her lips. It was the convict himself.

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For some moments therefore they kept up a forced conversation; she a little tremulously, and he in a disguised voice, yet with perfect ease and coolness; for they were passing men who were employed in the prison and a false move would be fatal. Several eyes were upon them, but he manipulated the sunshade with great dexterity. His absence he thought, would not be noticed for a while, as he was supposed to be doing odd jobs in the governor's house, but if a warder set eyes on his face, the game was up.

They strolled with apparent calmness through the grounds and out through a gate reserved for the use of the governor. There was no guardian at this little gate, for the governor's residence was really outside the prison wall, the end of the official and residential buildings abutting on the prison wall, and only the upper apartments having windows in that end. It was at one of those upper windows that the governor and his party had watched the procession of convicts.

"There are armed warders still on the look-out," said No. 49, bending towards her and speaking softly. "We must still keep up the fiction. If you do not move your head and look up at me, I may yet lose my chance of escape."

He held the sunshade at the back now, jauntily and as a man would who had nothing to worry about. All the time his restless eyes were seeking an enemy and his heart was beating hard.

Edith racked her brains for subjects to talk about and succeeded in conducting a spirited conversation to the no little admiration of No. 49.

"That's right!" he said approvingly. "We never know who may be near us in this road, so we must chat gaily, especially just there, for it passes some of the prison buildings—near enough to be awkward if anyone is there. Tool houses or something of the kind, I believe. Yes," he continued, raising his voice to the ordinary level, and skilfully directing the sunshade to the dangerous side, "there is not a great chance for prisoners to escape from here." Then for a moment the convict was silent.

"I took her for a romantic girl who would be impressed with all heroism in the abstract," he was thinking, "yet incapable of doing anything brave herself, but there are not many girls who would have dared to do what she is now accomplishing." And he gazed on her with wondering gratitude.

The armed warder was on the look-out in the wall tower and his rifle could not reach them yet. In the tool houses, as No. 49 believed them to be, there were signs of life that told them they were not out of danger.

He chatted volubly and gaily, keeping the sunshade between the danger point and his own face, yet continually moving it, twirling it about and protecting her from the rays of the evening sun. He drew in long breaths of the sweet air and his heart was glad with the hope of liberty.

Edith felt a chill at her heart; she feared that No. 49 might yet be caught and she tried to imitate his lively manner lest someone should see them at a bend of the road and her white countenance might "give it all away," as he said.

The danger point was passed, the armed guard was out of sight, and they were approaching the cross roads where he must leave her. It would be unwise for her to go farther, and he was safe so far. He could get away to the cover of the woods, in which he would lie till night was covering everything with a dark pall, and then, in the moonless gloom, he could walk some miles in order to reach a certain spot at which he could take the train, without fear, to London and thence to his home. Not all at once, though, for the detectives would be watching; he must arrange some plan, his mother might be able to travel, so that they could meet elsewhere. He did not know yet what he should do.

"Here we part," he said, a trifle sadly.

They had reached the cross roads, and he handed her the parasol as he spoke.

"You will want money. Take this!"

She held out the purse. He did not hesitate to accept it.

"Yes. I expect I shall need it, but I will repay you one day. I will, however, beg you to let me keep the purse as a souvenir."

She flushed, and then she asked him the question that had been hanging on her lips. She remembered his remark about an everyday sinner, but that might have been in mere bitterness of spirit.

"Were you—were you really—guilty?" And the voice trembled which had remained firm while there was danger.

The handsome man who stood before her—surely he could not have been guilty of a sordid crime? He must have been the victim of a miscarriage of justice, an innocent man wrongly convicted! He read the thought in her appealing glance; for once in his life he became a coward and flinched before her honest gaze.

"Don't make a hero of me!" he laughed harshly. "I am not worthy to stand by your side; I was guilty of a crime which I committed deliberately. I said just now that I was not a thief, but the world would say differently perhaps. But what matters it? I have my liberty, I shall see my mother and obtain her forgiveness and the remembrance of you will keep me in the right path for the future—if I make good my escape. Good-bye!"

He seized her hand and raised it to his lips; then strode down one of the cross roads and was lost to view, never once turning to see the arms outstretched in appealing gesture.

As she neared the prison she came upon a party of warders headed by her father.

"I am glad you are safe!" he said with evident relief. "A convict has escaped, dressed in my new suit. One of the men says he saw you walking with a gentleman; is that right?"

"Yes, father. I walked with him along the road."

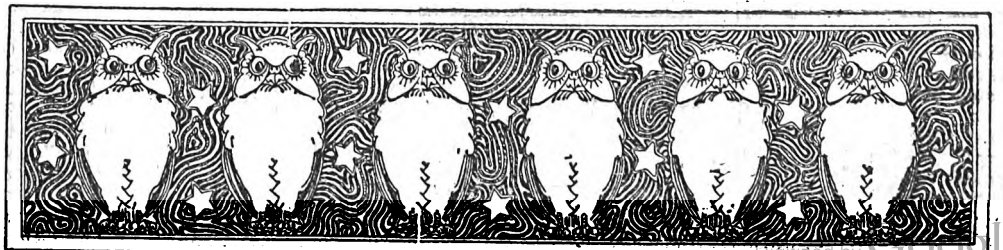
"Good Heavens! Then he even deceived you into taking him for a visitor. Hurry, my men!"

"It was very imprudent, Edith," said her father, more severely than usual. "You should not have sauntered off with a visitor, however certain you might have been that he was a guest. Let us walk back. How did you meet him? That fellow was the son of an old chum, and I extended him a privilege which may get me into trouble. I accepted his word of honour that he would not try to get away if I gave him more freedom and I thought that there was still enough of the old blood in him to keep his parole. He has broken his word! Whatever made him do that?"

There was a pause, and the girl stood before her father and looked at him with shame writ large on her countenance.

"He was tempted, father!"

G. E. Lingen.



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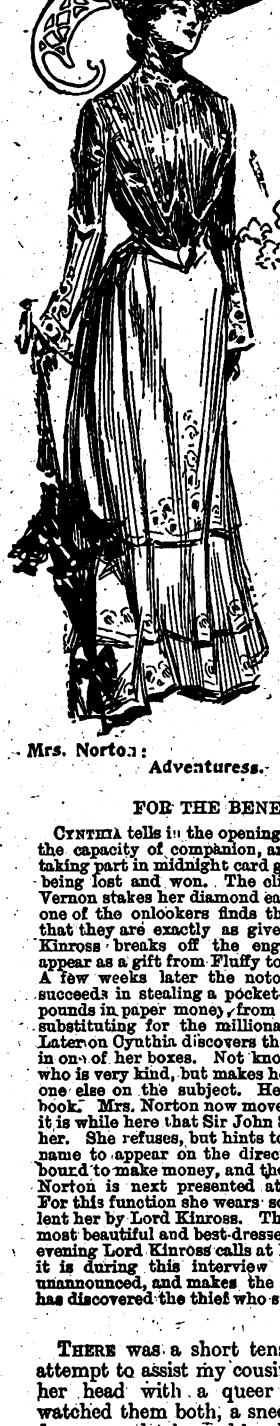

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion

PERCIVAL HOPE HAS MANY CLUES.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. Mary Vernon declares that they are exactly as given to her by Lord Kinross, whereupon Kinross breaks off the engagement. The diamonds subsequently appear as a gift from Fluffy to Mrs. Norton, set in a pair of hat-pins. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket-book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The Society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation. The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds.

THERE was a short tense silence. Lord Kinross made no attempt to assist my cousin, but stood quite still, staring over her head with a queer expression in his eyes. Percival watched them both, a sneer on his lips. Frankie had broken down completely, and her loss of self-control at such a moment gave matters a very ugly look. It was as though this sudden indisposition, was connected with Percival's announcement that Mary had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. The next minute the aspect of the affair had changed; with an effort my cousin pulled herself together, and moved away from Kinross. Her face was working, and she had trouble to control her voice; still it was fairly steady, and her eyes were eloquent.

"I am very glad for Mary's sake," she said to Percival, "I know what the discovery means to her, and I can't grudge Mary any happiness. But—but—Oh Hartland," she turned and grasped his arm convulsively, "you will go back to her; I cannot bear it!"

Lord Kinross caught his breath, he seemed bewildered, and looked glad and sorry both at once. As for me, I felt very grieved for Frankie. She must be terribly fond of Kinross to have been so upset at the mere thought of losing him. And yet, at one time I thought she really cared for poor Sir John.

"Dearest," stammered his lordship, "dear"—Then catching at his self-command. "Nothing can change the feeling that I have for you," he said. "Come, sit down; you quite frightened us."

He placed her gently in a chair, and stooping kissed her hand. It was prettily done—Kinross was always graceful, but I think my cousin would have preferred him to have been more definite about his feelings.

"And now, Mr. Hope," she said a few minutes later, "tell us all about this great discovery."

Percival bowed. Frankie's appeal to Kinross had not touched him, he looked if anything more stern than before.

"You were going to disclose the name of the thief, you know, when—" she paused, "I made a fool of myself, didn't I?" She smiled at Kinross who returned the greeting.

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"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
New Series of Stories.

"Now, Mr. Hope, out with it! Who is the guilty wretch?"

But Percival was not to be flustered.

"You must let me tell the tale in my own way, Mrs. Norton," he said quietly, "I'm a slow person, you know, old-fashioned and all that sort of thing."

Frankie shrugged her shoulders and waited.

"On the night of the card party at The Moat, Miss Vernon was unable to offer any explanation or suggestion as to how the diamonds in her earrings had been replaced by paste."

"Quite so," murmured Frankie.

"In the agitation of the moment she forgot that the ear-rings had been out of her possession for some two or three days."

Lord Kinross bent forward eagerly. "How long before that evening?" he asked.

"Some ten days previous to the card party," answered Percival. "The fastening of the earrings had got twisted and consequently it was painful to wear them. Miss Vernon sent the earrings to Howlet, the jeweller at Marlestone, the nearest town to The Moat, to be repaired."

"I know Howlet's quite well," said Kinross, "most respectable firm. It's not thinkable that they should have tampered with the jewels."

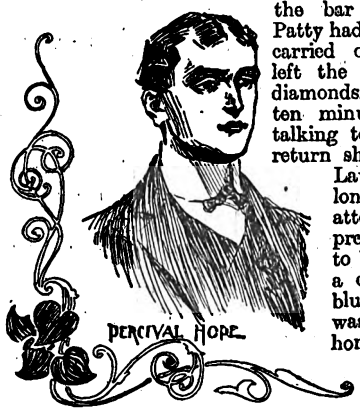
"It is not suggested that they did," replied Percival coldly. "Miss Vernon intended calling for the earrings herself but was prevented. She sent her maid for them instead, some three days later."

"Well?" Frankie leant forward, her eyes alight with excitement, "and did she——"

"You go too quickly, Mrs. Norton. Have a little patience. Patty Fraser, Miss Vernon's maid, is a bright, clever girl," resumed Percival, "but inclined at times to be giddy. She is however attached to her mistress as the sequel will show. Patty has noticed the change that worry and anxiety concerning the diamonds has brought about in Miss Vernon. In the hope that she might relieve that anxiety, the girl made the following statement."

"Tell us quickly," cried Frankie, "quickly.!"

"Patty Fraser confessed that instead of obeying orders and returning immediately to The Moat with the earrings, she stayed at Marlestone some two or three hours after leaving Howlet's. It appears that the girl met a man of the name of Lawrence, whose acquaintance she had made some few weeks previously. He induced her to go for a walk, and finally took her to tea at the Crown Inn where he was staying. They had their refreshment in the coffee room, where Lawrence met a couple of friends. The three men appeared to have pumped the girl pretty thoroughly. They learnt from her the nature of her errand to Marlestone, and with a little coaxing and some flattery induced her to let them have a look at the earrings. Lawrence was enthusiastic concerning their beauty, and declared he must show them to a friend of his connected with the trade, who was at that moment waiting for him in the bar of the inn. Before Patty had time to protest he had carried out his intention and left the coffee room with the diamonds. He was absent some ten minutes, Patty meanwhile talking to his friends. On his return she noticed a change in Lawrence; he was no longer pressing in his attentions, but seemed preoccupied and anxious to bring their meeting to a close. At length he bluntly suggested that it was time for her to go home. The girl thought his last remark a strange one.



"'Tis late,' he said, 'and diamonds are queer things. You never know what may happen to 'em. Take my advice and set off, my girl!' They parted at the door of the inn—Patty has not seen nor heard from him since."

"It is impossible to believe that Lawrence substituted paste for diamonds in that short space of time," said Lord Kinross, "where could he have got the dummies from? The cleverest rogue cannot counterfeit jewels he has never seen, and Lawrence, it is evident, saw the trinkets for the first time that afternoon. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Norton?"

Frankie looked steadily at Percival. "Mr. Hope has not told us all," she said slowly.

Percival flushed and seemed for a moment strangely disconcerted. "The diamonds were not changed that afternoon," he said at last, "there is proof as to that. Patty, suspicious of Lawrence's manner, returned to Howlet's and begged that some one might be sent with her to The Moat, the road being lonely. One of the shop assistants was told off to take charge of the girl and the diamonds. Howlet had the earrings in his hand before Patty and her escort departed. That the stones were genuine he is prepared to swear. Lawrence had not tampered with the jewels. But—" Percival paused, "he had photographed them."

"For what possible object?" asked Kinross.

"Failing the gems themselves, a photograph is the next best thing to copy," answered Percival, "Lawrence handed over the plate to a clever craftsman, who produced in paste the facsimile of Miss Vernon's diamonds."

"Even supposing you are right, how did the paste find its way to The Moat?"

Percival rose.

"That," he said deliberately, "is what I want Mrs. Norton to explain." He looked at Frankie quite steadily as if he expected her to give some sign of surprise. My cousin smiled at him sweetly.

"My dear man," she said, "how can I? I'm not a detective."

It was easy to see her answer surprised and a little disconcerted Percival. He recovered himself quickly.

"You can give me very valuable assistance in the matter," he said earnestly.

"I will do anything in my power," she answered, "but I'm a fearful duffer at finding out things. People see through me directly."

Percival did not challenge the assertion.

"Patty Fraser says it was through Ella Martin she became acquainted with Lawrence," he continued. "Ella Martin is Mrs. Norton's maid. I want you," he turned abruptly to Frankie, "to tell me when your maid last saw Richard Lawrence."

For a moment my cousin seemed about to lose her temper, then with a smile she leant back in her chair, fanning herself slowly.

"I can't tell you," she answered languidly, "I'm not in the habit of inspecting my servants' visiting list."

"Then the girl herself must be questioned," said Percival.

"I will do so," replied Frankie.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Norton, but I must beg you to do nothing of the kind. It is important not to rouse Ella Martin's suspicions. Your inquiries would inevitably put her on the *qui vive*. You have just told us, you know, how entirely transparent you are; Ella, to quote your words, would see through you directly. You understand," he turned to Kinross, "we suspect collusion between Lawrence and the maid."

"I don't quite see how."

Percival took a deep breath.

"The case lies in a nutshell. We know that Lawrence photographed the diamonds, and we conclude that one of his confederates copied them in paste. We have now to discover how the paste found its way into The Moat. I suggest through the hands" he paused, "of Mrs. Norton's maid."

"And then?" said Kinross.

"At present that is as far as I can get. The next link in the chain will be, I fancy, furnished by Ella Martin herself."

"How interesting!" said Frankie, "you're so clever, Mr.

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Hope. I long to hear your cross-examining the poor thing. Dearie," she turned to me, "tell Ella that I want her, or better still ring the bell. I can't have my little Cynthia suspected of collusion with the wicked Ella.

"Now, Mr. Hope," said Frankie when her maid appeared, "this is Ella Martin—ask her what questions you wish. You had better sit down," she added, turning to the girl, "Mr. Hope may keep you some time, and you look tired." Frankie smiled sympathetically and pointed to a chair. Martin, a thin-featured, sensitive young woman flushed gratefully and took the seat; no one could be more charming than my cousin when she chose—a tone of the voice, a look in the eyes—she hypnotised women as easily as men when she cared to take the trouble.

"You are, I think, a friend of a young man named Richard Lawrence?" commenced Percival abruptly.

The girl glanced timidly at Frankie, then in a low voice replied: "He is my brother, sir."

Hope stared at the answer. Frankie smiled.

"An assumed name, I suppose?" said Percival sharply.

"Professional, sir. My brother is a photographer. He thought 'Martin' sounded rather common."

"And pray, what does he photograph?"

For the first time Ella hesitated.

"All sorts of things," she said at last, "people, and places, and——"

"Diamonds?" suggested her cross-examiner.

"He may," said Ella suddenly.

"Now, my girl, this won't do. You're not telling me all you know. Believe me, the best thing for both your brother and yourself is to speak the truth without any reservations. Now, answer me, why did your brother wish to photograph Miss Vernon's diamonds?"

Still the girl hesitated, glancing round at Frankie as if for inspiration.

"Come, Ella," said my cousin, "answer Mr. Hope. I'm sure your brother has done nothing wrong."

"Thank you, ma'am," said the girl. Then turning to Percival, "Richard had an order from a paper, sir, to photograph the jewels of society ladies—Miss Vernon was particularly mentioned. Richard wrote and asked her permission some time back, but she refused. He asked me if I could help, so I introduced him to Patty Fraser and——" Ella paused.

"And Richard met Patty, took her to tea, borrowed the diamonds and photographed 'em—isn't that it?"

"Yes sir—he didn't hurt the earrings, sir."

Percival nodded.

"I'm aware of that. How many copies of the photo did he print, do you know?"

"I can't say, sir. He sent one to the paper I told you of, and one——" she stopped, in evident confusion.

"And he gave one to you, eh?" said Percival.

There was no answer.

"Did he send you a copy?" demanded Percival again. "If you won't answer, I must go to your brother, that's all."

The threat was effectual.

"Yes, he did send me one," she murmured.

"Where is it?"

"I—I—" the girl seemed positively unable to speak, she was trembling and quite pale, her eyes fixed beseechingly on Frankie. This time however my cousin did not come to Ella's assistance but continued to fan herself unmoved.

"I don't know, sir," the girl said in a faint voice, "I can't tell you at all. It disappeared one day from my box, I haven't seen it since."

"You say it disappeared. When?—After you came to town?"

"No, at Lady Winchin's, sir. Richard sent me the photograph a day or two after he met Patty. I missed it shortly before—" she glanced apologetically at Lord Kinross.

"Before Miss Vernon left The Moat, is that when you mean?"

"Yes, sir, about four days."

"Did anyone in The Moat see the photograph besides yourself?"

Ella caught her breath. We waited anxiously for her answer—the answer that surely would supply the link that Percival was seeking.

"Come," said he, "did you show it to the other servants?"

"No, none of the servants."

"Well, to any of Lady Winchin's guests?"

The girl was obviously distressed. She trembled and half rose in her chair. For a second her eyes sought Frankie's but my cousin did not look towards her.

"Well?" said Percival once more.

Ella Martin sank back in her chair.

"No," she said quietly but firmly, "nobody saw the photograph but me."

Percival started to his feet.

"I don't believe you!" he cried. "You're not telling me the truth!"

"You've no right to say that, sir," said Ella. "I have answered all your questions. Here is my brother's address if you want to know anything more." She handed him a paper, and stood with tight lips and downcast eyes before my cousin.

"Have you finished with me, ma'am?" she asked.

Frankie lowered her fan.

"I think so," she answered, "you've nothing more to say to Ella, Mr. Hope?"

"Nothing—to Ella, Mrs. Norton."

Frankie nodded.

"You may go," she said, "and you needn't wait up for me to-night, Ella."

The door closed softly behind the maid. For a few minutes nobody spoke.

"You're disappointed, Mr. Hope," said Frankie at last. "It's a dead lock, isn't it?"

Percival looked dogged.

"The girl wasn't speaking the truth," he said.

"In what particular?" asked Frankie.

"I believe she showed the photograph to somebody, who subsequently stole it. I feel sure Ella Martin knows who it was, though for some reason she pretends not to."

"The thief then, in your opinion, stole the photograph with the intention of getting the diamonds copied in paste?"

"Exactly."

"Take care, take care," cried Frankie. "Don't you see what you're doing? You are casting suspicion on the woman you are trying to prove innocent. Don't you see," she came quite close to Percival and spoke eagerly in quick low tones—"there's only one person to whom the photograph would prove of any use, only one person who would benefit by changing the diamonds for paste. In accusing Ella Martin of untruth you cast suspicion upon Mary, and that"—with an eloquent gesture of her hands—"that is unbearable! No matter what evidence you brought me, what proofs you gave me, I should declare Mary was innocent. But you cannot look for the same judgment from others. Therefore, for her sake, I warn you—take care!"

"You are too good, Mrs. Norton," said Percival, "and too sympathetic."

"Not in Mary's case—do you think so?" she asked innocently.

"I think," he said with a quiet smile, "that you are a very clever woman."

"It is seldom indeed you stoop to flattery, Mr. Hope. Will

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"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
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you excuse me"—she glanced from Percival to Kinross—"if I leave you for a little while; I want to write a note to Mary."

Frankie touched me as she passed, and taking it as a signal, I rose and followed her. The room was a large one; Frankie went towards the farther door.

"Don't trouble, please," she said as Kinross flew to open it, "I want to speak to Cynthia a minute." She turned as she spoke and began to scold about the arrangement of my hair.

"You look so bad," she said, "and you have not fastened the lace on your bodice properly. I'll do it for you. Don't be silly, child, they can't see," and she drew me behind a large Japanese screen, standing before the door. Frankie was a little rough in her manipulations. She caught hold of the lace, jerking the string of pearls about my neck.

"You've broken the cord," I cried, "what shall I do?" and I stared dismally at the beads scattered on the floor.

"Pick them up," said Frankie, "and take care you find them all, I value those pearls." She went out, closing the door behind her. My eyes filled with tears. It was very mortifying to be treated like a child. To my comfort however the incident appeared to have been unnoticed by Percival and Kinross, at any rate they made no offer of assistance. I gathered up the pearls nearest at hand, and sitting on the floor commenced to thread them.

"Percival," remarked his lordship, "what bogey are you hunting? Your enthusiasm is not entirely on Mary's account."

"My first object is to prove Mary innocent."

"And then?"

"We'd better leave it at that, I think, unless—" he paused. "Tell me, Hartland, are matters serious between you and Mrs. Norton?"

"Do you ask that on Mary's behalf?"

"No, on yours."

"You are hardly complimentary to Mrs. Norton. As for me——"

"Don't sneer, Hartland—you must know I only speak——"

"For my good—" interrupted Kinross, "I was sure of that."

"She's a dangerous woman," said Percival slowly.

"And I, poor innocent, may fall into her clutches? Don't worry on my account, dear Percival."

"She is an adventuress, Hartland—an unprincipled woman without scruple—heartless as they make 'em."

"She is a beautiful woman, Percival," returned Lord Kinross mildly, "without blemish—brainy as you can find 'em."

Percival sneered. "Are you going to marry this 'beauty'?"

"That is my affair," said Kinross sharply.

"Not wholly. I have some right to a voice in the matter, you must, you shall hear me."

"I will not listen to another word upon the matter. I dispute your right to question my actions, I repudiate you and your criticism. We look at things differently, you and I. It is the old, old difference between the sinner and the Pharisee. You've always been the good boy of the family, I as naturally the scapegrace. I know you helped me out of a tight place five years back, but you asked your price for it, Percival. A price I paid unflinchingly."

"You state the case unfairly. You were in a difficulty regarding what you were pleased to term 'a debt of honour.' Your father would not help you. You applied to me and I——"

"Like Providence you descended with the money and paid the debt. Remember, however, that in return I pledged my word not to touch cards until I was twenty-five. Remember also that while that promise undoubtedly saved me from ruin, it also saved the estate to which you are the heir at law."

"I did not credit you with so much meanness, Hartland I had your interests at heart when I got that promise from you. Mine are and were independent of you and the estate. When I took the name of 'Hope' I succeeded to an income far larger than I am ever likely to spend. I interfered then, as last year in Paris, and to-day in London, on your account."

"I quarrelled with you over the affair in Paris, and said I'd never speak to you again. I got over my anger and since you've been in town we've been pretty friendly. This time, however, I bar you altogether. Lift a finger to interfere with me, or what I choose to do and——"

"Well," said Percival, "what then?"

"I'll cut you for the rest of my life."

"Hartland be reasonable. You're no schoolboy to be taken in by a woman like Mrs. Norton."

"What is it you have against her? Speak it out, say something definite. I'm tired of hints and innuendos. What has she done—say?"

"At present I can give you no proofs. Wait a fortnight and I will bring you evidence of what I say. The woman is an adventuress living on her wits, a sharper existing on the credulity of fools, a swindler who profits by nefarious transactions. Her very name is probably as false as her life—how do you know the woman was ever married?"

"She—" he stopped. With quickened breath, a flame of fury in my heart and on my face I stood before him.

"How dare you, oh how dare you?" I cried fiercely. "No wonder you pretended to be friendly with me and offered to get me an engagement as governess. You wanted me to spy upon my cousin, to tell you tales about her, so that you could make up lies. I was present when my cousin married Richard Norton at the consulate in Bruges. You can go there and see the names entered in the book. You can question Lady Gaveston, you can write to the convent at Bruges where Frankie and I were brought up. A swindler, an adventuress! You know," I turned to Lord Kinross, "you know how my cousin gets her income, tell him, tell him, I say, that Frankie sold her husband's estate, and invested the proceeds."

"It's true, Percival," stammered his lordship, "quite true."

"And I, what am I? As bad as my poor cousin, I suppose, or worse."

"Cynthia," Percival implored me, "listen. You did not understand what I meant about your cousin, please God you never will. Of you I have had no thoughts but what were good, honest and sweet. I wanted to help you, I wanted——"

I stopped him with a gesture.

"Do you still say my cousin was not married to Richard Norton?"

"I believe what you have told me."

"You acknowledge she is Richard Norton's widow?"

"Yes."

"Lord Kinross has told you how my cousin's income is derived. Do you still say she is a swindler, an adventuress?"

"For your sake I would do much," said Percival, "but even for you I can't take that back. Wait for a fortnight, Cynthia, you shall then judge for yourself if I am right."

"And give you time to trump up a few more charges? No, thank you." I walked towards the door. "I am going to call my cousin and tell her before you both what you have said."

"For Heaven's sake, Cynthia"—Lord Kinross rushed after me. Percival stepped between us.

"A moment," he said quietly and looked at me firmly, almost sorrowfully. His manner had quite changed, he was grave and stern. "I must tell you," he said slowly, "that if you inform Mrs. Norton of what you overheard, I shall deny your statement *in toto*. Yes," he repeated, "I shall swear you have imagined the whole story."

I looked at him, his strong square face, and steady eyes, and even as I hated, I believed him. He would do as he had said—deny it all, and Kinross would back him up. What could I do? I was powerless against such a man.

"Oh, you are cruel and wicked," I exclaimed, "bad men, both of you. I—I——" The sentence was not finished. I broke into passionate sobbing. Percival looked horrified, and grief-stricken. Kinross hardly less comfortable.

"Don't," said his lordship, "my dear little girl, *don't*."

"Why should you care?" I asked through my tears.

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"You despise Frankie and let people talk ill of her. I wish she'd never seen you. You don't really care for her. Why don't you go and never, never come back. Frankie would be happy with Sir John, he's a good man and loves her truly. But for you she'd have married him long ago. I can't think what she sees in you. Sir John is just as rich. Oh yes," Kinross made a movement of surprise, "he's making lots of money in the City, he's better looking and much, much more loveable. Why don't you leave her alone? You can't really be fond of her."

Kinross caught his breath and murmured something about feeling like a cad.

"I must go," he said, "I *can't* stand this."

"Yes," said Percival, "we'd better leave." He paused and touched me lightly on the shoulder.

"Just at present you think very hardly of me," he said softly. "But in time you won't feel quite so bitter. Cynthia"—he paused, "some day I shall come to you," he said, "and ask forgiveness. You won't refuse it me."

I heard the door close behind them, I heard Frankie meet and greet them in the hall, the deeper tones of Fluffy chiming in. Kinross even made an arrangement to meet her the next morning in the Park! I listened to it all and remembered that Fluffy's warning to my cousin not to see Lord Kinross that evening. Why had he warned her? Was he base and treacherous like the rest, did he mean to turn on Frankie like the others?

I could not quiet myself but sat and sobbed till the door opened once again and Frankie entered.

"Well," she asked eagerly, "what did they say? Did you hear anything about me? Make haste, Cynthia, and tell me. Fluffy will be back directly."

I paid no heed to the questions, but ran quickly to my cousin, clasping her tightly with both arms.

"Send me back to the convent, Frankie," I sobbed, "where they don't say wicked, cruel things. I can't stay here, I can't."

With a firm hand, Frankie unclasped my arms and led me upstairs to her bedroom.

"Drink this," she said and made me take some brandy. "Are you quieter?" She put her hand on my head. "Yes, you are better already. Now," she faced me, pale but with a strange light in her eyes, "what has Percival Hope been saying?"

(Next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES contains another striking instalment of "Cynthia's Confessions.")

MR. E. CONOMIE: "Did you write to that man who advertises to show people how to make puddings without milk, and have them richer?" Mrs. E. Conomie: "Yes, and sent him the shilling." "What did he reply?" "Use cream."

MISS FITZGUSH (examining photo): "What a wrinkled, old, funny-looking cat! Who is she?" Miss Clevergirl: "I make it do duty for my sweet self, love. Many men are not allowed to engage a typewriter unless their wives see the applicant's photo, so when I look for a place I send that thing (after having called at the place previously, you know); so the governor shows the photo to his better half, and the dear, deluded thing is usually quite contented."

WE were very much amused by an incident related the other day. A gentleman who had been absent for a considerable time, and who during his absence had raised a pretty luxuriant crop of whiskers, moustachios, etc., visited a relative, whose child, an artless little girl of five or six years, he was very fond of. The little girl made no demonstration towards saluting him with a kiss, as was usual. "Why, child," said the mother, "don't you give Uncle P. a kiss?" "Why, ma," returned the little girl, with the most perfect simplicity, "I don't see any place."

Your Editor Chats.

"THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA" seem to have aroused a great amount of interest amongst readers of *Short Stories*. One reader, who claims to be "a member of the middle-class," confesses to a mild degree of astonishment at the revelations as to the ways of polite society made in these exposures. "Formerly," he says, "London society was supposed to comprise the fine flower of European aristocracy. Now, so far as one can gather, 'rogues' and 'adventuresses' are privileged members of the inner sets. Might I respectfully surmise that the disreputable state of things revealed by the 'CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA' owes much to Cynthia's feminine powers of exaggeration?"

I am regretfully compelled to confess that such a surmise on the part of my correspondent would be wrong. Unfortunately, the state of affairs described by Cynthia is only too true, and if the revelations had not been startling—as they certainly are—then I, as editor of your little paper, would not have accepted them. The fact of their showing society in its true light struck me as making them of more than ordinary interest, and being always on the look-out for good things for my readers I accepted them. Great truths are oft-times unpalatable reading.

Again, a lady reader writes to me the following letter:

"Some three weeks back a friend handed me a number of *Short Stories*. I had not before seen the paper. I was immediately interested in 'THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA' and have been since, so much so that I am writing to you upon the matter. I want you to tell me, in confidence, Cynthia's real name. About two years ago I met, at a seaside boarding-house, a woman of the Frankie Norton type, with a sweet young girl as companion. The poor thing was sorely tried by her employer, who was bad-tempered as well as unscrupulous. I lost sight of the girl, and heard afterwards that she had left her situation. If, as I suspect, she and Cynthia are the same, I should be glad to hear from her. I may, perhaps, be of some assistance to the poor child."

I wrote to this correspondent to express my regrets that the conditions under which I accepted this series of articles did not permit me to reveal the true name of the young lady in question, but that, as it seemed from her letter that her reason for making inquiries was to offer assistance to Cynthia, I was in the happy position of being able to inform her that Cynthia is not in any want and is making quite a good thing out of her pen. It is quite possible that the people whom my correspondent met at the boarding-house were Mrs. Norton and Cynthia, but no good can come of pursuing inquiries further merely out of curiosity.

I am now able to announce the result of the Sub-titles Competition. The first prize of a massive solid silver pencil-case goes to Mr. S. P. Hopkins, Kew Estate Office, Kew Green, S.W., while consolation gifts of cut glass solid silver-topped scent bottles and silver bangles go to the following ten contestants: Mrs. Macdonald, 4 Amberley Grove, Leopold Street, Leeds; H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, S.E.; H. H. Hearn, 12 Conrad Street, Hackney, N.E.; J. Berkin, 5 Great Peter Street, Westminster Abbey; J. Jones, 5 Worcester Place, Swansea; S. Keenan, 19 Balmano Street, Glasgow; Mrs. Kelly, 27 Maryfield, London Road, Edinburgh; R. Thomson, 5 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh; E. Payne, 73 London Road, Clapton, N.E., and G. K. Stubbs, 4 Victoria Terrace, Longsight, Manchester.

For *this week's competition* I want you to construct a sentence using only words containing four letters. The reader who sends the longest and most sensible sentence made up of such words will receive a handsome barbaric guard, while the ten readers whose efforts come next will receive gifts of pretty rolled gold hearts and rolled gold charms. Postcards only should be sent, and these must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday morning, July 22nd. They should be marked "sentence" and addressed to the Competition Editor, SHORT STORIES, Henrietta Street, W.C.

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Breaking it Gently.

IT is related that a man once had to break the news to a woman that her husband had been killed. "Do you know," he said, calling at her house, "that with your light hair and pretty complexion you would break every heart in town if you dressed as a widow?" She blushed and laughed. "And you are one," he added. "Your husband was just blown to atoms down in the boiler works. But then, black is so becoming to you!"

A Dear Girl.

"OLD fellow, I'm engaged to Miss Dashe. She's a dear girl." "She is so. She cost me about £100 the time I was engaged to her."

Necessary Elements.

"So you have written a novel?" "Yes." "Has your heroine satin skin, velvet eyelashes, and hair like threads of spun gold?" "Yes." "Is her name Gwendoline?" "It is." "Then I don't see why it shouldn't be a success."

The Very Reason.

JONES: "I'm going to bring my wife round to call on you to-night." Smith: "That's right; but do me a favour, old man. Don't let her wear her new cloak; I don't want my wife to see it just now." Jones (grimly): "Why, that's what we are coming for."

An Inducement.

WIFE: "Why did you stand and talk so long with that Turkish pedlar?" Husband: "I was trying to convert him." "Hum! Fine missionary you would be. What did you tell him?" "I told him that a Christian was not obliged to have more than one wife."

Mamma Lived Somewhere Else.

SHE: "You won't object to have my dear mamma live with us after we are married, will you?" He (a young physician): "Not at all. In fact, she'll be most welcome." "I'm so glad you feel that way." "Yes; you see she is always ailing, and I really need somebody to experiment on."

Didn't Like to Look.

SOME children were trespassing in a field, and quite happily gathering flowers. Presently a keeper came up to them saying angrily: "Now, then, what business have you to be in here? Didn't you see the notice at the gate?" "Oh, yes, please sir," answered one little girl, "we saw a notice, but it had 'private' on it, so we didn't like to look."

A Gentle Hint.

THEY had been engaged to be married fifteen years, and still he had not mustered up courage enough to ask her to name "the happy day." One evening he called in a peculiar frame of mind and asked her to sing something tender and touching, something that would "move him." She sat down at the piano and sang, "Darling, I am growing old."

The Force of Habit.

A WIDOWER is being married for the fourth time. During the ceremony one of the guests is surprised to hear violent sobs proceeding from a woman in a corner of the church. "Who is that lady who is crying so bitterly?" he asks of the bystanders. "Oh, it's only Martha, our cook," answers one of the bridegroom's children; "she always blubbers when papa gets married."

A Story Telling Picture.

HE: "Well, for my part I like a picture that tells a story." She: "Mrs. Witherby's portrait ought to suit you then. It makes her positively handsome."

Wanted His Face Washed.

LITTLE ETHEL: "Mamma, I wish you'd wash Willie Prettie's face." Mamma: "The idea! He's not my little boy. I have nothing to do with him." Little Ethel: "But I have. We's become engaged, an' I want to kiss him."

Accounted For.

BERTHA: "Sometimes you appear really manly, and sometimes you are absolutely effeminate. How do you account for it?" Harold: "I suppose it is hereditary. Half my ancestors were males and the other half females."

An Unpublished Testimonial.

FIRST QUACK: "Here is a letter it would hardly do for us to publish. A man writes: 'I have taken the first bottle of your medicine——'" Second Quack: "Well?" First Quack: "There it breaks off short, and is signed in another handwriting, 'per Executor.'"

The Last Chance.

"DID you ever notice," said Mrs. N. Peck, "that about half of the pictures in the photographers' windows are of bridal couples? I wonder why they always rush off to a photographer as soon as the knot is tied?" "I fancy the husband is responsible for it," said Mr. Peck. "He realises that it is about his last chance to ever look pleasant."

Didn't Even Crack.

CLARE was perched upon the fence-post, swinging her chubby legs and singing at the top of her sound little lungs. "Be careful, Clare," said her mother; "you might fall and break your bones. I'm afraid you'll get hurt." "Oh, don't be 'fraid," she answered reassuringly; "I did fall yesterday, and I never even cracked."

A Time to be Firm.

MISS OLDGIRL (coyly): "I had a strange dream the other night, Mr. Jones. I dreamed—only think!—that you and I were married and on our wedding tour. You don't know how real it seemed. Did you ever dream such a thing?" Mr. Jones (firmly): "No, Miss Oldgirl, I did not. In fact, I haven't had the nightmare for a good many years."

Animal Intelligence.

THE common opinion is that animals do not know enough to be superstitious. Here is a possible exception:

"I tell you what," said Mr. Watts, "I saw a remarkable exhibition of animal intelligence to-day!" "What was that?" said Mr. Potts. "Why, a bridal party started from the house across the street from where I live, and one of the horses threw a shoe."

She Got a New One.

THEY were going out, and she sat down while her husband got into his overcoat. "I don't believe you love me any more," she said with a sigh. "I am convinced of it," and her voice trembled a little. "Not love you, my dear? Why, how absurd! Must I tell you every moment that I love you—love you with all my soul?" "Oh, that will do to say, but I know you care for me no longer. How can you love me in this old hat?"

Not Quite What He Meant.

WIFE (who has just returned from the dentist's): "I shall be awfully stupid now." Husband: "Why so, my dear?" Wife: "I have had all my wisdom teeth pulled out." Husband (with the best intention in the world): "Of course, my love, you know it's nothing but a superstition the idea that wisdom teeth have anything to do with wisdom. If you were to have every tooth in your head drawn it couldn't make you any stupider, you know." He succeeded in smoothing matters over, but it was a narrow escape.

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Another Woman's Child.

(A Story in Two Parts.—*conclusion.*)

THE FIRST HALF OF THE STORY.

ALECK BAYNES has jilted the girl who loves him for his cousin, Hilda Baynes, a beautiful and a wealthy girl. Joyce, his former sweetheart, is broken-hearted when she hears of it, and, feeling very bitter against Hilda, whom she declares has stolen Aleck from her, resolves to have her revenge when opportunity offers.

Later on Joyce marries a man who had loved her for years, and by a curious coincidence, Hilda Baynes, now a widow, comes to their home in search of rooms for herself and her unborn child. Full of sympathy for a sister in distress, Joyce takes her in and nurses her. This kindness Hilda rewards by running away as soon as she is well enough, leaving her baby for Joyce to look after, with a little money, and a sarcastic note in which she explains that she has left her child to be a companion to Joyce's own baby.

The next we hear of Hilda Baynes is that she is married to Sir Alfred Trevor, and is one of the most beautiful and most wealthy ladies in London.

But Joyce discovers her and sends her a note. The note reads: "You must come to me or I will come to you.—JOYCE CARNEGIE."

IN a tiny garret far east of the Trevor's great mansion, a woman sat sewing for her life. She was young, and might once have been pretty, but want and sorrow, and the marks of a mortal disease, had carved lines upon her face which told their own sad tale. Her clothes, though neat, were worn and patched, the room in which she sat told of the poverty of its occupant. The furniture was of the barest—a table, two chairs, and a bed constituted the whole, with the exception of a cradle at the feet of the woman, whose eyes glanced lovingly now and then at its occupant. The window, high up in the wall, showed many broken panes, a few sickly plants struggled for life on the sill.

The woman sighed as she sewed. Life was a weary fight for her now.

"Will she come, I wonder?" so her thoughts ran. "Will my long patience be rewarded at last? Is my revenge at hand? And is the woman who stole my lover to be delivered up to me at last?" A smile of triumph stole over the wasted features upon which disease and misery had set their marks so plainly. "If I had gone to her husband—to this great Sir Alfred, with the story, he would never have believed me. If she comes here, I shall be able to make my own terms—my own terms." She laughed softly, then she sighed, a bitter sigh, as the past came flooding back upon her memory. She saw again, as if it had been yesterday, her parting with Aleck in the orchard. She heard his low pleading voice saying: "Ah! Joyce, keep my secret, forgive me, and keep my secret!" Well! she had kept the secret whilst he lived; she had done more, she had tended his widow in her trouble—and how had Hilda repaid her? In the flash of recollection Joyce saw herself standing in that empty room in her house, from which Hilda had fled, leaving behind her a helpless babe! At the remembrance Joyce set her teeth hard.

"She left the child to me," she muttered, "her delicate child to me—a young mother myself. Hard, selfish, cruel—it is time she was taught a sharp lesson. She will come here to-day in deadly terror, lest I should make her secret marriage known to the world. Ah! my lady, you will see now that you cannot sin with impunity, my revenge is close at hand!"

There was a step upon the stair, and Joyce lifted her head, the smile about her mouth grew, as someone knocked at the door, and she said softly: "Come in."

The door opened slowly and cautiously, the woman inside the room rose to her feet.

"Is it you?" she said, when her visitor had entered the room, "you—at last?" And her glance never left the face of the other woman who looked round the garret with a look that held in it something of fear.

"Why did you write to me?" was the answer, in a low, hoarse voice. "How did you know that I——"

"How did I know that the Hilda Trevor of to-day was the Hilda Baynes of a year ago? Oh! I found out that little fact by the common process of putting two and two together. So! You hid from your husband all knowledge of the past. You never hinted at the weeks you passed in my lodgings, when I tended you as though you were my own kin? What will he say when I tell him that his wife——"

"You must never tell him," cried Hilda. "I—I have come to you to-day to say to you that he must never be told. I—I thought it best to keep the past from him. It was not necessary that he should know——"

Before the scornful glance in the other's eyes, her voice trailed into silence.

"What a pleasant little surprise for him when he learns the truth," Joyce said calmly.

"You must never tell him!" Hilda made a quick step forward and laid a hand on the arm of the little sempstress. "Joyce Carnegie, listen to me. I have acted for the best. My husband would never have forgiven me had he known my secret. I could not tell him—I *cannot* tell him. But—I have come to offer you anything you like to ask me, if only you will be silent."

"To bribe me?" Joyce answered slowly. "You guess, and you guess rightly, that money is precious to me. I have come down in the world since you knew me. My husband died, and I—I sank and sank to this," she waved her arm towards her dreary room, "I am dying of consumption—I am deadly poor, money *is* a temptation to me, but—revenge is sweeter."

"Revenge?" Lady Trevor looked at her with terror in her eyes.

"Yes, revenge! Do you know that it was I—I—I from whom you stole your first husband, Aleck Baynes?" Lady Trevor uttered a cry of horror, and shrank back towards the door. "Ah! Now you are beginning to understand! I have never forgiven you for that. I was good to you a year ago, because you were ill and in trouble. Then you repaid my kindness by leaving your child upon my hands? Oh! the reasons for revenge are growing apace, are they not?" And she smiled into the other's white terrified

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face. "You thought you would cut the knot of all your difficulties by running away from my house, and leaving no clue. You married a rich man, you are courted, honoured, made much of, your plan *seems* to have worked well! But it is only seeming, because—I—have found you out at last!"

"Listen!" Hilda cried. "I—I am very, very sorry for what has passed. I see you are poor. I see you have a great burden of care, I will help you. I will give you money—any amount in reason that you like to name, if you will promise silence about my past. Let me do what I can for you, and I beseech you give me your pledge of silence."

Joyce broke into soft laughter once more.

"No! I will not touch your money! Your husband shall know—and you shall tell him!"

Lady Trevor was desperate. She walked slowly to the door, gathering her rich robes about her, lest they might touch the dust-flecked walls. At the door she paused and turned her head to the woman in tattered garments.

"I defy you!" she said, her lip curling in scorn. "I defy you to come near my house!"

Joyce sank to her knees beside the cradle. She would win yet!

"Your child is asleep," she said quietly, after a moment's silence.

Lady Trevor reeled under the blow.

"*My child!*" Her voice rose to a scream. "Are you mad? That child cannot be mine! That is your baby, not mine—you are mad. My baby, I thought that my baby——"

Joyce looked up at Lady Trevor with flashing eyes.

"Ah! Yes, I guess what you would say. You thought—you mean you hoped—that your baby was dead. Poor mite, little wonder if it had died. But when you deserted it, I cared for it. This is your child. My baby died—yours lived. The child is yours!"

"Woman, you lie—you lie—it is impossible." Lady Trevor's voice rose in a storm of anger.

"It is yours," Joyce repeated firmly. "Pity! for your child's sake!"

"*My* child! No, *your* child!"

"Hear me! It is not money that I want from you, but for your child's sake do what I ask. I am dying, you can see it for yourself. The doctor has told me so. I beseech you acknowledge the child, take it to your own home, give it its rights. I am willing to die in poverty, but grant me this prayer I make you for the sake of your child!"

With a dramatic gesture Joyce swept the baby from its cradle and held it out towards Hilda, "for the sake of your child!" she said once more.

"Whose child?" A man's voice said the words, a voice so sharp, so stern, so unexpected, that both women turned with a gasp towards the door. In their conflict they had not heard this step upon the stair, and both Lady Trevor and Joyce Carnegie stood spell-bound, whilst the newcomer looked from one to the other in speechless amazement.

"It is my husband," Hilda murmured, every trace of colour leaving her face. "Good God, he has found me—here."

"What does this mean?" Sir Alfred spoke at last after a long and pregnant silence. His words came slowly, his face had blanched when he saw the fear in his wife's eyes. "What does it all mean?"

By a great effort Lady Trevor recovered her self-assurance.

"It means," she said, "that this woman is attempting to blackmail me, by pretending, pretending, that the child yonder is—mine."

"*Yours!* Hilda, are you mad?"

"It is this woman who makes mad assertions—not I!" Hilda spoke more confidently, the incredulity in her husband's voice gave her new courage. Sir Alfred strode across to Joyce's side.

"Who are you who dare make such statements about my wife?" he said. "And whose is the child you hold in your arms?" Joyce stood motionless, and the child lay looking from one to the other of those about it with big frightened eyes.

"My name is Joyce Carnegie," Joyce replied, "the child is your wife's. It was born in my house, where I cared for her and for it. I——"

All at once, in sight of the terrible dismay that overspread her husband's face, Hilda's self-control gave way. With a low cry, she flung herself upon Sir Alfred.

"Alfred—Alfred," she cried, "I will tell you—I will tell you——"

"Tell me the truth," he said hoarsely, pushing her away from him, and holding her at arms' length, "this is no time for lies, tell me the truth. I shall believe every word you say." For a moment the eyes of husband and wife met, then Hilda's fell. Her self-control had utterly deserted her. She laughed, a low mirthless laugh, that made him shiver. She was too terrified and blinded by emotion to realise that even now the game lay in her own hands—her husband would believe whatever she chose to say—*now!* Five minutes later it would be too late.

No realisation of all this crossed her mind. Goaded by fear, she spoke with reckless haste and bitterness.

"I suppose it *is* my child," she said. Sir Alfred cried out in dismay, "it is useless to deny it if that woman swears to its identity. I did not tell you before because, because, I knew how you hated deceit."

"And so you deceived me?" he replied, in a tone of intense anguish. "I can forgive anything but deceit."

"I deceived you for your good and my own," Hilda said sullenly. "I was married before I married you. I married my cousin, Aleck Baynes. I was miserable as his wife. I was glad when he died. We were both miserable, he and I. The child was born after his death. It was born in Mrs. Carnegie's house. I—I hated it. It was a burden, a clog upon all my hopes, all my ambitions. Do not look at me as if I were a monstrosity! All women are not child lovers—I was not. The baby was delicate too. the doctor did not think it would live long. I thought—I thought it must have died long ago."

For the first time her voice shook, and Sir Alfred asked sternly:

"Are you going to tell me you deserted your child—your own child?"

"What could I do?" she cried impetuously. "Could I begin life again, hampered by a child? I tell you my marriage with Aleck was a secret, no one knew of it. I had not even told my mother. Could I have gone back to my parents, who imagined me to be staying with a school friend, and told them all my story, taking a baby with me? No! a thousand times no. They would have turned me out of their house. I tell you, I thought the child would die. I was sure it would die in early infancy. One day I sent Mrs. Carnegie and her husband out. Then—I went away. I left some money and a letter for Mrs. Carnegie. She loved children, she had told me so scores of times. She had a baby only a little older than mine. I was not fit for the care of a child. I went away, and left the child behind. I have never heard of it again until to-day."

The cool cynicism with which she spoke—the indifference of her voice—the icy calmness of her manner, roused Sir Alfred to a white heat of fury.

"Are you a woman at all?" he said. "And can you speak in this way of your own child? I believed I loved you—but—it was a *woman* that I thought I loved! Are you dead to all sense of womanly feeling and goodness?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and again her reckless laugh rang through the room.

"The game is up," she said dramatically, with a little hysterical laugh. "I need dissemble no longer. Why pretend to be what I am not, what I never was? You will never forgive me for having deceived you! You have found out the truth now, and henceforth——"

"Henceforth," he said sternly, "justice shall be done to this poor child, whom you have foresworn. Of forgiveness towards you, I cannot even think, much less speak. I do not know—I cannot imagine what the future may have in store for you and me." His voice trembled—if ever heart-

(*Concluded at foot of next page.*)

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The Great "PASS-IT-ALONG" Scheme.

FIRST AWARD £10.

SECOND AWARD £5.

THIRD AWARD £2.

Six awards of 10s. each.

AN ENTIRELY NEW FORM OF MONEY MAKING.

This novel and clever scheme will be continued in next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES. For the benefit of those who have not seen our previous announcements, we give below a rough idea of the scheme, so that they may be prepared for next Tuesday's offer.

Every person who buys a copy of "SHORT STORIES" will have the opportunity of entering for this scheme by first of all writing his or her name and address on a space which will be found at the foot of one of the pages, and then sending the copy of the paper to a friend whom the competitor thinks will be likely to sign *his* or *her* name in a space provided. This friend of yours will then post the copy to a friend of *his* or *hers*, and so your copy will go from one person to another for fourteen days, when you will find it returned to you. Then you simply send the copy to us, under the conditions which you will find next week, and if it contains more names than that sent by anyone else

You will get £10, and every person who has signed your papers will get £1 each.

Your whole expenses will be one stamp for sending a copy of *Short Stories* to your friend. Your friend, and his or her friends and friends pay the other postage. If, however, you don't want to send your own copy away, and you can't get a friend to give you his or her copy (readers, you will find, don't like parting with their copy of dear little *S. S.*), then why not get an extra copy of the next number, as thousands of other readers will do?

The copy will cost you one penny, and may bring you £10.

But don't leave it till Tuesday before you ask for your extra copy, or you will find your newsagent is sold out. Just ask him to keep it by for you till you call on Tuesday for it. . .

Next Week's Number, we may add, will be a splendid one. The cover depicts a beautiful young girl being escorted out of church by the churchwarden. Why? Well, that will be explained in the paper in a powerful and thrilling story which the picture illustrates.

Altogether, next week's number will be worth twopence in itself. But there's no need to pay twopence for it—only one penny. You get two copies for twopence—one to keep for reading, and one to make £10. . . . . .

break looked out of a man's eyes, it looked out of his then. "Your child shall not stay a day longer in this miserable home. The truth shall be told to all the world. I will allow no further deceit." Lady Trevor tried to speak, but he silenced her by a gesture. Turning to Joyce, he said gently:

"Words are poor things with which to thank you for your goodness to another woman's child. My thanks will be shown by deeds. I will make arrangements at once for bringing you and the child to my house." Hilda uttered a suppressed cry, but again her husband silenced her. "Every thing that we can do, Mrs. Carnegie, to make amends to you for all that you have suffered, shall be done. And now, Hilda, come"—he looked coldly at his wife, who shrank away from him with a shiver—"come home, and God grant that in time your heart may be softened. Come."

Standing back to allow her to pass out, he threw open the door for her ceremoniously, then followed her slowly down the stairs, the sound of their footsteps gradually dying away in the ears of the woman in the garret, who stood silently where they had left her, the child held close and warm against her heart, a smile of triumph upon her face—

For—the child she held in her arms *was not Hilda's, but her own!* Joyce's triumph was complete—she had made Hilda confess—her revenge was revenge indeed.

L. G. Moberley.

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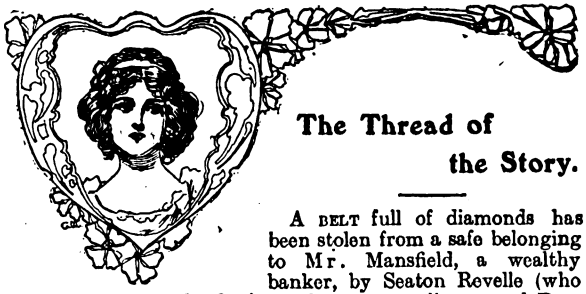
OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.



The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

In the meanwhile Scarsdale manages to pass through several letters to Esther to which she receives replies full of hope and affection. On account of an assault upon a brutal warder, however, he is to be removed to Wrackham Convict Prison, an establishment famous for its hard discipline.

A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump. It is while returning from this concert that Revelle proposes to Esther but is refused.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther.

FOUND DROWNED!

"IN the reservoir!"

The man jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"In the far end. They were cutting the weeds. I'm going for the police!"

The man hurried away. Esther had already reached the house.

"That idiot of an inspector!" rasped out Crump fiercely. "If watch had been kept through the night, this might have been prevented! Now it's too late, and a life's been sacrificed, just for the want of a little thought!"

But, though the little man's indignation was righteous, he was mistaken. The tragedy would have taken place all the same; but, had watch been kept by the reservoir, some clue might have been furnished as to how the poor creature found her way into the water. The look of anger on Crump's face gave place to one of deep sorrow.

"I can't do any good!" he muttered, "and yet——"

He passed out into the road, and set out towards the reservoir. Few men had seen more of the grim side of life than Crump; but it had not made him callous, nor was it the morbid spirit of curiosity that was taking him to the reservoir. It was the detective instinct which was as strong within him now as it had been in the days of active service. He believed that the poor creature had taken her own life; but he had jumped at the conclusion that, though she had denied herself, there was foundation for those words, "That man is my husband!" and even in death something might be revealed. It was his duty to investigate.

Not far from the sluices that controlled the outflow of the water stood a shed, used for keeping tools and housing a boat. Three or four men stood outside talking in whispers. "Mr. Penworthy" was known to them.

"Too late to save her, this time!" said one of the men in a low voice.

"Poor woman!" said Crump very softly, and with a dimming of his bright, little eyes. "The All-merciful will, I dare to think, has granted her the rest she sought!"

He was visibly affected. To him the woman with dull, spiritless eyes, and a face from which a former prettiness had been washed out, had been full of pathos.

Removing his hat, and with his grey head bowed a little he passed into the shed. The others did not follow him. He came to a standstill close to where they had laid her, and for a few moments did not stir, his lips moving a little, his hands pressing his hat to his chest. Then he raised up the tarpaulin that covered her.

He emerged some ten minutes later, a curious expression on his face.

"Where," he asked in a whisper of one of the men, "was she found?"

"Yonder!"

The man pointed away to where some weeds rose up out of the water, some distance from the bank.

"How deep is it there?" questioned Crump.

"Not more than four feet!"

The little man's expression was exceedingly thoughtful.

"Were the sluice-gates closed?"

"Yes."

"Then the water was absolutely still. When the sluice-gates are closed, I presume that there is no current?"

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"No."

The little man, looking in the direction of the distant weeds, seemed to be making a calculation.

"H'm!"

The intonation of the monosyllable told that something was puzzling him. The weeds were some distance from the bank. And also, while in the shed, he had made a discovery of an extraordinary nature—something that had evidently escaped the notice of those who had found the body.

"Is it deep between the bank and the weeds?"

"Yes, there's a regular dip."

"It was a long way from the bank for her to have been found!"

"Ah," said the man, "but I daresay, when she found herself in the water, and it was too late, she may have made a fight for life, struck out blindly in the dark, and kept afloat till she reached the shallower water, only to sink under from exhaustion. It must have been so. What else could have happened?"

Crump did not answer. His lips were pursed up. He was looking more puzzled than ever. He intended to make further investigations; but he preferred to wait. He did not wish to call attention to himself.

"Hullo," cried one of the men suddenly, "here comes the police, and Doctor Felton—not that he can do any good!"

Crump did not wait, but moved away slowly and thoughtfully. He was obviously perplexed.

"How was it," he muttered to himself, "that she came to be found so far away from the bank? And, granted that the theory that she had managed to struggle so far is correct, how is that broken leg to be accounted for?"

One of the poor creature's legs was broken! The fact had escaped the notice of the men who had taken her from the water; but not Crump's!

"I certainly must be present at the inquest. I am altogether mystified. Later in the day I must have another look round; but I do not wish to call attention to myself; and earn the reputation of being a poke-nose. But I am absolutely puzzled. If her leg was broken before she jumped into the water, it seems to me impossible for her to have struggled through the deep water into the shallow. At the same time, it does not seem possible that, jumping into deep water, she could have broken her leg in doing so. I may be wrong; but I feel that I am face to face with a most extraordinary mystery. I am very much puzzled. I feel very, very much tempted to jump to the conclusion that this is not a case of suicide."

"Yes," he said to himself, when presently he emerged from the wood. "I'm glad that Miss Mansfield is going away. There is a gloom gathering over this place. I hope, sincerely hope, that she will get away at once, before the inquest!"

Then he lapsed again into a brown study.

"Ah!" he ejaculated suddenly, then brought his teeth together with a sharp snap.

He had jumped at a conclusion, and the next moment had told himself that he was mad for having done so.

"I think that I am suffering from Jim, balloons, and parachutes on the brain! I really must watch myself most carefully!"

He drew out a letter, and, having torn off the half-sheet, proceeded to scribble down some jottings in pencil as he walked along—grim jottings that referred to the dead woman's dress and personal appearance.

He was looking very sad and depressed when he reached The Woodlands.

* * * * *

"I am glad to see you back safely, sir. I have passed an anxious night thinking of you. Mr. Faversham has been equally anxious on your behalf. Allow me, sir!"

The silent Railton took from Revelle his hat and heavy overcoat.

"Yes, it was a nasty night, and so dark that I lost my bearings, Railton. I landed at a Heaven-forsaken hole called Ocklington. Only one inn in the place, and it took me nearly an hour to wake 'em up!"

Seaton Revelle was looking a trifle grey and haggard, as he made his way into the billiard-room where Benny was idly knocking the balls about, and speculating as to how it had fared with the Marquis.

"You hit your ball a little too full!"

Benny, who had just failed to run in off the red, turned sharply to see the Marquis standing on the threshold, a faint smile playing round his lips.

"Back!" he cried. "Thank goodness! I was beginning to get into a dickens of a funk about you! You haven't been careering about the sky all night, have you?"

"No. Landed at Ocklington shortly after midnight. Got them to put me up at the inn there."

"What have you done with the balloon? You haven't brought it back with you in your pocket, have you?"

"No; but it's packed up, and I've left it at Ocklington to wait there till called for!"

"Well!" said Benny, with a genuine sigh of relief, "I'm jolly glad to see you back. And if I hadn't known that you always have the devil's own luck, I should have been still more anxious. But you always come down on to your feet!"

He glanced at Revelle's face.

"But, I say, you don't look any the better for your trip!"

Revelle carefully selected a cue from the rack, and, having placed the billiard balls into approximately the same position that they had occupied when he had entered the room, neatly pocketed his ball off the red. Then he rang the bell and ordered brandy and soda-water.

"I say," said Benny, dropping his voice a little, and watching the effect of his words, "nothing's been heard of that poor woman who's escaped from the asylum!"

"Oh, is that so? They are bound to get her, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Well," said Revelle, as he helped himself to a cigarette from his case, "you see she was suffering from suicidal mania, and when a man or woman suffers from that, they generally succeed sooner or later!"

His cigarette lighted, he strolled towards the door.

"I'm just going to have a tub to freshen me up; then I shall take the cob out for a spin. You'd better come too."

"No, thank you!" said Benny, very promptly. "That cob gets on my nerves too much. Some other time, perhaps, later, very much later. But don't you worry about me. If I do anything, I shall go out for a spin on my bike. I prefer it. It hasn't a will of its own, nor hind legs to rise up upon and do a promiscuous sort of dance from one side of the road to the other!"

Revelle laughed, then went to his dressing-room. The mask fell from his face. His jaw dropped a little. his head sank forward; and suddenly, as if a cry had reached him, he drove his fingers into his ears. But he could not keep out that cry.

"Jim!"

The reaction had come now. Then he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in a mirror. The sight seemed to recall him. He steadied himself.

"Oh, when I was single, oh, then,
Oh, when I was single, oh, then,
Oh, when I was single, my pockets did jingle,
I long to be single again!"

It was Benny going to his room, and singing as he went the refrain of the song which had been such a success at the village concert.

"Single again!"

Mechanically Revelle repeated the words; then, through the open window, from which the road was visible, came the slow, rhythmic tramp of footsteps, heavy footsteps as of men carrying a burden. As though drawn by a magnet, Revelle approached the window, and, gripping the sill with a shaking hand, stared out.

Four men, carrying a hurdle on which lay something covered over with a piece of tarpaulin, passed into sight. A silent little crowd followed.

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OUR NEW SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

"Single again!"

Benny had reached his room and closed the door; but the words rang out audibly.

They were out of sight again, the bearers and the burden, the little crowd following.

Revelle reeled away from the window.

"Single again!"

BENNY COMES A "CROPPER."

"Yes, my father has wired to say that we are coming. We shall leave to-morrow for Gurlston Bay. After what has happened to-day"—Esther shivered—"I am more thankful than ever to think that I am going to get away from here for a little while; but—but do you think me a coward, Mr.—Mr. Penworthy?"

It was twilight, the close of the day that had witnessed the tragic discovery in Warham reservoir. Esther had left the house and had joined Crump. They were walking along a secluded garden path.

"My dear young lady," said the little man, "I, too, I am very thankful! No, no! I don't think you a coward, believe me. In your absence we shall be watching over your interests, doing our best for you—such as it is. I am glad!"

On the morrow the inquest was to be held on the poor woman found in the reservoir, and Crump was thankful to think that Esther would be away, right away from the place.

"Gurlston Bay," he went on, "a very pleasant place indeed; but perhaps you have been there before?"

"No!"

The little man was making conversation purposely with a view to distract Esther's thoughts.

"I was there some years ago. The cliffs are very fine and imposing. And there are caves that well repay a visit—quite a romantic history connected with these caves. They are, most of them, artificial, originally quarries; then, when quarry work was discontinued, they served as the head-quarters for smugglers. But, of course, the days of the bold, bad smuggler are long since things of the past—except in a certain form of fiction that caters for credulous youth!"

The little man's eyes twinkled.

"I took my young nephew Fred and his sister there. It's a good many years back now; but I can even now remember the look of disappointment on the little lad's face when reference to the guide-book showed that no smuggler had been seen or heard of in the neighbourhood for more than sixty years!"

The little man chuckled.

"I remember that we spent a very happy day in those caves, playing, most of the time, at being smugglers. At least Freddie and Katie were the bold, bad smugglers, and I had to content myself with the more virtuous, but less interesting part of their prisoner. I hope you won't find the journey wearisome; but you know the pace of some of these South Coast trains is not excessive, nor are they famous for their punctuality. Let me see, if I remember rightly, you will travel *via* Roxeter Junction!"

Roxeter Junction was the changing-place, not only for Gurlston Bay, but also for Wrackam—Wrackam, where the big convict prison was.

"What time are you starting, Miss Mansfield?"

"In the early morning. I think we shall have to leave here at about half-past nine!"

"Ah, well, though I shall be seeing you to-morrow, perhaps I had better be saying my real good-bye now—at least, good-bye for the present. You will, I trust, write to me. I shall take the liberty of writing to you. My letters will deal with other matters besides the progress that I am making with the front garden. I do hope, my dear young lady, that you will come back ever so much refreshed by your change. You will try not to brood—it is very easy for me to advise, I know—but you will try, won't you?"

The little man held out his hand.

"God bless you!" he said quietly and unaffectedly.

Esther went with him round to the front gates. They had reached them when the rattle of wheels sounded out, and, a moment later, a dog-cart came into sight.

Revelle reined up—he was alone—at the gates.

"Single again!"

Crump raised his hat, and retired into the background.

"Miss Mansfield," said Revelle, in a low, strained voice, "I'm supremely shocked at what has happened. Awful! I saw your father to-day. He tells me that you are going away to-morrow. I can quite understand that you will be glad to get away. There's a gloom over the place. Gurlston Bay you're going to, aren't you? It's a charming place. I know it well. I suppose I shan't be seeing you before you go. I hope the change will do you a world of good!"

"You infernal blackguard, sir!" said Crump to himself fiercely.

Revelle raised his hat. The dog-cart rattled away.

"Single again!"

"Oh, how I loathe you!"

The words had been whispered out from Esther's quivering lips. Crump was beside her again.

"We must be very patient," he said in a low voice, "very patient!"

Then, after some further whispered conversation, the little man again wrung her hand, and gave her his blessing.

It was a climb up to Woodbine cottage. Crump recognised the bicyclist who coasted down past him, his feet on the rests. It was Mr. Faversham.

"You're a blackguard, too!" said the little man to himself. "But you amuse me, in spite of myself!"

Esther still stood by the gates, staring wistfully into the deepening shadows.

A snapping sound, a sharp cry, then a thud and a metallic crash awakened her from her reverie.

She darted out into the road. A little distance away, a man lay stretched on the ground, not far from him a bicycle smashed almost beyond recognition.

Some women would have returned to the house for assistance. Esther promptly hurried towards the motionless figure on the ground. To go back and summon help meant loss of time. The man lay on his face, a thin stream of blood trickling from his forehead. Esther, trembling from head to foot, but retaining her presence of mind, knelt down, and, exerting all her strength, turned him over on to his back.

She started when her eyes rested on the white, motionless face of Mr. Faversham, Seaton Revelle's friend.

Benny Beard was a good rider, but even a good rider cannot hold up against the calamity of a broken brake. He had been badly thrown at the foot of the hill.

He was quite unconscious. Esther's womanly instinct was uppermost. She did not pause to think who or what he was. Whipping out her handkerchief, she staunched the flow of blood; then bound it round his head.

And when Benny opened his eyes it was to find Esther kneeling beside him and supporting him in her arms.

"You!" he muttered in dazed fashion. "You! Oh, yes, I remember now. Brake broke—somersault through space—smack on the head—forgetfulness."

"I hope you're not hurt badly, Mr. Faversham; you had better come into the house. We can send for the doctor."

Benny slowly rose to his feet. Beside being cut about the head, he had been severely bruised and shaken, but he was not a coward so far as physical pain was concerned.

"Thank you, Miss Mansfield. I wouldn't mind resting for a few moments. There's no need for a doctor; I'm all right, or shall be in a few minutes. It's very good of you, Miss Mansfield"—he raised his hand to his head, and for the first time realised that it was bandaged—"Hullo, and you've been and bandaged me up, too. I don't know how to thank you!"

Once within the house, Benny did not say "No" to a brandy-and-soda. It was the first time that he had been in John Mansfield's house since the night of the burglary. Esther had led the way into her father's study—the room containing the

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safe that had been robbed. The surroundings, the presence of Esther, made Benny, now that he had recovered his senses, feel decidedly uncomfortable. He gave a sigh of relief when Esther asked him to excuse her for a few moments. Left to himself, he stared at the safe.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "it's scarcely a year ago. I was standing here; the Marquis over there. I can almost fancy I hear the sound of those approaching footsteps. It makes my heart beat quicker to think of that moment."

He shivered.

"Confound it all, I wish I'd never had a hand in that wretched job! I wish I'd never met Esther Mansfield. Every time I see her face my conscience pricks me. And she looks at me sometimes as if she could see through me. Those great piteous eyes of hers, too! I haven't many virtues, but I can't bear the sight of a woman suffering. Confound the Marquis! He put up the job; he dragged me into it. It was the worst night's work I ever did!"

When Esther returned she was carrying bandages, and insisted on bandaging Benny's head afresh before he left the house. Never had he felt so uncomfortable. The woman whom he had helped to wrong so cruelly was, with the sweet tenderness of her sex, ministering to him. When he prepared to leave, he stammered and seemed strangely embarrassed as he again thanked her. He was conscious of her dark eyes bent searchingly upon his face.

He only breathed more freely when he had left the house, and was wheeling his wreck of a bicycle towards The Firs.

"If I saw much more of her, if I were constantly in her society," he muttered uneasily, "I should make an ass of myself. I'd blurt something out; she'd draw it out of me, in spite of myself. I'll have a chat with the Marquis to-night about getting away from this place. What the dickens is coming over me? I'm not sure of myself!"

"TILL DEATH!"

JOHN MANSFIELD and Esther, her arm linked in his, were pacing up and down the platform of Roxeter Junction.

"Dear me," said John Mansfield, impatiently, "that's the worst of these South Coast railways—trains are always late, and one never knows into which platform they are going to run. Porter, is this our train coming?"

"No, sir; yours is the next after this."

A long train had run into the platform, a third-class saloon attached to the rear.

Esther and her father were strolling along, watching the passengers disembark, when their attention was attracted by a crowd that was gathering round the last carriage. On reaching the outer edge of the little crowd, they saw two military-looking men in uniform, and wearing cutlasses, alight, and one of them called out—

"Now then, look sharp, tumble out, all of you. We've got to change here for Wrackham!"

"A batch of convicts," said someone close to Esther, "bound for Wrackham prison!"

The blood rushed from her cheeks. Convicts! Was not the man she loved a convict!

"Come away, Esther," said her father hurriedly, "it's a shame to stare at the poor fellows!"

But a paralysis held her motionless. White to her very lips she stared with dilated eyes at the carriage-door.

A clanking of chains fell on her ears. Three men linked together, in drab and arrow-stamped clothes, their hair close-cropped, the ugly prison cap perched on their heads, filed out of the carriage and moved across the platform to where another train was waiting.

She scarcely seemed to breathe. Her eyes scanned every face.

There was a moment's pause. Then another gang—a gang of four—filed out, a warder in front, a warder behind.

Again she scanned each face. The last man was differently dressed to the others—in a hideous parti-coloured dress of black and drab—and his legs as well as his hands were fettered.

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PRICE ONE PENNY.

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OUR NEW SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

His face was haggard; the hair about his temples streaked with grey.

Esther reeled back. Her great brown eyes seemed to start from their very sockets.

"Alec!"

It was more of a scream than a cry.

Convict 35 stopped short. The chain tightened as the other convicts still moved mechanically forward. The sound of his name, the accompanying cry, had rooted him to the ground. His eyes had been bent down to avoid the staring looks of those gathered round. They were raised now! Was it only a phantom voice—a mocking echo of imagination? A choking, stifled gasp burst from his lips.

Then a mist seemed to obscure his vision; he saw the crowd, shadowy and indistinct, open out; he heard a voice hoarsely cry—"Esther, are you mad?" He was dimly conscious of a warder trying to interpose himself between him and a woman's figure that swiftly moved towards him. But the man had sprang forward too late.

Too late, thank God!

Too late to come between two hungering souls! Too late to mar the ecstasy of that impassioned embrace.

It was a scene that those present would never forget. Many of them witnessed it through a blur of blinding tears.

Surroundings—everything but the fact that they were together again—had been forgotten by the manacled convict and the beautiful woman who, her arms twined round his neck, had buried her face on the hideous, arrow-marked coat. They were as much alone as when they had watched the setting sun over the waters of Rushton Wood. The weary past, the doubtful future, were lost sight of and merged in that present moment. But it was a cruelly brief moment.

Shocked beyond measure and angered at what had occurred, John Mansfield, simultaneously with two of the warders, had sprung forward. He was almost beside himself. That unexpected meeting seemed likely to undo everything. He had hoped that Esther had forgotten Scarsdale. That meeting showed that it was not so. It must mean the re-opening of the wound that he had believed to be healed.

"Esther, come away, come away—this is disgraceful!"

Roughly he gripped her by the arm and tried to drag her away. He was a man of the old-fashioned school. His sense of propriety was outraged. The sight of his own daughter clinging to a prison-clad felon before a score or so of onlookers, filled him with shame. Never in his life had he felt so humiliated.

The two warders had seized Scarsdale by the shoulders, and roughly wrenched him back. John Mansfield had dragged Esther away, but, with an almost fierce movement she broke away from his grasp, and once more flung her arms round the convict. She raised her face, white as death now, to his, he bent down and kissed her!

"My love!—my love!" those who pressed round heard him whisper.

"Till death!" said the woman with a great choking sob.

The words had been spoken; the kiss had been given! The warders might strike him, they might tear them asunder now, but the words had been spoken, the kiss had been given!

"Shame, shame!"

The words had burst from the lips of more than one of the onlookers.

The warders had torn the convict away. In doing so one of them had deliberately struck him a blow with his clenched fist. They saw the convict, hampered as he was with handcuffs and chain, fiercely raise his manacled hands above his head; but the warders had closed with him before they could descend, and held him powerless. Other warders rushed to their assistance. For a moment it was impossible, owing to the confusion and hubbub, to notice what was happening. Then orders were shouted out, there was a clanking of chains, and the little convict gang, the last man held on either side by the warders, was hustled across the platform.

And Esther? Esther had fainted away in her father's arms. Scarsdale's last glimpse of her was as she was borne into the waiting-room. The warders who held him felt the muscles of his arms twitch as the mad desire to break from them, to rush to her side, surged through his brain, and they tightened their hold accordingly. His conduct had cast discredit upon them as warders, and they were furious. He was fettered hand and foot, and there was but little danger of retaliation. They did not spare him in that short transit across the platform to the train. One of them, who gripped the collar of his coat, found brutal satisfaction in jamming his knuckles into his neck. Another—the man against whom in that moment of passion he had raised his hands—twice contrived to strike him in the ribs with his elbow.

"You beauty," he muttered with a coarse oath. "You beauty, you ought to be strung up to the triangles and get six dozen for to-day's doings. I'll give you a character when we get to Wrackham. Go on, don't stare at me like that. Get into the carriage!"

And he emphasised his speech with another blow in the ribs. Worked up by all that had gone before, a prey to a hundred conflicting emotions, Scarsdale gnashed his teeth, and the light that shone from his eyes was fierce and merciless.

"You brute," he hissed, "if only I were free!"

"Go on. None of your lip. Into the carriage."

A few minutes later the engine snorted out a hoarse whistle and the train moved slowly out of the station. The whistle penetrated into the waiting-room, where Esther, surrounded by a little group of sympathetic women, was just opening her eyes. John Mansfield was there, kneeling beside her; his anger had given way to grief. He loved his child and would have given half his possessions that she might have been spared that meeting.

"Esther, my Esther, are you better?"

She did not answer him; but the look in her tearless, staring eyes was more than he could bear. He turned his head aside. One of the ladies present—a sweet-faced woman, whose hair was streaked with silver—whispered something to him; then led him away. Returning, she sat down beside Esther, and, placing an arm round her waist, took one of her hands in her own. Esther had never known her mother, who had died when she was but a baby. She had often been vaguely conscious of a void that only a mother's love can fill—and longing for someone to whom she could pour out the secrets of her heart, without fear, without reserve.

She was still numbed and dazed; still wondered whether she had dreamt it all—the convict gang, the uniformed officials, the hurried whispered words, that one impassioned kiss. The gentle touch of the woman at her side seemed to awaken her more fully. She glanced at the sweet face that was not without signs of a secret sorrow, and the light of womanly, motherly sympathy that shone from her eyes fell comfortingly on Esther's bruised heart. Then the flood-gates of her grief were opened. With a catching gasp, she burst into tears, and convulsively buried her face on the woman's bosom. Tears often bring relief; they brought relief to her.

The others, now that they were assured of her recovery, quietly melted away, only her father, standing by the mantelpiece, his head upon his hands, remained.

The woman, gently stroking Esther's hair, suffered her to weep awhile in silence. Then, bending down, kissed her forehead, and whispered a few simple words of encouragement and consolation—words, precious as jewels, and falling like dew from Heaven, they helped to soothe the burning heart. And as Esther listened, something told her that the woman who was speaking had also suffered.

The gathering roar of the approaching train sounded out. A porter thrust his head into the waiting-room, and, with a glance at John Mansfield, shouted out: "Your train, sir!"

"Esther, this is our train; but, if you like, if you don't feel well enough——"

"No, father, I—I want to get away, to get away!"

She was still weak, and her limbs were trembling. Assisted by the woman, she rose, and, taking her father's arm, passed out and entered the train. She could scarcely find words to thank the woman for her kindness; but the look from her eyes supplied the want of words.

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"If," said John Mansfield, when he, in his turn, had endeavoured to express his thanks, "you should ever be in the neighbourhood of Warham, I hope you will come to see us."

The grey-haired lady took the card he handed her, and gave him one of her own from her case. Then the guard's flag was waved, and the carriage doors were slammed to. She pressed Esther's hands and kissed her.

It was only when the train had gathered motion that John Mansfield glanced at the card. It bore the words: "Mrs. Cecil Crofton, 35 Warwick Square, London, S.W."

No wonder if Esther had noticed signs of suffering endured on the sweet face. The woman who had been so good to her was Gentleman Jack's mother!

And if Esther's agony was great, hers had been and was greater. The days passed, but nothing had been heard of the escaped convict. Every day she dreaded to hear the news of his capture. She did not even know whether her son was alive. It may be imagined how the sight of the convicts at Roxeter station and the pathetic scene that ensued had affected one whose own son had worn the felon's dress and badge.

Fate works strangely, weaving a wonderful web in which the threads of many lives are interwoven, crossing and re-crossing one another.

A FAMILIAR FACE.

The journey from Roxeter Junction to Wrackam Dock—the station where convicts alight and are transferred from there to Wrackam Convict Prison—left but a blurred, confused recollection in Alec Scarsdale's mind. He scarcely heard the remarks that were passed among the convicts. The gentleman of the coining persuasion contrived to make one or two brutal jests on the subject of his "gal." The grey-haired old man and the little Cockney ventured upon a few whispered words of sympathy. But jest and sympathy fell upon unheeding ears.

The darkness that follows is more black than the darkness that precedes the flash of light. He had seen her; had heard her whisper "Till death!" had kissed her. Blackness before; a brief flash of light; blackness again, but more intense, more cruel!

His chin resting on his chest, every facial line and furrow deepened, his handcuffed hands clasped together and hanging down between his legs, he looked a picture of grim despair. He was in a state of mental collapse. Then, gradually the darkness seemed to be illumined by a faint glimmering of light. Youth was not yet crushed out of him; hope was not yet dead. Hope—the will-o'-the-wisp that beckons us from point to point; that, when we sink exhausted and fainting on the weary road, drags us on to our feet again, and plunges a spur into our sides; hope that whispers in the ear of the dying man a lying promise of life.

"Till death!" It was hope that whispered the words again and again in Scarsdale's ears, and seemed to point with outstretched hand to the distant light that now shone out like a guiding star—a woman's lasting love; a love that had held its own, impregnable against calumny, doubt, and time.

It was hope that raised up the drooping chin, and brought back a flash of the old fire to the grey eyes.

Darkness had set in when the train had reached Wrackham Dock, and those convicts who were new to the place gleaned but little knowledge of the surroundings. An omnibus was awaiting them, and the driver, a warder, exchanged greetings with the warders in charge of the party.

"I hope you've brought a nice, respectable little lot?" he cried.

"Oh, very," answered one of them, "especially Number 35; he started to spoon a girl on the platform at Roxeter, and then when we interfered, was going to bash my head with his bracelets. Yes, I think 35 is the pick of the basket, and I wish you joy over him. We were getting a little bit tired of him at our place."

The words were spoken loudly, and some of the convicts burst out laughing at the specimen of warder-humour.

Wrackam Convict Prison—a great barrack-like building, the work of convict labour—stood some distance away from the town of Wrackam, a large naval and military depot. The country around, though undulating, was low-lying, and here and there split up by the many little streams that flowed into the Reedway, the broad river on the edge of which stood Wrackam with its vast docks and basins.

On arrival at the prison, the convicts were conducted into the presence of the deputy-governor and a number of warders. The principal warder in charge handed over the official papers; and names and registered numbers were called over.

When Scarsdale's name and number had been called out, the deputy-governor paused, stared hard at him, and then, drawing aside the principal warder, conversed with him for some little time. The principal warder gave a full account of the episode at Roxeter Station. Scarsdale's reputation as being a dangerous character had already preceded him, and had prejudiced the prison officials against him. What the principal warder told the deputy-governor did not serve to lessen that prejudice.

When handcuffs and connecting chains had been removed, the convicts were conducted to their different cells. Special preparations had been made for Scarsdale's reception. He was placed in the strongest part of the prison. The convicts occupying the cells on either side of him were men whose sentences were nearing expiration, who, in consequence, would not be likely to endeavour to communicate with him by tappings on the wall, and other secret methods of communication known to prisoners.

Scarsdale was still under the ban of Special Orders, and the remainder of his sentence had yet to be completed.

It so happened that he had arrived on the night of the weekly search, and scarcely had the officials who had conducted him to his cell departed, than the door was flung open with a crash, and two warders entered. Without glancing at them, and, almost mechanically, Scarsdale unrolled the bedding for inspection, and then began to strip off his clothing. He was quite unconscious of the fact that one of the warders had fixed his eyes upon him, and was staring at him as if trying to recall something. An exclamation, bursting from the man's lips, made him look up.

The warder's face was familiar to him; but for a moment—only a brief moment—he could not recall when and where he had seen him. Then, like a flash of light, it dawned upon him; and his mind went back to Warham police-station, and the night—that terrible night—of his arrest. It was the warder he had struck.

(A further long instalment of this story appears in next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES.)

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By MADGE MORRIS.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Is it Love?

How is one to know when a boy is in love? "Mater" propounds this question. Her young son, a youth of nineteen, has of late become very strange in his manner. He seems abstracted, and is very reserved. He goes out constantly, and keeps very late hours. Do I read these as symptoms of heart affection?

Ask him straight out, "Mater," and judge from his manner what is the nature of his abstractedness. If he is *not* in love, he will tell you so in terms probably of contempt. If he gives an evasive or suspicious answer, I think you may assume there is something in the love theory. How does he dress when he goes out at night? Does he brush his hair very carefully, and look particularly neat, and have you noticed a distinct improvement lately in his manner and general deportment? If so, then be assured someone has stolen his affections.

Mother v. Daughter.

"Fifty Three" is a widower, and perplexed as to the rival claims on his affections of two ladies, a mother and her daughter. While he admires immensely the daughter, the mother (a widow) has great mature charm and would, he should think, make an admirable wife. He is anxious to marry again. Which do I think would make him the better wife, the mother or the daughter?

I think the mother would. It is too much of "Fifty Three" to expect that his admiration for the girl is likely to be returned, save in very exceptional circumstances. If he married her he must do so under a sense of entering into a one-sided attachment. The mother, on the other hand, for whom he appears to have an admiration, might be the very woman to make him comfortable and to administer to his home needs. If he is mentally able to make a selection on judicial grounds, the chances are distinctly in favour of the mother.

The Unknown Suitor.

"Perplexed" is very much worried over a certain man who continuously writes asking her to meet him. He app ars to be very fond of her. She does not know much about him, but she has an idea that he is quite a desirable acquaintance; but at the same time has not the courage to accept his invitations. How should she act? He may really be quite a nice man, and, on the other hand, might be an adventurer.

Next time "Perplexed" hears from this man, let her make a note of his whereabouts, and call in the services of her brother or some male friend she can trust. Let this gentleman be present at the appointed time and place instead of her, and explain his identity, adding that he would be very pleased to do anything on "Perplexed's" behalf. The man might on the one hand be very much abashed, apologise and disappear, in which case he is clearly an undesirable, or, on the other, he might candidly explain his reason for writing to her, adding details about himself and his position. If these details were satisfactory, and the man seemed a "desirable," "Perplexed's" friend might think it worth while to accept an acquaintanceship, and in course of time introduce him.

Probably a Flirt.

"Jim" is engaged to be married to a young lady who says she loves him but not with all her heart. She says that her love is growing, but while she does not at present love "Jim" passionately, she thinks it will come after marriage. Meanwhile she is very fond of other men's society, though very jealous of "Jim."

Well, "Jim," I don't quite like the story you tell me. Her liking for other men's society rather suggests that she is the familiar type of flirt, anxious to keep a bird in hand while she inspects the possibilities of those in the bush. Her jealousy of you may, as you suggest in your letter, be merely to "keep you round her." While I cannot attempt to influence your decision if you really love her yourself, I should not advise a too close engagement unless she gives you proof that she really *does* love you, at any rate with as much heart as she has in her.

The Familiar Question.

Few problems recur more frequently than that of the girl who is attached to the impecunious young man. "Nita" is my client this week for advice in similar circumstances. Her sweetheart is a clerk earning thirty shillings a week in a City office as a typist. Of course "Nita's" parents have the usual objection to any engagement, and "Nita" is, as usual, in despair to know what to do.

Well, "Nita," let me tell you what I have told many others. Let matters stand over for a time, without becoming definitely engaged. If time proves that you are really devoted to each other, and that nothing can possibly sever you, your parents must see that to stand in your way would be foolish. Time would also enable you to judge as to your sweetheart's chances of promotion. Few young men of ordinary ability, and experienced in office work, need remain more than a year or so on such a salary as thirty shillings a week, and if your friend is energetic and capable he must make more within a year or two, when you could safely become engaged. However, you should wait for the present and see what time brings forth.

A Doubtful Lover.

"Mitcham" writes "Twenty-Five" has given her heart to a man of twenty-eight, who has gone abroad for five years. He apparently does not reciprocate her love. In the meantime another man has appeared who pays marked attention to her. If the absent man did not reciprocate your love at twenty-five, he is scarcely likely to do so at thirty. And who knows but that during his stay in India he may not meet someone else whom he does love? I think the girl would be unwise to continue this forlorn hope, and, if she cares for the second suitor, I think she should at least consider him as a lover, leaving the rest to time.

An Offer of Marriage.

Jessie B. writes to tell me that she has just received an offer of marriage from a gentleman whom she likes but does not really love. He is particularly well endowed with this world's goods, and she thinks she could learn to love him in time. Should she accept so good an offer?

I do not think Jessie B. should at once consent to an engagement which might end disastrously in the near future. No, she should tell him exactly the state of her feelings towards him, and if he really loves her he will be quite willing to wait till he has reason to believe the time has arrived for him to renew his offer.

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(A Pathetic Incident from our Powerful Story, "Saved from Herself." See Inside.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 708.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending July 26th, 1902.

SAVED FROM HERSELF.

A Story of Some Strangely Crossed Destinies.

By R. NORMAN SILVER, Author of "Hate, the Destroyer," "The Golden Dwarf," etc.

FIRST CHAPTER.
"I will Prevent this Marriage."

"Do not weep so, Rene, dear, after all, it may not be true."

The ruffled, golden head, buried despairingly upon a pair of girlish arms, was lifted suddenly. A gleam of hope came into the lustrous violet eyes, whose tears had overflowed their long lashes and wetted the soft, almost childish cheeks.

"Gwen," was the answer, "do you really think that, or are you trying to comfort me for a little while, only to make it worse for me afterwards?"

Gwendoline Bellasis bent over the large bare table at which she was working. She was as dark as her sister was fair, and her grave lips and clearly-cut features suggested a strength of character lacking in the dimpled, delicately-moulded countenance of Irene Bellasis.

"I don't see why you should take it for granted," she said, mixing a fresh tint from the rows of water-colour tablets beside her porcelain palette, "that a rumour is correct just because we happen to hear it. But there, if I were you and I did believe it, I wouldn't waste a single tear on the——"

Irene Bellasis started from her chair to put a protesting hand over her sister's mouth. "Please, Gwen, dear," she begged, "he is my husband, you know, whatever the Law may say."

Gwendoline kissed her. "I am sorry, darling," she replied, deepening the crimson petals of a rose in the flower-study before her, "but facts are facts, and when a man lays a diabolical plot to lure an unsuspecting girl into an invalid marriage, and then casts her adrift upon the world, he shows himself to be a scoundrel of the first order. And when he adds to that piece of villainy the contemplation of another, and this time, a real marriage with a woman in his own station—well, if I had been tricked and abandoned by him, I should feel more like shooting Victor Ashford than crying over him!"

Her sister sighed. "I can't look at it as you do, Gwen," she objected; "perhaps he never meant that the marriage should be invalid, his fine friends and relations may only have found afterwards that it was, and forced him into disowning me, and then into this—this engagement with Miss Dacre. She is his cousin, and the Dacre and Ashford estates join. He told me once that the marriage had always been urged upon him!"

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The artist threw down her brush. "Rene," was her response, "you are hopeless. But you are a child and I don't blame you. Yet when Victor Ashford married you in the back-parlour of an unfrocked curate who is at present serving a term of penal servitude for forgery, he knew what he was doing. When he was tired of you, and especially when he had inherited his uncle's fortune, he flung you off. Now it is reported that he is about to marry again. But even this crowning wrong—supposing, as you do, the report to be true—does not seem to convince you of his utter worthlessness."

Irene sank into her seat and hid her face, her shoulders heaving with convulsive sobs. "You don't understand, Gwen," she faltered, "he is my husband in the sight of God, mine alone, and I can't—I can't give him up!"

Gwen pushed away her work, got up from her painting-stool—a tall, handsome figure—and stooped to fold the weeping girl to her.

"My poor child," she said, "I think I do understand, in proof of which I will endeavour to find out for you whether there be any truth in this rumour. If there is, well, we shall be able to consider what we ought to do. There, don't cry, I won't breathe another word against Victor Ashford. If I could, I would bring him back to you that I might see my darling smile once more."

Her sister's arms stole round her neck. "You are good to me, Gwen," murmured Irene Bellasis, "and I am shockingly selfish—I do nothing but worry you and stop your painting. But I do wish—I—I——" A sob choked her; Gwendoline smoothed the golden head.

"Wish what, darling?" she whispered. Irene held up her left hand, and the tears blinded her great violet eyes.

"That I could put on my wedding-ring again," she said, "and have the right to wear it."

Gwen clasped her pitifully and the two were very silent. The light faded steadily from the narrow windows of the old Bloomsbury house, the August days were shortening fast. At length the elder sister rose.

"I must go out for an hour, Rene," she observed; "I—I have some materials to get. I won't be longer, though. Promise you will read a nice book and not mope."

Irene brushed the drops from her wet lashes, gave the required pledge, and sealed it with a kiss. There is often

a bond curiously passionate in its affection between women, such as Irene and Gwendoline Bellasis. Orphaned in childhood, both unquestionably beautiful, one weak but sensitive, the other strong while tender, nothing had come between them till Irene's hasty flight and secret—and invalid—marriage had separated them for a brief interval to re-unite them even more closely under the shadow of its tragedy.

Hastily donning her hat and a loose walking-jacket, Gwendoline picked up her latch-key—with a brave attempt at a jest—and descended flight after flight of dusky stairs to the street, itself shadowed by the huge Greek pile of the British Museum. She turned southward and westward into the broad roadway of Oxford Street. Here she hailed a cab and gave an address in the aristocratic quarter of St. James's. A vivid sunset glowed at the end of the famous shopping thoroughfare down which she was driven, its glow fell upon her face as she sat in the hansom, emphasising her air of quiet, almost lofty, pride and cool resolution.

The cab halted at the entrance to a block of flats whose rents were as high as its occupants were fashionable. Gwen paid the driver, walked up to the second floor, and rang at a small, heavy door with a gilt number on it. A male servant in a plain livery acknowledged her summons.

"I wish to see Mr. Ashford," she told him, "you may say Miss Bellasis—Miss Gwendoline Bellasis."

The servant's expression became wooden in its stolidity. "I am sorry, ma'am," he rejoined, "but my master is not at home."

Gwendoline surveyed him disdainfully.

"Then I will wait till he is," she intimated meaningly. The man bowed, her demeanour had convinced him that she was in earnest.

"If you will step in, ma'am," he answered respectfully, "I will ascertain when Mr. Ashford is likely to return."

Gwendoline entered the small, square hall, and passed into a bachelor apartment, heavy with the odour of tobacco smoke. The servant placed a chair for her and moved to go.

"You realise that I am determined to see Mr. Ashford," remarked Gwen significantly.

"Yes, ma'am," she was answered. And Gwendoline heard the sound of the other's departing tread. Everything in the room was indicative of wealth, the gold ink-stand on the writing-table by her, the silver-topped spirit-bottles and ash-trays, the Turkish carpet, the exquisitely-framed proof-etchings on the walls, betokened a luxurious taste, endowed with the power to gratify its predilections. Gwendoline frowned, it was here that poor Rene had spent her deceitful and all-too-short honeymoon.

Idly Gwen picked up a paper, to escape her own thoughts. She did not wish to lose her nerve. Her decision to interview Victor Ashford—without her sister's permission—had been a sudden one, veiled by a quite excusable fib. Hitherto her communications with him had been carried on through the medium of her solicitor; it was that gentleman who, some hours earlier, had conveyed to them the rumour of Victor Ashford's intended marriage.

Gwendoline started, and the paper she had been contemplating dropped from her grasp. Her gaze had fallen upon a paragraph. It read:

"According to the immemorial custom of the Ashford family, the banns of the forthcoming marriage between Mr. Victor Ashford and Miss Audrey Dacre were called yesterday in the Church of St. Bennet, at Liversedge, Somersetshire, where the ceremony will take place. The Ashfords have always followed this method of conferring to the marriage laws. It is believed that an Ashford has never been married by license or elsewhere than at St. Bennet's. By the way, Miss Dacre is now at Dacre Park near Liversedge, the bride and bridegroom's families being neighbours. Mr. Ashford himself will shortly go to Ashford Court, Liversedge, in readiness for the wedding."

So it was true! Victor Ashford, depending upon the reluctance of Irene to cause and face a public scandal, and confident in the invalidity of his marriage with her, was about to place it out of his own power to go through a second and binding ceremony with her. Gwendoline knew that upon the cherished hope of this, her sister had been brooding for months. Would she survive the discovery that its fulfilment would soon be impossible?

A shudder ran through Gwendoline Bellasis—she remembered Irene's pathetic cry: "If I could only put on my wedding-ring again!" She thought of the ring itself, laid away in tissue-paper, its wrappings moistened with bitter tears.

"He shall not do it," she exclaimed aloud; "I will not let him do it!"

"Who shall not do what, Miss Bellasis?" asked a mocking voice; "am I correct in concluding that the threat applies to your humble servant, Victor Ashford?"

Gwen sprang to her feet, a square-shouldered, clean-shaven personage, of medium height and dressed in irreproachable evening garments, stood before her. His small grey eyes, his florid complexion, his deep jaw and low forehead showed him to be all that she had imagined. She wondered how love could ever have blinded Irene to his obvious selfishness and brutality.

"You are Mr. Ashford," she said, "so your servant had been instructed to lie to me or to my sister if we should call? I guessed as much. Yes, I did mean you, Mr. Ashford; I know that you are going to be married again. It is a crime, you are my sister's husband!"

Victor Ashford smiled. "Fortunately," he rejoined, "the chain which bound me to that folly had a weak link. Who can blame me for snapping it?"

"That is false," declared Gwen; "you knew the marriage laws well enough, too well. You planned deliberately the whole fiendish piece of wickedness."

A gesture of indifference was Victor Ashford's response. "I have offered to provide amply for your sister," he said.

Gwen flashed out into passion.

"Never!" she cried; "never while I live—unless you will repair the treachery you have practised upon her."

Ashford snapped his fingers. "Impossible!" he replied; "but, as I informed you through my lawyers, any reasonable allowance——"

Gwendoline drew a deep breath. "I came here, Mr. Ashford," she said, "to humble my pride, and to beg you, for Rene's sake, to make her happy, to give her back her self respect. I hate you, I always shall hate you, but I would have hidden my hatred lest it should harm her. You not only refuse to do her justice, however, you insult us. Well, I will punish you. You shall not do as you intend. I will prevent this marriage."

Ashford's florid countenance grew purple, but he tried to sneer.

"You cannot," he retorted, "I defy you to do that. And if you did, it would not help your sister. All the scandal in the world would not get me to legalise our marriage—you would only torture her unavailingly. Be sensible, persuade her to accept five hundred a year, and to cry quits."

"You shall see what I will do," answered Gwendoline, contemptuously; "good day, Mr. Ashford." She turned her back upon him, went through the hall, and let herself out, her heart beating with anger and despair. A quick step sounded at her side. It was that of Victor Ashford—he had put on his hat and followed her.

"Listen to reason, you mad thing!" he exclaimed; "will eight hundred, a thousand a year do?"

"Not a million," said Gwendoline, and kept on her way in the increasing dusk of the quiet Court quarter. Ashford caught at her wrist.

"What am I to do with you?" he hissed; "you will ruin your sister's peace of mind and make a gazing-stock of her to

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no purpose. Curse you, I didn't count on your going blindly for revenge. Will nothing shut your mouth?"

"Repair the flaw in your marriage," she told him, "and I will be as silent as the grave."

"Never!" snarled Ashford; "I will see you and her——!" And he finished his sentence with an oath. Gwendoline shook off his hold, and would have hurried on, but he seized her hand again. "Be sensible, you fool!" he gasped; "you must, you shall strike a bargain with me."

There was an abrupt intervention. A powerful arm slipped between her and her persecutor, a grasp of iron was laid upon Ashford's shoulder, and he was thrown violently aside.

"Drop that, you blackguard!" said the new-comer, drawing himself up to the height of a good six feet, increased by a tall opera hat and a long dust-coat; "if this were Australia instead of England, I'd treat you to a good thrashing. But I don't suppose this lady wants a police-court subpœna from an officious bobby."

Victor Ashford bit his lip, muttered another oath, and slipped off under cover of the night. Gwendoline's rescuer raised his hat.

"Pray let me see you on your way a little," he added, lightly; "who knows, the scoundrel might molest you again. Some people seem to think—begging your pardon—that a pretty face is a sufficient excuse for thrusting their attentions upon its owner."

They walked on together as far as Piccadilly Circus, Gwendoline's companion chatting genially about the weather and the density of the traffic. She could not help noticing, in shy feminine glances, that he was a bronzed, well set-up fellow with a gallant bearing, and a free stride. In the Circus she stopped.

"I can get a 'bus here," she said; "thank you very, very much."

"Not at all," was the answer; "you'll repay me extravagantly if you will permit me to give you my card—I'm from down under, Australia, that is." And he produced his pocket-book, without waiting for her permission.

Gwen accepted the slip of paste-board, but did not look at it, and, to the Colonial's obvious disappointment, made no offer to disclose her own identity.

When she was safely seated inside the 'bus, she glanced at the card. It bore the name "Philip Ross," and the Colonial had found time to scrawl upon it the address of a London hotel.

SECOND CHAPTER.

"I Should Like to be Your Friend."

"How far is this place from Dacre Park? I suppose you could drive me over?"

Gwendoline Bellasis asked the question. She was sitting in the corner of a wide, low-ceiled room, at a round table with a snowy cloth upon it. Old sporting pictures, stuffed birds, and preserved fresh-water fish in glass cases decorated the walls about her, and the scented breeze blew in through the open latticed window, where the slant rays of the afternoon sunbeams crept between flowering creepers and trails of ivy.

Her attendant—a fresh-cheeked, country damsel, with short skirts and a white apron, curtsied.

"Yes, miss," she said, in the quaint accent of the Somersetshire dialect, "if you wanted us. But it is hardly worth while charging you for putting the horse to, Dacre Park gates is only about three miutes from here, past St. Bennet's Church on the other side of the road, and the avenue goes straight up to the house."

"Thank you," answered Gwen, gravely, setting down her cup and pushing away her plate, "then I think I will walk." And she looked at her watch.

"Dear me, miss!" exclaimed the waitress, "you've eaten scarcely a mouthful! Be you stopping here overnight, miss?" she inquired, standing with her hands on her hips in a friendly attitude; "because there's only one good train out of Liversedge this evening, and that's in half an hour. But perhaps you will be staying at the Park, miss, begging your pardon."

Gwen knitted her brows. "I shall not do that under any circumstances," she replied, "and it is plainly quite impossible for me to catch that train. Indeed, I did not count on doing so. You had better see about a room for me, and take my portmanteau upstairs. I rather anticipated having to remain in Liversedge this evening."

"Yes, miss," rejoined the attendant, and went away to execute her instructions. Gwendoline leant her head on her palm and pondered.

"Almost six o'clock," she said, "I have just time to get there before dinner, it would not do to leave it till afterwards. I wonder what Sir John Dacre will say to me. Will he hear me out, will he be sympathetic, will he be insolent, will he—oh, what is the use of wondering? I must go and put my fate—and Irene's—to the test."

She unfastened a small bag that swung at her wrist and spread its contents out on the table.

"So much for the proofs," she murmured; "his letters to her, his photograph, the false marriage certificate, her poor little wedding ring. They will—they must believe me."

Thus assuring herself, she restored the pathetic series of evidences to her bag. The short-skirted country girl had re-entered the apartment.

"I have kept a room for you, miss," she said, "and this is the visitor's book, if you will write your name in it."

She proffered the soiled volume and a pen. Gwendoline hesitated a moment, then took the latter and signed—a bold "Gwendoline Bellasis."

The waitress spelt it over admiringly and carried off the volume.

Gwen began to put on her gloves at the window. As she stood there, gazing out at the scene in front of the inn—it was a Saturday afternoon, and the benches before the door were crowded with stolid agricultural labourers chatting over their ale—a motor-car shot by down the road. In the driver's seat was Victor Ashford. Gwen drew a sharp aspiration.

"So the papers were right," she muttered; "well, what will be will be, I half hoped——"

She checked herself, buttoned her gloves, took up her parasol, and went out of the inn into the late sunshine. The drinkers on the benches stared at her amazingly as she passed them. Whatever her mission to Liversedge might be, she had been wise enough to lend it the support of a careful, even smart costume, and her graceful figure and fine dark features gave her an air of breeding, even of rank.

The waitress was evidently an excellent judge of distances, for exactly three minutes walking brought Gwendoline Bellasis to the gates of Dacre Park. She gained the head of the avenue, and rang at the great entrance under the pillared portico.

"Take Sir John Dacre my card," she desired the footman who appeared. The servant bowed to the ground. He imagined the hard-working young artist a chance caller of distinction.

"Yes, madam," he said, and escorted her with stiff gravity to a huge, old-fashioned reception room close by. Gwen sat down, for her knees were quaking under her, despite her calm exterior. A lapse of some moments allowed her to regain her equanimity.

A door opened and closed behind her, she rose and turned to perceive a tall, lean, frock-coated person, at once pompous and severe.

"Miss Bellasis," he observed politely, "I understand that you wished to see me, a request that I willingly grant, though I cannot recollect that I have had the —pleasure——"

"We—we meet for the first time, it is true," said Gwen, bravely, "but I have ventured to believe, Sir John, that you will hear me none the less patiently. I come on a serious, even a tragic errand."

"Indeed, indeed!" responded Sir John Dacre, conventionally; "pray be seated."

Gwen acted on the suggestion, and her host followed her example, crossing his legs in a formal, dignified pose. "Your daughter, Sir John," she began, "Miss Dacre is to marry Mr. Victor Ashford."

Sir John Dacre inclined his head.

"I—I— scarcely know how to tell you what I have to tell," she pursued, "but it amounts to this, that, by nine-tenths of the law, and every dictate of honour and justice, Mr. Ashford is already married—to my sister."

Sir John Dacre rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and the hard, cold caution expressed in his spare countenance, grew more pronounced. Gwendoline produced the contents of the bag at her wrist.

"I do not speak without proofs," she added, "here are his letters to her, here is his portrait, signed by him 'Your own true husband,' here is their marriage certificate—the certificate of an invalid marriage, I own, but a marriage in the eyes of God and society. My sister, Sir John, is a girl of eighteen, as delicate as she is lovely. Mr. Ashford's repudiation of her is breaking her heart; his marriage with your daughter will kill her. You are a father, and, no doubt, a magistrate—will you allow this match to go on?"

The other coughed. "Miss Bellasis," he said, "I gather that I speak to a very able woman, and I may admit that, with the exception of actual names, Ashford did confess to me something of a mock marriage into which he was inveigled, and I consulted my solicitor about the matter. Young men are proverbially fools, but that is no reason why they should ruin, by their folly, the plans of older and wiser folk. This marriage between my daughter and Victor Ashford is inevitable—it joins two estates and two fortunes that have been rivals for three hundred years. However, I recommended Ashford to make a reasonable, even lavish compensation; I understood he had done so."

"We refused it!" cried Gwen passionately, "we always will refuse it, till he does justice to her. Our lawyer advised us that, cleverly as Ashford worked through others, he may have rendered himself liable to criminal prosecution, and that, in any case, Rene could demand crushing damages on a breach of promise action. We will not bring it. I will not sell my sister, or see her sold. In time Victor Ashford's heart may soften towards his deceived girl-wife, he may, he must legalise their marriage. But he cannot if he marries your daughter. In Heaven's name, Sir John, for the sake of your own manhood and your own innocent child, break off this match."

Sir John Dacre thrust back his chair with a warning exclamation. A woman had just entered the room—a young woman, yet matured with a dazzling maturity. She was above the middle height, with a wealth of brown locks and a complexion of alabaster. She was dressed for dinner, and her neck and arms shone whitely in the late sunshine.

"One moment, Audrey," said Sir John, "I—I am engaged."

At the words Gwen started from her chair, flung herself at the newcomer's feet, and clasped her knees.

"You are Miss Dacre," she cried; "it is to you I must appeal then, as a woman to a woman on behalf of a woman. Miss Dacre, my sister is Victor Ashford's wife, not legally, because of the fraud he caused to be practised upon her, but his wife in your sight and the sight of all good and honest people."

Audrey Dacre released herself violently. "Oh, the little red-headed girl," she said. "Victor told me of her. What more does she want? He has done something handsome for her, I suppose."

Gwendoline staggered up. "You are a wicked, wicked woman, Audrey Dacre," she gasped, "and I could almost pray that you and your father may live to suffer as you are making Rene suffer. But I will not, I will leave you to your fate. As for Victor Ashford, I have not finished with him yet. Let me get out of here—I am suffocating; I know—I knew you would not do right by my darling, something told me! You are not human, you are fiends—let me go!"

She darted out of the tall French window on to the lawn, hurried like a wild thing through the long avenue, out at the gates, and down the road. Then her limbs failed her. She dropped and sank upon a gnarled stump on the grassy edge of a plantation whose shadows the setting sun threw far across the road and the meadows beyond.

Crouching on the felled tree-stump in the golden evening, Gwendoline covered her face and wept.

Unexpectedly she felt a hand on her shoulder, and glancing up, saw, to her utter amazement, the young Colonial who, a few days before, had delivered her from the clutches of Victor Ashford.

"Pardon me," he began, then stopped, staring at her. "The—the lady of St. James's, by Jupiter," he said, "I am glad to see you again, that is, I should be glad if I knew that you weren't in trouble, or unwell. Can't I do anything?—it would be a real pleasure and an honour—you never gave me your card the other night, in the hurry of catching your 'bus."

Gwen tottered to her feet indignantly. "You didn't—you haven't dared to follow me!" she exclaimed.

"Not for worlds," answered Philip Ross; "I have business in these parts, business that brought me all the way from Australia. But do take my arm, you look positively faint, and, to be honest, I've done nothing but think about you ever since we parted that night. I should awfully like to be your friend."

Gwendoline Bellasis recoiled. "Please," she begged, "leave me to myself, I shall be better soon. I have had rather a shock, that is all."

"Won't you let me see you again?" pleaded the Australian, almost boyishly. Gwen laughed hysterically.

"Yes," she said, "I shall go to church in the morning, at St. Bennet's, the parish church up the road there. If you go to church we shall meet. I must be there without fail."

"Thank you," answered Philip Ross, and lifted his hat. "Then I shall also be at St. Bennet's."

He walked off up the road, sauntered towards the inn, and ascended to his room. Here he threw open the casement, found a paper-backed novel, lighted a cigarette and puffed drowsily. He was thinking of his curious double encounter with the dark beauty.

So long did he puff and dream that at last he dropped asleep. When he woke it was twilight. He stretched himself and descended, his thoughts turning towards supper.

As he lounged down the passage he found himself fronting the partially open door of a bed chamber. Within, in the glow of a lighted candle, stood a woman—the woman he had met so strangely in St. James's and in the lane outside. She was bending over something and he saw her hands move. The light glinted on something bright—she was loading a tiny revolver.

(The conclusion of this tale appears in next Tuesday's "Short Stories.")

Ethel (who thinks her country cousin nervous): "Can't you find anything better to squeeze than a felt hat?" Country Cousin: "Wait a bit; I'm only reducing my energy for fear I might hurt you."

"Gil Tedge showed me his new book last night, and asked what I thought of it." "Is it good?" "No. The only attractive thing about it is the design on the cover." "What did you tell him?" "I said I thought it was bound to succeed."

He was a pretty little youngster, with little fat legs that stuck out beneath clean, stiff-starched clothes. "What are you going to do when you grow to be a man?" asked a visitor. The little fellow's face assumed an expression of earnest gravity as he responded with a voice which was evidently shaken by sad memories of the past: "Whip papa."

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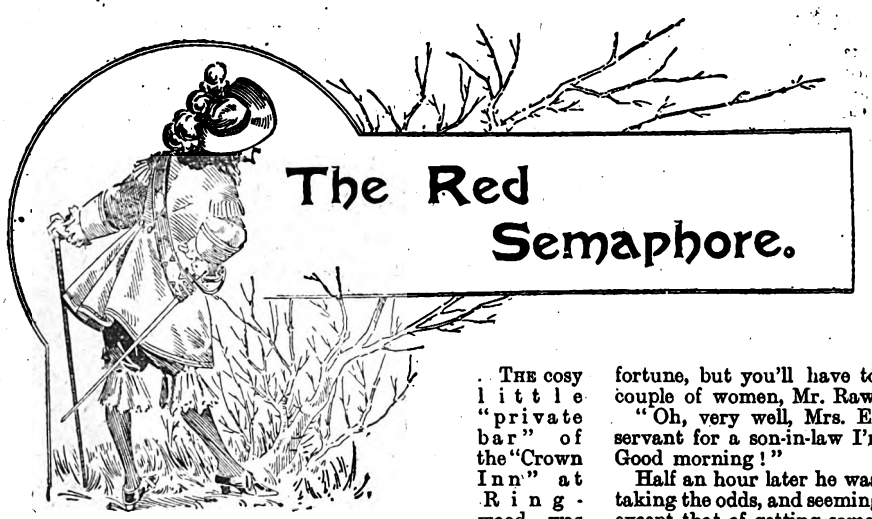

The Red Semaphore.

THE cosy little "private bar" of the "Crown Inn" at Ringwood was crowded.

Bookmakers, and representatives of the betting fraternity from London and from the neighbouring county town of Dunchester, elbowed one another, and made the almost primitive atmosphere of the place reek with "horsey" talk, and with worse than "horsey" expletive.

It was the first day of Ringwood races, the course being about half a mile from the village on the road from Dunchester.

Of all the crowd who were taxing to the full the energy and patience of pretty Madge Ellerton, one there was who, leaning with his elbow on the pewter-covered counter, with an air of semi-appropriateness, had apparently eyes and ears only for the handmaid daughter of the house. Living at Dunchester, five miles away, scarcely a day passed without his coming over to Ringwood, where he not only made hot love to Madge, but sorely disturbed the maternal peace of the buxom hostess of the "Crown."

Dick Rawson's occupation, or, rather, the lack of it, was a mystery to most people, for well, if somewhat flashily dressed, well fed, and well provided with ready money, he seemed to be ever idle, to be always the man of means.

To the observant eye, he looked what he was, a dabbler in "prices;" a dependent upon his own wits. Mrs. Ellerton detested, because she distrusted him, and lost no opportunity of plainly hinting to him her candid opinion.

His personal appearance was not prepossessing. Of middle height, lean of feature as of figure, his light, lashless eyes had that shifty uneasiness which always creates suspicion in straightforward minds. He looked forty, and was probably ten years younger.

"Madge," he was whispering on this particular morning, "I shall want an answer from you to-day. I hear that signalman chap from the railway is making up to you."

"Will Varge? And supposing he is, Mr. Rawson, that would be his business, not yours!" she answered with spirit.

"I deny that! His love is nothing to mine; while I can give you ten times more, in comfort, in money, in everything. Will Varge!"

The tone of contempt in which he spoke his rival's name fairly roused the little beauty's anger.

"Mr. Rawson!" she said, almost loud enough for the others to hear, "I've known Will all my life. Of you I know nothing, beyond that which you choose to tell me. Well, since you have heard so much, I will tell you that Will Varge has asked me to marry him, and—and I haven't said no! That will serve for any answer you may want of me. Good morning, sir!"

By this time the crowd of racing men had melted away, Dick Rawson being the only one left.

He was about to reply to the girl; and, if his flushed face might be taken as a true index of his intention, none too politely, but was stopped by a voice at his elbow.

"Look here, Mr. Rawson! my girl's words are mine! We don't want you—nor your custom for that matter! We're only poor folk, and my husband has been fortune-hunting on the other side of the world for these last ten years. But see here! (and the excited dame flourished a letter before him) my George has landed in England again, and, please God! will be home to-day! I don't suppose he's brought a fortune, but you'll have to do with *him* now! not with a couple of women, Mr. Rawson!"

"Oh, very well, Mrs. Ellerton! If you prefer a railway servant for a son-in-law I'm sorry for your taste, that's all. Good morning!"

Half an hour later he was seen upon the course, laying and taking the odds, and seemingly oblivious to every other interest except that of getting something for practically nothing.

But in the midst of all the whirl and clamour, the cheating and the confusion, one dominant idea possessed him—to be even with the man who had come between him and the woman he wanted.

Love Madge, as a good man loves, he did not, for—he could not; it was outside his nature. To such a man, revenge—unreasoning revenge—comes easily, and grows without effort.

He did not go near the "Crown" again, but watched for some chance which should give him the points of the game.

About four o'clock he fancied that he saw Madge passing along a lane to the left of him, in the direction of the railway cutting.

It was in this cutting that the signal-box, in relief charge of Will Varge, was situated, a good mile the Ringwood side of Dunchester Junction.

The signal post, with its green semaphore at "caution," was clearly in view from where he was, but even as he looked the figure he was following with his eyes suddenly disappeared.

"I must have been mistaken! It couldn't have been her," he muttered to himself.

Then a boyish laugh immediately behind him made him turn sharply round. It was a youngster of thirteen or so on some bird-nesting or similar expedition bent.

"Hullo, Jim!" cried Rawson. "Anybody at home?"

"Only mother! Sis has gone to see Will Varge at the home signal-box."

"Then it *was* her I saw just now in front of me," said Rawson, carefully concealing his exultation.

"Of course it was!" said the lad. "She's gone to tell him about dad's coming home. The letter came after he went on duty. Five o'clock express he's coming by into Dunchester. The train passes Will's box at two minutes to."

Rawson had always made a friend of the boy, who was too young to see the wolf through the sheep's clothing. Jim was, therefore, quite ready to impart this wonderful bit of family news to the gentleman, who was always so over liberal in the matter of seasonable "tips."

He got one now—a brand new half-crown.

"My! You are a brick!" he cried. "I think I'll get back. There's a circus in Tarrant's field, and it begins at six!"

Rawson for a moment watched the boy as he ran at full speed back towards the village.

"I've got you now—both of you!" he said, smiting his clenched right hand into his open left. "By the company's rules no one is allowed in the box. No signalman, also, is allowed to leave his box. She's made him break one rule, I'll make him break the other. Then we'll see who'll win the odd trick and the pool! It won't be Mr. Will Varge, I'm thinking!"

* * * * * * * *

The intermittent ticking of the telegraph receiving in

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strument in signal-box No. 52 afforded a sleepy sort of accompaniment to Will Varge's thoughts as he looked at his watch at twenty minutes to five.

He was a smart, good-looking young fellow, six feet in his stockings, and with the limbs of a Hercules.

"I'll go straight up to the 'Crown,'" he was saying, "when I go off at six. I hope that Rawson chap won't be hanging around. He's a bad 'un, I'll swear! He never looks you square in the face. I've got an idea he and I are going to have words afore long. Well," and Will drew a mighty breath and threw his shoulders back, "hard words break no bones, they say. I don't know, p'raps mine may, if I fling 'em straight from the shoulder!"

The line would be clear now till seven minutes to the hour, when the ordinary passenger train from London would pass the box, to be followed in five minutes by the express. Consequently Will had a few spare moments for musing purposes.

"As soon as ever Madge and I are married I'll take her away from Ringwood, and out o' sight of that wretched business. I hate a public for any girl—encouraging loafing blackguards like Dick Rawson, as only lives by swindling silly fools, with more money than wit."

Leaning lazily against the rear side of the box, he failed to see a dainty, sun-bonneted little figure making its way down the rough wood steps let in flush with the bank.

The front and two sides of the box were from breast-high upward, of glass, including the door. When, therefore, he heard a rapping at the door, but could see no one, he was, for a moment, puzzled.

Then, striding to the door, he threw it wide open.

"Why, Madgie!" he cried. "Who'd have thought of seeing you?"

Stooping down on the top step of the little flight leading up to the box from the ground was Madge, her eyes full of mischief, and her cheeks as blushingly red as any rose or peony in her mother's garden.

"May I come in, Will?" she said, getting up, and putting one pretty little foot over the sill.

"I'm afraid not, dearie," he answered her, hesitatingly. "It's the company's rule that no one's allowed inside. I'd get the sack if I broke it."

"Well, Will, *you* shan't break it, for *I* will," and before he could make further protest she was standing by his side at the lever rack.

He was too happy in her presence to chide her, and, seeing that she was overflowing with something to tell him, he just let her say on.

"Will! read that!" she went on, holding a letter right under his nose.

"Who's it from?" he asked.

"Father!"

"Your father! Why it's from Southampton!"

"Yes! yes! yes! he's come back, Will! And, though he doesn't say so, he *may* have brought a fortune with him! Read, you dear old silly! He's coming from Southampton by the express!"

The last word roused him to his duty.

"Stand back, Madge! The four fifty-three ordinary will pass in two minutes, and I must stand by," he said, catching hold of the "white" lever.

"Oh, do let me see how you work them, Will! I've always longed to know!"

"Sweetheart! if you do remain—which is a risk, for the inspector or anybody might come along. Keep quite quiet—don't speak a word, till I've got these two trains through."

He resolutely stamped his foot, and resisted the temptation to turn round and look at her.

Rattle! rattle! rattle!—p—r-r-r-r-r!

Just inclining his head to the left, he could see the "ordinary," overdue two minutes, sweeping along the two miles of "dead straight."

Back went the lever, and, with a grinding thud, the "white" semaphore dropped to "go on." Half-a-dozen seconds later the "ordinary" whizzed by, to gradually slow up into Dunchester.

Will Varge was in the act then of moving to close the door when a man sprang up the steps and put the weight of his body against it to keep it open.

It was Dick Rawson!

"I suppose," he said, with a cool sneer, "that I could get you into trouble for entertaining young ladies in your box while on duty?"

Two more minutes and the express would pass, and would need stopping; he could not bandy words with the other till the "red semaphore" was up.

"Miss Madge!" continued Rawson, "your mother has sent me for you; has asked me to take you home without delay."

"Will! it isn't true! Mother would not ask *him* to come even near me."

"That is very nice and polite of you," said Rawson, making a step forward into the box, "but——"

Will Varge never exactly knew how things came about after that.

To let go the "red" lever, and, with a cry of "liar!" to clutch Rawson by the throat was, however, the work of a second.

The impact was terrific.

In close embrace the two men rolled heavily down the steps on to the permanent way.

Rawson, though hurt by his backward fall, and struggling with all his might to loose Will's grip of his throat, was alive to a warning sound, every second becoming more and more distinct.

It was the express! The white cloud of steam just appearing as the train entered upon the two miles of straight.

Then Will heard it.

"Madge!" he shrieked, "pull the 'red' lever! Pull hard, for God's sake!"

The girl was paralysed with fear. Will's voice seemed to come through miles of space.

Only a mile away now.

"Madge! Pull the 'red' lever—now!"

The last word, shot out with all the remaining force of despair, reached her. She woke to a realisation of the truth.

Will—her Will!—in deadly struggle right in the path of the oncoming express; the passenger train waiting still in Dunchester Station—her father's life, too, in peril!

She could almost feel the hot damp steam of the express engine on her cheek.

Staying no more to dream or think, she seized the "red" lever, and pulling it back with all the strength of her little arms, she heard the semaphore "lock-up" into its place.

Then she fainted.

The express pulled up within a score of feet of the two men, Will uppermost, his fingers still on Rawson's throat.

One of the passengers by the express, a big, bearded, elderly man, accompanied the guard to see what was the matter.

"Why it's Will Varge!" said the passenger.

Will heard him, and pointing to the signal-box, said—"You had better go to Madge, if you are Mr. Ellerton!"

The father found his daughter unconscious in a heap on the floor of the box, by the lever handles.

It did not take him long to rouse her, and on the journey home she told him the whole tale, and how that she was to blame for tempting Will from his duty.

However, nobody blamed her much; not even Will, who, as he had prophesied, was discharged from the company's service.

It is satisfactory to know that Dick Rawson left Dunchester for London soon after his encounter with his rival; the latter place offering him a wider field for the shady operations in which his soul delighted.

As Mr. Ellerton returned with even a more than fair "pile," the order soon went forth for an evacuation of the "Crown Inn," and for the building of a comfortable house on the site of the cottage where he himself had been born.

Madge and Will were to be married on the day the house was finished. The happy pair were then to sail for the place in Queensland, which Mr. Ellerton had left for his native land.

Ralph Enderby.

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A Frustrated Elopement.

Told by a Britisher who Lives in Texas.

NELLY WARDEN was the belle of James County; there could be no doubt of that. Some said in the whole of Texas, but that was more problematical.

No one denied, however, that she was one of the prettiest little maids that ever stepped,—laughing blue eyes, roguish red lips, and a skin with just the least touch of brown where the fiery Texas sun had kissed it. And there wasn't a boy in the section that wouldn't have given his right hand for that same privilege. But she would have none of us, though goodness knows we hung round the Warden ranch in a most disgustingly obvious manner. Her three big brothers never wanted for chums, and her poor old father positively couldn't move without having some of Nelly's suitors buzzing round him. For, you see, we were all so keen on getting her, that we couldn't afford to let the other fellows steal a march on us by making friends at court. But in spite of all our efforts Solomon himself couldn't have told which one of us she favoured—if she favoured any one at all.

She had a laugh and a smile for every one of us—but as to a preference! Some of the married men, just to worry us, used to say that the right man hadn't arrived yet, and we boys would feel for our pistols and hint that if he wasn't a born and bred James County man, the stranger would find things unhealthy for him.

There were, I should say, about eight of us boys who wanted to marry Nelly Warden, and, in spite of our rivalry, we were all pretty good friends. With one exception. He was Juan Sola, a Mexican from over the border—a regular fiery Spanish "greaser" of the old style. He was a magnificent horseman, and to see him come thundering up to the Warden ranch—big silver spurs, silver-worked saddle and bridle, and jaunty hat—made us fellows green with jealousy when we thought of our sorry steeds and string and leather equipment. Still, Juan didn't get on any better than the rest of us. He was always welcome; so were we. He stopped to dinner or tea; so did we. And he went away no forr'arder.

But as time went on we began to notice that the Mexican was not exactly contented with the progress he was making in his wooing. His was one of those impetuous natures which brook no obstacles, and it galled him to think that he, Juan Sola, owner of a big ranch, the handsomest man in the border, who could have had any dark-eyed Mexican señorita he chose for his wife, could not make headway with the little blue-eyed Nelly Warden. And we saw that he scowled blackly at times as he rode home over the border.

And so the days passed away, until one night Jim Warden—that was Nelly's eldest brother—came to my shanty in a high state of excitement.

"Dick," said he, dropping into a chair and mopping the perspiration from his face. "I've got a most extraordinary bit of news for you. Juan Sola is going to elope with Nell!"

"Elope with Nell!" I roared. "You mean she's going to marry him? Has she——"

"Steady, old man," said Jim, with a smile. "Perhaps I didn't ought to have put it that way. But now listen—I'm serious. I was down at San Roca about some horses to-day, and who should I meet there but Pete, one of Sola's servants. You remember him? The man I dragged away from that mad bull last year."

I nodded.

"Well, the old chap seemed confused at seeing me, and it seemed to me somehow that he's got something on his mind. At first, when I asked him what was amiss, he tried to pass it off, but then he suddenly turned to me and told me that he wouldn't have it on his conscience to deceive a man who had saved his life. Of course I asked him what on earth he meant about deceiving me. Then out came his whole budget. I promised him I'd see he didn't suffer, and came straight on to see you about the business. To put it in a nutshell, what he told me was this: His master has got tired of hanging round Nelly without result, and he has resolved to kidnap her, take her across the border to one of his *estancias* in the mountains, and there get a priest to marry them, while we're hunting around for our poor girl."

"Good heavens!" I cried, for although wild doings took place on the border, I had never dreamt of anything quite so comprehensive as this. "And when does this game come off?"

Jim leant forward.

"To-morrow night, my boy," he said impressively. "Juan Sola and two servants are to wait for Nelly as she rides across to Mellor's for her music lesson. She always goes alone, as the villain knows, and the job can be done as easy as winking."

"She mustn't stir out, that's all," I said hastily. "Great Scott! what can we do to the fellow?"

"My dear chap," said Jim, "if we simply content ourselves with keeping Nelly safe under lock and key we can do *nothing* to him, because we lack proof. But I've got a scheme."

He broke off and chuckled.

"Out with it, man!" I cried, for his merriment nettled me.

"We must go through with the kidnapping business, that's all!" he said, becoming suddenly sober.

"What! Let Nelly get taken!" I cried.

"Yes, and no!" said Jim, his eyes dancing with merriment at my bewilderment. "Juan shall kidnap somebody, if he can—*but it won't be Nelly.* See?"

"I'm hanged if I do!" I said. "Who should he take, if not Nelly?"

"We'll provide someone," said Jimmy. "You blockhead! Don't you understand? Somebody must play Nelly, for this occasion only. Then when our gay Mexican rides up to start his girl-lifting lay, we chime in and trot out *our* part of the play. And, by Jove!" he added grimly, "I've got some mighty pretty lines in my act!"

Dawn was now breaking in upon me.

"But who is going to pretend to be Nell?" I asked. "It's going to be a mighty unhealthy part. Sola's not a man to stand any monkey tricks, and he's very handy with his guns."

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"I know," said Jim. "He's a dead shot, and he's more than likely to get mad when he realises he's been fooled and won't be able to show his nose this side of the border again. It can't be a girl, Dick, it's too risky. She'd be just as likely to stop a bullet as one of us, if I know anything of the greaser."

"Yes," said I. "That rather beats us, doesn't it?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Jim. Then he looked at me critically. "I've got it!" he cried. "*You* shall play Nelly, Dick!"

"Me!" I said, and my voice was so strange that Jim roared again.

"Yes—you," he continued. "You've got a slight, girlish figure, my boy—don't hit me!—your face is innocent of hair, and you'll make an A 1 girl when we've done with you. We'll borrow one of Nell's gowns and her big flop hat, and a wig out of the box we had for the theatricals last spring, and your own mother wouldn't know you."

"Don't talk rubbish, Jim!" I said, hotly. "Do you think I am a fool? What sort of freak should I look got up like that?"

"We're playing for a big stake!" said Jim, becoming grave again; "and if we come out all right you ought to stand in for something. I like you, Dick, and I should like to see you get our Nell. Don't you think if you and I pull this through it'll send you up in her estimation? You do as I tell you, my boy, and I'll be your best man yet."

From that moment I was as wax in his hands.

* * * * *

The time had come. Miss Nelly Warden, otherwise Dick Travers, attired in her pretty blue print gown, and her big flop hat, which effectually concealed her face, set out on her black mare to ride to the house of old Ma'am Morrell, who gave music-lessons. Miss Nelly rode side-saddle—but between you and me I found it confoundedly uncomfortable, and my gown wouldn't set right somehow round about where I had got my two trusty six-shooters tucked.

I didn't feel happy. I knew that away down the trail somewhere Jim and Tom Warden was waiting, their pistols on the cock. The old servant had told Jim pretty exactly the spot where the ambush would be laid, and Jim and Tom had arranged so as to be on hand when wanted. Still, things might go wrong, and if so I stood to get a couple of leaden pellets through my head instead of leading little Nelly Warden to the altar. For Juan Sola had a way of shooting on sight when he got mad, and then his vicinity became distinctly unhealthy.

Hark! What was that? A scurry in the underbrush, a rush of men and horses, and a cloak had been thrown over my

"I threw off his grasp and sprang to my feet, drawing my revolver as I did so."

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head and I was dragged backwards off my horse to the ground. Some very unladylike exclamations which I let drop as I struggled to escape were fortunately lost in the confusion.

Then came the thud of hoofs, and I heard Jim's voice demanding what was amiss. For answer came an oath in Sola's voice, and a rough command to stand out of the way.

"What's that behind you?" cried Jim. "Great heavens, you villain, is that my sister?"

Apparently he made one step towards the Mexican, who threw out his arm and fired at him, and with a groan poor Jim dropped. Quick as lightning Tom Warden fired on Sola, but missed, and I began to think it was time I assisted in the fighting. I was lying on the ground entangled in the horse-cloak, and as I struggled to rise Sola suddenly seized me by the arm with the intention of pulling me to my feet. In the darkness he had not yet discovered the deception.

I threw off his grasp, and sprang to my feet, drawing my revolver as I did so. A strange figure I must have looked standing there in my blue skirt. My big "flop hat" hung round my neck by its ribbon, and my wig had fallen off.

One searching glance the Mexican threw at me, then he realised the truth.

"Fooled!" he shrieked, and let drive a bullet at me. I had ducked at the flash, but a hot, tearing pain in my left arm told me that his aim was good. I fired at him, but missed him badly, and in a second he had mounted and turned to fly, his two servants riding beside him.

"Mount and after then," roared Tom, who was fat and heavy. "I must look after my brother."

I needed no further incentive. I leapt on to my horse—Nelly's horse—and in a moment I was after them. My mare was fresher than theirs, and I gained rapidly on them. Suddenly, in obedience from an order from Sola, one of the servants turned back and rode at me, but a bullet from my Colt took him in the shoulder, and he rode off howling in a direction at right angles to that in which we were galloping.

The second servant was apparently in a terrible panic, and at last he swerved off and left his master alone. Sola, seeing this, turned in his saddle and fired after him, making the silent woods ring with oaths. And all the time I was gaining on him. I knew that if he once got behind a rock there he could pick me off at his leisure, and so I strove my hardest to come up with him, paying no heed to my burning wound. Just as he turned to the corner, and stood outlined for a second against the blue night sky, he turned and fired on me, and our bullets crossed. He took me just above the knee, but mine hit him somewhere under the breastbone, and he pitched out of his saddle heavily. I rode cautiously up, but when I saw his face I knew that the danger was past. Juan Sola was dead!

* * * * *

Quite how I got back to the town I do not know. I must have fainted from pain and loss of blood many times, but the good old horse pulled me through, and carried me safely to the Warden ranch, where Tom, carrying his badly wounded brother, had arrived long before. By the time I arrived the whole story of the frustrated elopement was public property, and great was the rejoicing when I turned up alive, though damaged, the general consensus of opinion having been that when I set out to pursue the Mexican and his two servants I had gone on my last ride.

So poor little Nelly had her hands full, with two great invalids to look after. Jim got better sooner than I did, having only a bullet-track across his ribs, but that was to my advantage, seeing that when he got better she was free to devote more time to me. She made me tell her all about my chase, and how I felt in her gown and hat. I told her a good deal more, too, a good deal that wouldn't interest you, perhaps, But when we told Jim the result of our conversation, of course the silly idiot must slap me on the back, and roar out—"I told you so, Dick! I told you you stood to get something good out of the business!"

As I often tell little Nelly, I did.

Victor Pitt-Kethley.

WHEN IS YOUR BIRTHDAY?

(See Editor's Chat.)

July 22.—A fortunate birthday; good for health and progress in domestic affairs. Benefit will be derived from friends.

Those born in the early morning and from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. will derive the most benefit, but will have some anxiety over love affairs.

A child born to-day will be fortunate, will possess original ideas and good judgment; will be ambitious, fond of change and the uncommon.

July 23.—The indications for a birthday to-day are good for money and business. Much activity; health favourable, and speculations should go well.

To the young courtship and marriage will soon come, especially if born before noon. Girls born after then will have some peculiar experiences in love affairs.

The day is good for marriage, pleasure, and visiting.

A child born to-day will be active, cheerful, and a pleasant companion. Fond of fun, pleasure, and the opposite sex. Very artistic if born in the morning.

July 24.—Not a fortunate year for those whose birthdays come on this day. Sickness and an unsettled time are approaching.

Favourable for those born between 7 and 11 a.m., especially clerks, teachers, and professional persons. Bad for landlords and farmers.

A child born to-day will be of a peculiar disposition and hard to understand. Fond of change. Better for a male than a female.

July 25.—A year bringing many ups and downs and little progress for those who celebrate their birthdays to-day. Don't risk much. Guard against loss and damage to premises.

Rather fortunate for farmers; and persons in employ may be promoted. Lovers will have cause to grieve, many crosses and much deceit.

To-day is evil for dealing with young people, and ladies generally. Ask favours about 7 p.m. Beware of mishaps near 10 p.m.

A child born to-day will be ambitious and proud. Free with money and not very fond of work. Should keep in the employ of others.

July 26.—Clerks and literary persons born on this date will have anxiety, and young girls will need care in love affairs. Those in business will do well with care.

The day is good for dealing with professional persons, seeking work, and buying, especially from 4 to 5 p.m. Evil for signing papers after then.

A child born to-day will be rather fortunate in business, will be quick and clever, though a bit abrupt and crafty, possess a quick wit.

July 27.—Indifferent health is probable this year to those born on this date. The day is unfavourable to business and domestic affairs. Mind unsettled and inclined to change.

Farmers, dealers, builders, and aged persons will have an anxious time. Girls will meet many obstacles in love affairs.

A child born to-day should keep in employ. It will be clever and inventive, but suspicious, reserved, and lack self-confidence.

July 28.—This day brings anxiety in business; go carefully to avoid loss. Don't speculate or lend money. Give extra attention to the health.

The day is evil to speculate or ask favours. Good to do with military men, doctors, and engineers near 6 p.m. Guard against chills.

A child born to-day will be active, generous, and affectionate. Rather fortunate and enterprising. Apt to be too free with money.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton. Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

THE CLIMAX DRAWS NEAR.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. Mary Vernon declares that they are exactly as given to her by Lord Kinross, whereupon Kinross breaks off the engagement. The diamonds subsequently appear as a gift from Fluffy to Mrs. Norton, set in a pair of hat-pins. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket-book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The Society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation. The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room, Cynthia however stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope. While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard.

FRANKIE listened to me unmoved, until I mentioned that Kinross had alluded to Percival as his heir-at-law.

"Kinross said Hope was his cousin, and his heir? Are you sure, Cynthia?"

"Quite."

"But the difference in name, what of that?"

"Percival told Kinross that when he took the name of 'Hope' he had succeeded to a good deal of money, more than he was likely to spend. I suppose he was adopted by some rich relation."

"I remember hearing some talk that a connection of Kinross had changed his name. To think it should be Percival Hope—Pettigrew's secretary. Tell me, Cynthia," she cried eagerly, "did they mention *him* at all—the American, I mean?"

"Not a word. They spoke chiefly of you. Hope declared that within a fortnight he would prove you were——" I paused. I simply couldn't repeat the conversation in cold blood.

"Don't be squeamish, Cynthia. If I don't mind, you needn't. I suppose Hope said I was an adventuress?"

"Yes."

"Anything else?" she glanced at me keenly. "For Heaven's sake don't keep me in suspense," she cried, "speak."

"He said you were a swindler existing on the proceeds of nefarious transactions, and that you duped people. He declared you were leading a false life, under a false name, that you had never married Richard Norton at all."

"And then——" panted Frankie. "Did Kinross strike him, did he sit still and listen to such lies?"

"I didn't wait for Kinross, Frankie. I told Percival Hope what I thought of him myself."

"You? Why, Cynthia, what made you do it?"

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"It wasn't very likely I could sit and hear you abused without defending you, Frankie. I think I made him feel ashamed. I said I had been present at your wedding, and suggested he should write to the Consulate at Bruges, or question Lady Gaveston if he didn't believe me. I went for him like anything, Frankie, and at last he acknowledged you were really Mrs. Norton."

"What of his other accusations? Did he retract them?"

"No. I told him about your estate in Jamaica and Lord Kinross backed me up. But he would not retract a word. He even dared to say he would prove his assertions if I would wait a fortnight. Of course I wouldn't listen to that, but started to fetch you."

"Who stopped you, Cynthia?"

"Hope. Oh, Frankie, imagine what he said, he declared that if I told you what he had been saying, he would deny it all, and accuse me of making it up."

"Was Kinross sorry?"

"I don't know. I said some nasty things to him as well as Percival. I told him I wished he'd go away and not come back. I said I couldn't understand what you found to like in him."

"Why Cynthia, you must have been a perfect termagant. Tell me," she looked curiously into my eyes, "you used to like Percival Hope a little?"

I nodded, the subject was a sore one.

"He cared for you, didn't he, Cynthia?"

"I think so."

"And yet you treat him like this! Simply rave at the poor man. At the very moment too, that you've learnt he has an income too large for him to spend—alone. Why on earth did you do it, child? Don't you see you've spoilt your chance?"

"I don't understand you, Frankie. It seems to me I never do. I used to like Percival Hope, I—I can't help liking him a little even now, but neither he nor anyone else shall say bad things of you in my presence."

"But why, child?" she asked again. "How does it affect you, if they speak ill of me?"

"You are all I have in the world, Frankie. The only person there is for me to love. Shouldn't I be mean, base, and disloyal to let anybody speak against you?"

"I haven't been particularly kind to you, Cynthia. I really don't see why you should care for me. Still——" with a sudden movement she put her arms round me.

"You are a little fool," she said softly. "It doesn't pay to be fond of anybody, but oneself. It certainly won't pay you to be fond of me." Then, with a sigh, "I might have been nicer to you, Cynthia. I wish——" she broke off and kissed my face and hands with a strange tenderness. "I am sorry," she said, "oh, I am sorry——"

"Are you going back to Bruges," she asked presently.

"Not if you want me, Frankie."

"If you do, Percival Hope will follow; you'll forgive him and——"

"I don't mind about Percival or anybody else, Frankie. I am quite content to be with you if——" I paused.

"What is it, Cynthia?"

"Be fond of me sometimes, that's all."

"I always said you were sentimental, Cynthia," she laughed. "You want to make me as bad. Now," she rose, "you must go to bed, it's late."

"Shall you speak to Hope, Frankie, and make him apologise?"

"What's the use? You say he would deny everything. I shall just ignore him and all his works. Kinross is quite right, Hope speaks against me for his own ends. He doesn't want his cousin to marry. He desires to remain the heir-at-law."

"Frankie, you don't *really* care for Lord Kinross?"

"That's the person I care for, Cynthia," she answered, pointing to her reflection in the glass. "Lord Kinross can look after himself, my dear, there's no need for you to worry."

"And Sir John?"

Frankie looked grave. "I think you can trust me with Sir John," she answered.

And with that I was forced to be content.

Lord Kinross looked in for a little while the next day. His relations with my cousin seemed unchanged, his attentions were marked but indefinite. He contrived to get a few words with me before he went.

"Please forgive me, Cynthia," he said softly.

"For what?"

"Let us say for existing. I know you grudge me the right to live. Won't you be friends?" He smiled and put out his hand.

"Like your lordship, I'll make up my mind when Mr. Hope returns, in a fortnight," I replied.

Lord Kinross had the grace to blush.

The next afternoon was our "At Home,"—our first in Pont Street. By this time our visiting list had grown, men used to crowd round Frankie when she drove in the Park, and smart women dropped into lunch.

Lady Gaveston had routed out all her acquaintances, pious people most of them, of good family, with plain daughters and dull sons. To all these Frankie had dispatched "At Home" cards. Some of the folk we had met at Lady Winchin's were requisitioned; also Mrs. Curtis-Blount, and my old friend the pink youth. The men invited certainly outnumbered the women, but if the latter were few, they were, as Frankie said, well chosen, and the rest would follow. Lord Kinross had promised to bring his sister Paula, and Mary Vernon was sure to come. She had answered Frankie's letter with a pretty little note of thanks, but had not yet been to see her.

The rooms looked lovely, Frankie and I decorated them with lilac, laburnum and white narcissus, and Sir John—frightfully busy of late—sent us a sheaf of lilies and a whole lot of roses.

I got dressed early and went downstairs to watch for first arrivals.

Lady Gaveston was seated in the drawing-room, cased in a gown of satin spiked with jet. She was worrying some soft white wool with a pair of hungry-looking needles—knitting she called it.

She stared at me through her glasses. "That's a pretty frock, my dear," she said at last.

"I'm glad you like it, Lady Gaveston. I think it's sweet myself. Frankie has beautiful taste."

My lady clicked her needles and slightly sniffed. My dress was of pale yellow silk falling in pleats from the waist. The bodice was cut without a collar band, and showed my neck above a *berthe* of soft lace, caught into place by a knot of roses, deepest, darkest crimson.

Frankie was gowned in one of her most triumphant toilettes. She wore a canvas of a pale shade of brown—biscuit colour best describes it, with a silk underskirt of *eau de nil*. The dainty fabric caught the shimmer of the silk and gave it a wonderful green effect. The skirt cut very long, was embroidered in *motifs* of blue cloth and silver. The bodice was a confection of silk and lace, with a suggestion of a zouave in blue and silver. A delicious belt of turquoise completed the costume.

Mrs. Curtis-Blount was the first to arrive. She wore mauve with a picture hat of orchids, and looked very smart. Her *cher ami*, the man in glasses, followed in her wake.

"Here I am, dear," she said, "and I've brought Douglas Seton with me. Every little helps, doesn't it? Your rooms

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are large dear, and at first you'll find them difficult to fill."

"You are always thoughtful, Vi," said Frankie, and promptly turned her over to milady, who sternly controlled Vi's frivolity for the remainder of the afternoon.

People came thick and fast after this. Society men introduced by Lord Kinross, military men friends of Sir John, grave and reverend gentlemen invited by the Gavestons. All well-dressed, immaculate in frock coat, patent boots, and the latest thing in buttonholes, all pleased with themselves and not displeased with Frankie. The women dropped in by ones and twos, and seemed astonished to find how many men they knew! Lord Kinross and his sister arrived about half-past four.

Lady Paula was about seventeen, tall and fair with a bright sunny face and a bonny pair of dark blue eyes. I took a fancy to her at once, and she confided to me that she hoped we should be friends.

"My cousin Percival has told me all about you," she said frankly, "though he didn't say you were so pretty as you are. I shall tease him when he comes back."

"What about, Lady Paula?"

"What innocence! You must know he's awfully keen on you. I like your name—Cynthia. I shall call you so if you don't mind. That is, if you will remember that I am Paula. It saves trouble, and it is much more friendly."

We talked together for some time, the efforts of the pianist whom Frankie had engaged made a nice cover for our conversation. That, and the chink of the cups and saucers, drowned our voices, which was a good thing as we talked rather loud. By this time the rooms were crammed, I didn't know half the people and kept asking Lady Paula who they were. "A pretty woman your cousin," she observed. "Any amount of go. She'll be the rage this season, I expect. Half the smart set are here to-day and the other half will come to-morrow. It's quite a success, eh, Hartland?"

"Very much so," he returned, "Mrs. Norton is a charming hostess."

Paula nodded, and helped herself to cake.

"I don't see that funny little man you told me about, Hartland. What do you say he's called—'Fluffy'?"

"You must ask Miss Hamilton about him, Paula, he's a great friend of hers."

"Fluffy is very nice, not a bit like his name," I said laughing. "He'll be here later, with Sir John. They are both in the city at a board meeting."

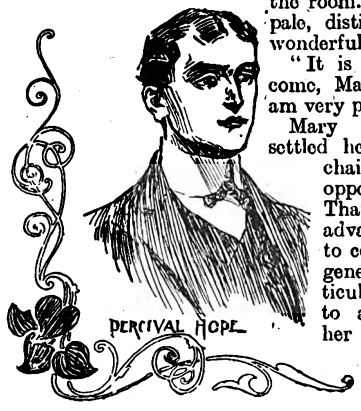
"It's surprising to think of Fluffy and Strickland as co-directors or co-anything. The sleek-headed one used to set the poor old Colonel's nerves on edge," remarked Kinross.

"They are better friends, now," I answered coldly. "Mr. Thomson is a very sincere person."

Kinross grinned.

"And Sir John a very wise one," he remarked. "Sincerity and wisdom should do well together—in the City."

At this moment a tall, elegant girl, dressed in black, entered the room. I recognised her face, pale, distinguished-looking, with wonderful dark eyes.



"It is very sweet of you to come, Mary," said Frankie, "I am very pleased to see you."

Mary Vernon smiled and settled herself in a comfortable chair near the piano, and opposite Mrs. Curtis-Blount. That volatile lady took the advantage of a violin solo to comment upon things in general and Mary in particular. The solo coming to an untimely end, left her unaccompanied in the middle of a sentence. She, oblivious, continued:

"Of course she took them, isn't it proved by the fact that Kinross won't speak to her? Absolutely cuts her, his own cousin, in public."

"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
New Series of Stories.

All ears were turned to Mrs. Curtis-Blount all eyes towards Mary and Lord Kinross. The latter with considerable address saved the situation.

"Come and see Mrs. Norton's china," he said smiling, "she's some awfully nice Chelsea in the other room."

Mary Vernon flushed, hesitated, and consented. They went together from the room. I wondered what would happen before the two returned.

Lord Kinross sauntered back some half hour later smiling and self confident as ever.

"Miss Vernon's gone home," he said presently. "She's more amiable than you," he added, "not half so hard hearted."

"She knows you better perhaps, and can make allowances for your—weakness."

"Possibly. You consider curiosity a weakness, Cynthia."

"Are you suffering from it?"

"Intensely. So are you. You want to know what Mary said to me, I desire to learn what Frankie is saying to Sir John. Shall we exchange confidences?"

I glanced up eagerly. I had not noticed Strickland's arrival and felt vexed that I had overlooked him. He was standing by the window, talking eagerly with Frankie. He was pale and seemed to stoop a little. It may have been the bright sunshine was trying, but he struck me as looking old and very worn. Frankie listened to him for a while, then moved towards the window into the shade of the curtains. She spoke quickly, impatiently, with an irritated little movement of her hand. She left him abruptly, and returned smiling to her guests. Sir John sighed and dropped wearily into a chair beside Lady Gaveston.

"Well," said Lord Kinross lightly, "and what do you think of it, Cynthia?"

I made no answer, I did not feel inclined to jest. I liked Sir John and was sorry for him.

"Has he received his *congé*, Cynthia?"

"What then?" I asked quickly, "how will it affect you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Not at all. Your cousin a great deal. She's a beautiful woman, Cynthia, and I——" he paused.

"Well?"

"I admire beauty. So does Percival."

"He certainly contrives to keep your admiration within bounds."

"Perhaps. He'll be back soon, you know. And then," Lord Kinross bent towards me, "he'll admire *you* without any bounds at all."

I made no answer but endeavoured to look dignified.

"Now Paula, it's time we went. You've eaten all the cake, and Cynthia is quite cross. Coming to see you next week, is she? That's right, I want you two to be great friends."

Shortly after Lord Kinross and his sister left the rooms began to thin. By the time Fluffy arrived, they were all but empty. He flung himself into a chair and asked for tea; when the rest of the people had gone, he turned to Frankie.

"Pleasant afternoon?" he said.

"Splendid. It's been a complete success."

"I'm glad. I've had a very tiresome meeting in the City. We've had an unfavourable report from the Carnegie gold mine. The engineer has cabled that the ore is yielding less and less gold. The shares are going down like the deuce, and the shareholders are off their heads."

"How are the directors?"

Fluffy shrugged his shoulders. "We play the game," he said. "None of us stand to lose much except Sir John. He's very hard hit indeed. I told him not to venture more than £500 in the Carnegie, but he was enthusiastic and insisted on planking down ten thou.—his entire capital I'm thinking. He talked quite wildly this afternoon, declared he'd give up every farthing to save the company from ruin,

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and mouthed about his responsibility towards the shareholders. Just as if he'd anything to do with them. I tell you Frankie he's no more fit for a board of directors, than I am for the bench of bishops."

"And will the mine go wrong, do you think?"

"May do. We shall know better next week, The thing will settle itself one way or the other under a fortnight."

"And—" Frankie glanced towards Lady Gaveston, but her ladyship far from taking the hint sat firmly on her chair and knitted for dear life.

"Sir John won't get burnt unless he's a fool," said Fluffy. "If he does as he's told, we shall all come out on top, with thousands to the good. If not—" he grinned and passed his cup for tea.

"If Mr. Thomson has finished discussing business, there is something I should like to say to you, Frances," said Lady Gaveston coldly. "Don't go, Mr. Thomson, I wish you to remain. You are, I understand, an old friend of Mrs. Norton's husband, and as such I am sure you take a deep interest in her future. You also can remain, Cynthia, your cousin will not object."

Frankie glanced round quickly. She wanted, I could see, to defer the discussion, but there was a warlike air about Lady Gaveston, her spiky jet, her gleaming needles, that defied opposition. She was in no mood to brook defiance. My cousin therefore took a chair and waited for the fray.

"It is now some six weeks since I came to you, Frances, to act as your chaperone," commenced her ladyship. "You may remember that I reserved to myself the right of expressing disapproval of some, or any of your actions should the occasion arise. I now feel called upon to do so, and in the strongest terms. In fact, if you do not see your way to alter your conduct in this matter, I shall leave you and return to Scotland."

Frankie breathed hard. It was an unexpected blow and came at a critical moment. On the eve of social success—it would be fatal to be left without a chaperone.

"In what way do you find fault with me, Lady Gaveston?"

"In many ways, Frances. I shall however only specify one. I have a great regard for Sir John Strickland, and I strongly reprobate your treatment of him. Are you, or are you not, his future wife?"

"That," said Frankie, "I am not at liberty to say."

Lady Gaveston glowered. "It's a dishonest answer," she said, "and one that should shame you. You can play with laddies like Kinross to your heart's content. I despise such goings on, but they don't trouble me. But when I see a man like John Strickland suffering from the bad treatment you are giving him, I am moved to speak. Not a word has he said, I have seen and heard for myself. I'll see and hear no more of that sort. Yes, or no, are you going to marry him? If it's 'no,' give him his answer, he'll take it. If it's 'yes,' down on your knees, and thank the Lord that he has sent you such a man to love and tend. Which is it to be, Frances?"

"Are you going to leave me, if I say no, Lady Gaveston?"

"I don't believe in compulsion, Francis. I wouldn't force any woman against her will. One way or the other, it doesn't matter which to me, but one way or the other it must be settled. Sir John shall not be made a fool of any longer, if I'm to stay in the house."

"Sir John is poor," said Frankie, "Mr. Thomson says within a fortnight he may be even poorer; or he may be very rich. I'll be candid with you, Lady Gaveston; if John Strickland were wealthy I'd be his wife rather than any other man's, but I cannot, will not, be the wife of a beggar. As things are now it would jeopardise my future and his to promise marriage. In a fortnight the issue will be clear. The Carnegie will prove a gold mine or the reverse. Strickland will make or lose his fortune. In a fortnight I will either promise Sir John to be his wife, or——" she paused, "I will not see him any more. Will you wait?"

Lady Gaveston stared hard at her. "It's borne in upon me," she said, "that you ought to decide here and now. But there's that about you which makes it difficult for me to refuse. I'll wait a fortnight, Frances, but not a moment more." She gathered up her knitting and departed grimly from the room.

Fluffy, much relieved, lit a cigarette, and read the paper. Frankie sat gazing at the floor deep in thought. As for me I was tired and rather sad.

What a lot of things were going to happen in a fortnight! Percival Hope was coming back to town, Kinross would, I suppose, decide as to his future course with Frankie, the Carnegie mine would prove a failure or a triumph, Sir John — somehow I could not bear to think about Sir John. My mind went back to the time he had come up with us to town from Lady Winchin's. I pictured him as he stood bare headed on the pavement, straining to catch the last glimpse of Frankie's face.

How would it all end? Would Frankie dismiss Strickland and marry Kinross, or would she flout his lordship and be true to Sir John? It might be—the thought was strange—that having played with the one, and amused herself with the other, both at the same time, she would at the last moment lose the two together.

Well I should know, and so would she—in a fortnight.

(Next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES contains another striking instalment of "Cynthia's Confessions.")

AN Irish servant girl being sent for a bottle of capers, asked the astounded shopman for a "bottle of them 'jumps'!"

"YOU should never take anything that doesn't agree with you," the physician told him. "If I'd always followed that rule, Maria," he remarked to his wife, "where would you be?"

"YOU shouldn't find fault with my temper," said she. "When we were married, you know, you took me for better or for worse." "I know it," was the reply, "but I had a hope of striking something like a general average."

"PA, what sort of a house is that?" "That, my son, is the blind asylum. Blind people live in there." "They can't see, can they?" "No, my boy." "Then what has the house got windows for, if they can't see?"

MUTUAL FRIEND: "It really is shocking, dear, the way in which you and your husband quarrel and carry on. I wonder you don't separate from him." Injured Wife: "What, go away, and leave him alone to do just as he likes? Not me."

"How can I leave thee, oh, my love?" warbled Adolphus, under the window of Eliza, one shimmering moonlight night, when up spoke the policeman on that beat, and harshly said: "Come now, young man, just move on. The family what lived here moved two weeks ago."

A LITTLE boy was taking a walk one day with his father when they came upon a hen proudly marching out a brood of ducklings. Looking at them with great seriousness, the little fellow remarked: "Father, I wonder what a hen thinks when it finds it has laid duck's eggs?"

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Murder by Speaking Tube.

A Powerful Story in Two Parts. Conclusion.

The First Part of the Story in Brief.

DR. FEATHERSTONE, a country surgeon with a dwindling practice and an extravagant wife, is in a serious financial position. His only hope is centred in an old lady, Mrs. Peake, who is living with him as paying guest. She is extremely wealthy, has no heir, her only son having been killed in South Africa, and is very fond of her host, the "dear doctor." Her infatuation goes to such a length that she leaves the whole of her fortune—something over forty thousand pounds—to the doctor in her will, and informs him of the fact through her lawyers. He refuses to take the money for form's sake, but is over-ruled. Then suddenly the son, who was reported dead, is seen by Mrs. Featherstone, and the doctor realises that unless Mrs. Peake dies before she has time to alter the will, the fortune will never be his.

It so happens that Mrs. Peake has been boasting to a friend that she is accustomed to help the doctor in his dispensing, and, anxious to support her boast by demonstration when next her visitor calls, she intreats the doctor to allow her to make up an harmless dose all by herself. He refuses, but while thinking the matter over an awful temptation assails him. Here is the chance of securing to himself the fortune by means of a terrible deed.

IN DISPENSARY AND SURGERY.

DOCTOR FEATHERSTONE watched the little snowy puffs of thin hair bobbing up and down with the old lady's sobs. "I sympathise with you, my dear Mrs. Peake," he said, "in not wishing that spiteful cat—pardon the name, I never liked the woman!—to be able to laugh at you."

"I could not—could not live under ridicule," wept she.

"But if my hand in this harmless little deception were suspected—it is a very little thing, but it would mean ruin to me. You might be in a playful mood one day and let out the joke, without thinking how it would hurt me——"

"You can swear me to secrecy!" said the old lady eagerly. "I can see it is more serious than I thought, dear Freddie, for you are so pale and frightened about it. I wish I had not been so foolish. But forgive me, and do but help me in this, and I will never boast again."

"Here is Mrs. Featherstone," he said suddenly. "She must never know. I will think it over. I should dearly like to oblige you. Minnie, take dear Mrs. Peake and be cross with her for a minute. She has been allowing herself to be silly enough to cry. She has been studying those big books a little too hard."

Alone once more he took the chances in his hands and studied them.

"I believe," he thought, "it is intended that I should take the opportunity and use it. My career—my home, my wife, my two little ones at school—all this in the balance against a little remnant of this old, worn out creature's life and, and the means of being idle to the son of her old age, a young man without cares and the whole world before him. What does he want with money? Against this—all that it means to me! There's a higher justice——"

Meaning that the mad instinct of self-preservation cried out within him and would not be denied.

A whole scheme crystallised before his mind's eye while the old woman had gazed up in his face. It was sharp, symmetrical, without a flaw. Many a man might have been hanged on circumstantial evidence—this was a plan to prepare circumstantial evidence to clear him.

Censure there would be. He must bear that. Suspicion there might be, but it would be idle. The verdict would certainly be "death by misadventure."

He brooded long over his solitary pipe.

"Minnie must be kept in the dark all through, and I must assure her of my entire innocence even if she suspects. I cannot have her turn from me, for a million pounds, no!"

"I shall be censured for allowing the old woman at any time to monkey about in the dispensary, but I can explain that I never permitted her to do more than hand a bottle down for me after I had indicated the exact one. The boasting of the old woman to Miss Fryar I can easily prove to be lies, prompted by silly vanity. Why, everybody knows it—the coachman, Martha, Ellen, my wife, Richards!" (He named his brother practitioner who took his connection and stayed at the house while he was away). "Richards has often laughed at the joke. I'm safe in that particular.

"Miss Fryar shall see her make up her own dose, that is the main thing, and she can swear to the foolish victim's crazy claim to a knowledge of drugs. How simple it all is!

"The will is sure to turn suspicion on me. It looks nasty. If young Peake turns up, he may contest it, too, and I may have to ease my strained nerves a bit by turning generous and coming to a compromise. Any sacrifice even to one-half the legacy to end the worry. I may not go so far, but we can leave that. I am secure on the point of the will. The lawyers and others—and the old lady's diary, too, can testify to it that I opposed the idea; that I urged the looking-up of next-of-kin and the claims of hospitals and that I urged Mrs. Peake to reside elsewhere. Hylton begged me at last, for her health's sake, to let her stay. My disinterestedness has been cracked up all round. I knew her so well, too; the more I urged her to take back her money the more determined she was to let the will stand."

He was not without a twinge of shame as he ran over the list of his acts of duplicity, and he actually admired himself for his feelings of self-disgust and squirmed beforehand with the pain of undergoing the suspicion that was inevitable.

"But after all," he said, wiping a wreath of cold sweat from his brow, "I shall have the money. There can be no serious hitch. Nasty remarks, that's all!"

Mrs. Peake found the dear doctor won over to the idea, and prepared now to enter into the spirit of the "joke."

"This is my idea," he said, "I shall be in the surgery, and will whisper instructions to you through the speaking-tube. The end in the dispensary can be hidden by bottles and things, and you can easily stand near the open mouthpiece.

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The least inclination of your head will bring your ear near it. You have a dear little way of your own of putting your head on one side when you are thinking. 'Let me see,' you will say, 'what else will improve the mixture?' That will be my signal, or, in fact, any sound you like to make near the mouthpiece, and I will tell you a few harmless things to swell the prescription a little. In between you can say what you like about some of the poisons which are on a shelf all to themselves."

Mrs. Peake pressed his hand in gratitude.

"Go down now," he said hurriedly, "and we will rehearse it. That woman shall not have a laugh at your expense if I can prevent it."

Mrs. Peake set her mouth firmly.

"Trust me," she said. "I will go down now."

"And, by the way, to test your knowledge of the measuring glass you shall bring me the dose complete and I will see if you under or overdo it."

He laughed as he spoke. The measures were to be uniform and finally filled up to a given figure, and there was no room for error.

The rehearsal was a great success. Mrs. Peake was exact to a drop. As the understood total was to be exactly one fluid ounce the careful old lady corrected all mistakes with the last item, *i.e.*, pure water, making it reach the large figure "1" without troubling about the others to a drop or two.

The doctor emptied the dose away laughingly, and the rehearsal was renewed several times until it seemed desirable to stop the repeated journeys backward and forward lest they should attract attention. It could be carried through easily enough now, and would take up so little time that Featherstone had not a fear as to the result, though half-a-dozen patients were shown in while he should be occupied with his whispering.

* * * * *

Mary Havers, wearing colours for the first time since her lover's supposed death, had gone to the side entrance of Featherstone's house, where she caught sight of Matilda, Mrs. Peake's one faithful retainer.

"Close the door, Matilda," she said, in a whisper, "I don't want any one inside to know just yet."

Matilda, without a sign of astonishment at Miss Havers' odd behaviour, did as she was bid, and the two were now entirely concealed from view by the irregular growth of shrubs growing right up to the wall and edging the winding path. Mary beckoned someone forward from the concealment of a turn in the path, and a moment afterwards Matilda was face to face with one before whom she might excusably have screamed "A ghost!"

"Do you know who this is? Don't make a noise."

The young woman did not cry out or indeed make any fuss at all, though tears of joy started into her widely rounded eyes.

"Oh, it's Master George! I should say Mr. Peake, I s'pose, now he've got a moustache," she said. "Then you're not dead? Well, I'm proud to say I never could nor would believe but what you'd turn up again. Well, there, I would like to kiss him a welcome home, I would. Do you mind, miss?"

"Oh, Matilda, you'll be the death of me yet!" gasped Mary, pushing George forward.

The smiling young man gave her a hearty smack, and received one in return, when, in a level tone of voice, as if a return from the grave was a daily event she said, eyeing him up and down—

"And in khaki, too! Aren't you glad the war's over, sir?"

"Tilly," said the young man, without waiting to reply, "I have a long story to tell you some other time. I was wounded badly and lost my memory for a long time, I certainly was not killed, anyhow. I haven't long come out of Netley hospital with my noddle in working order again, and I find there's been a blunder in naming me. I knew how you'd take the news, but how do you think your mistress will? We were afraid of giving her a shock while she was so ill and weak, and Miss Havers has been coming every day since Sunday to make sure that she was well enough to bear it. Miss Havers suggests going in first now and preparing her with some roundabout talk. What do you think about it?"

"I know what you mean," said the woman, "but my opinion is it's all nonsense about good news being dangerous to anybody. It may upset 'em like, but it makes 'em clear and happy, all the same, like a fresh breeze a-blowin' through a house——"

"And knocking the pictures down, eh, Tilly? Well, you truly think your mistress would be none the worse?"

"Not a ha'porth, sir. It would be just as well, though, not to give the poor dear too much of a startlerizer. Suppose I let you in by this door to save you showing yourselves at the front. I'll tell Ellen and Martha and shut their screechin' mouths up before I let you in; then I'll take you through to the surgery. There's nobody there. Your mother's got a lady friend with her, and the doctor he's in the droring-room, I think. You can tell him yourselves if he comes in accidental. Then you can speak to the mistress first, Miss Havers, and Master George he can come from behind the curtains when you think she's prepared, or you can take Mrs. Peake to another room and say you'll bring the master to her

This arrangement commended itself at once, and presently the three conspirators were safely slipped into the surgery without being seen except by the other two gasping servants, who were athrill with the romance involved in the plan.

A small curtained alcove containing a chair for occasional dentistry suggested a good hiding place, and here George and Mary secreted themselves. Though their taking seats in quite an ordinary manner suggested nothing at all mysterious.

A swish of silk was heard before Matilda could leave them, and the woman whispered: "That's the mistress!" and stepped out of the alcove.

A moment later she returned with her finger on her lips.

"She've gone into the dispensary, and Ellen's been told to bring tea there for her and Miss Fryar.

"Could I have a peep at her?" said George, yearning to see the dear white-haired, apple-cheeked old lady moving about in all unconsciousness of what was in store for her.

"Easy." And conveyed by his mother's stolid maid, George made soft-footed for the hall, leaving Mary in the recess. A look to see that all was clear, and Matilda had placed him in a dark corner where he could watch the two antiquated heads bobbing in friendly converse between him and the glowing garden.

Hardly a second seemed to have passed before a hurried step sounded in the surgery, and Mary looked out, prepared to speak to whomsoever it might be.

It was Dr. Featherstone, and he had passed from view before she could speak and without seeing her.

He was only on the other side of the curtain within two yards of her, but Mary did not make a sound.

There was something in the pale face of Featherstone that seemed to have chilled her blood. Fear, horror? She knew not what it was; but such a look as that she had never seen on mortal face before, and for a moment or two she held her breath and trembled. The feeling was gone very soon, for this beautiful athletic specimen of per-

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fect womanhood was the wrong one to suffer any great time under an attack of "nerves." Her not having declared her presence at once was a trifle awkward. She would step out and apologise for absent-mindedness.

As she moved over the thick carpet there came a faint "Ting!" of a bell and an answering gasp from the doctor.

Mary was clear of the alcove, but the doctor did not see her. His back was towards her, and he was whispering into a speaking-tube, unslung from a corner of the many angled room.

She waited irresolute and heard certain slow careful instructions being given to someone at the other end of the pipe. And then there was nothing to do but wait. His preoccupation would appear to have covered her entrance.

It was nothing—only directions to somebody to put together certain ingredients of a mixture.

Mary had some knowledge of drugs. The uncle who had left her and her orphan sister the little property they now enjoyed, had been a doctor, and she had often helped him with his medicines. For the matter of that she had lent her assistance to Featherstone, and it was doubtless envy of her accomplishment in this direction which had started poor Mrs. Peake in her course of absurd imitation. She now followed the instructions in a listless half-interested way.

It was a harmless sort of dose for somebody, and the instructions were certainly to a novice; for, after mention of the name, the drug was further specified by location. "Second on the third row from the left—*from* the left, not *to* the left—a *green* bottle with a gilt glass stopper"—and so on. There were long pauses between the items, and Doctor Featherstone's tongue often grew dry in a parched mouth—the sound of his voice suggested that. And as his mouth grew parched his brow grew moist, for he repeatedly wiped his damp forehead, and a dull red burnt visibly behind his ears.

Mary's listlessness became strained interest. She was watching him, she could not imagine why, and leaning forward quite close. Had he turned round she would have bluntly asked for an explanation, though a severe snub should be her portion for her pains.

Amazing! The man was now prompting as for a lecture.—mentioning poisons and their properties in between his instructions, and speaking with great slowness and repetition of pronunciation. "That is enough," he said at last. "One more ingredient; then fill to the one ounce with water."

He now, with tense deliberation, specified that one ingredient, giving its abbreviated name and indicating its position on one of the shelves.

Mary was wondering—wondering—when the man whispered sharply:

"Now, you never shrink at the most nauseous draught remember—take it at a gulp!"

A cry of fright burst from him the instant after, for the mouthpiece was snatched from his hand and a strong grasp on his coat-collar swung him aside at the same time.

"Stop!" cried a clear, ringing voice. "Do not drink that—it's poison!"

Three times the word was reiterated—"Poison! Poison! Poison!" while shrieks and shouts came from the region of the dispensary—then Mary was struck to the ground with a chair, swung round first in a sweep that smashed vases, pictures, and the globes of a gasolier.

George had been watching with great amusement, through tears standing in his eyes, the whole antic performance of his dear little mother.

"Dear soul!" he had murmured. "Isn't she showing off! She knows a bit about dispensing evidently, fearing a trade in her old age! What a lot of toxicological erudition to be sure! She could be a Lucrezia Borgia if she wasn't such an old angel. Oh, you conceited little girl!"

Mrs. Peake had turned and raised the dose high like a glass of wine.

"Confusion to the headache!" she said affectedly.

Then came that terrible cry from the speaking-tube.

George, who heard it, shouted and ran forward; and his mother, who could not lose her pride in her feat of dispensing even in the shock of seeing her son, carefully laid down the dose before she screamed.

"It is my son!" she cried, and clasped him tightly round the neck; then screamed again and again.

It was all screaming. The maids outside, hearing the screams and shouts in the dispensary and sounds of cries and smashes in the surgery, added to the uproar all it was in the power of their own lungs to do; but rushed with one accord to the help of Miss Havers.

None was needed. Mary, after receiving the first coward blow, had turned on Featherstone, seized and flung him—a feat not difficult to a girl of her strength, in dealing with a man so slight and weak—and was found kneeling on the man, who was now almost raging mad.

* * * * *

The examination of Dr. Featherstone before the magistrate had an unexpected result. The draught that seemed so miraculously prevented from going down Mrs. Peake's throat, proved on analysis to contain no poisonous ingredient!

Mary Havers was clear in her testimony; Mrs. Peake had the name of the deadly drug off by heart, and was sure she had added it just before the water, following the instructions of the "dear doctor," as she still quaintly called the scoundrel; and in his first frenzy of terror Featherstone had made admissions which pointed conclusively to his murderous intent, and justified Mary's accusation to the full. Yet the fact remained that the draught as compounded was not poisonous. There could only be one explanation, poor Mrs. Peake had added one more blunder to the list, and taken down the wrong bottle at the critical moment.

In the circumstances the accused man was admitted to bail, and cut the knot of the difficulty by himself swallowing the poison which Mrs. Peake had failed to take.

One person was glad, or at least relieved in mind, at this tragic end—Featherstone's wife. She wept sore and oft, for she loved the man; but when she remembered the terrible moment when their two souls had stood nakedly before each other in their eyes, and when hers had been the lips to first give form of words to their mutual horrid thought of murder, she knew that had he lived there would have been a cold ghost between them evermore. The ghost of a murder which had failed.

Her share in the ugly thing was not suspected, but she did not go without punishment. It was Mrs. Peake's generous hand which, by deed of gift, placed herself and family beyond danger of want, and it never failed to give a bitter flavour to her bread to know that it was undeserved when eaten.

THE END.

DAUGHTER: "I love him. He is the light of my life." Father: "Well, that's all right, but I object to having my house lit up by him after midnight."

ADA: "You are a flat, Freddie—nothing more!" Freddie: "What else could you expect? You sit on me at every possible opportunity."

SHE: "Postpone our wedding till October? Impossible. If I don't marry you in August I can't marry you at all." He: "Why not?" She: "Oh—er—Mr. Simmons asked me to marry him in September and I promised to."

FATHER: "Sarah, I don't like that fellow that comes here to see you." Sarah: "I don't see why not, pa. I'm sure he bears the impress of a gentleman." Father (wriggling his foot): "If he comes again he'll bear the impress of another gentleman."

TEACHER: "If you face the north, directly behind you will be south, on your right hand will be east, and on your left west." Seeing a lack of attention on the part of Bobby and wishing to catch him: "What is on your left hand, Bobby?" Bobby (in deep confusion): "Please, ma-a-m—it's some tar, an' it winna come off."

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An Innocent Pretence.

Telling of a Sham Engagement which Ended in Reality.

Susan Miller was decidedly perplexed and a trifle worried by the behaviour of the young artist, whose name she had discovered to be Ralph Overend. For nearly a week he had been keeping a watch on her movements; she had arrived at this conclusion from the fact that she met him whenever she went out. It would have been bad enough to meet him at every turn, even although he did not attempt to speak to her, but he had endeavoured to make a rapid sketch of her on several occasions with his pencil and note-book.

It is highly probable that, if the man had been a loafer or some impudent "gentleman" who fancied that he might permit his eyes to take liberties which his mouth dared not utter, Susan Miller would have boldly requested him to discontinue his silent persecution, or, at least, would have taken steps to put an end to it. This man, however, was neither of those; she was abashed as well as vexed by his conduct, and felt afraid to do or say anything. She was satisfied that he did not mean to be offensive, that he was perfectly honourable; yet it was extremely provoking.

The thought occurred to her that he might be in love with her, but she laughed at the idea. Had it been so, he would have sought an interview through the good offices of some artist known to both; that would not have been a difficult task. "And then," mused Susan with a quiet smile, "the affair would have come to an abrupt termination, for I am not at all in love with him and he would soon find it out!"

Nevertheless, that state of things could not go on indefinitely, and she would have to put an end to it in some way or other. But how?

"Susan, dear," said her mother tenderly, during the evening of one of the days when Ralph Overend had attempted to sketch her: "I wish you were—married and settled!"

"Don't talk like that, mamma!" said Susan reproachfully. "You don't wish me to leave you, do you?"

"No, Susie," was the reply, "but I have often wondered what would happen if—if you were left. Perhaps I ought to have removed from this neighbourhood; I fancy you are not so much in love with art as your poor father. I stayed here, among artists, to gratify my own feelings and to retain the memory of the old days. I thought you might fall in love with an artist."

"I am fond of art, I believe, mamma, but I have no inclination to marry anyone, artist or otherwise. So let us forget the subject."

Mrs. Miller said nothing aloud, but to herself she said: "I thought there might be something in it. I know he has followed her two or three times, and he comes of a good family, so I understand. Can I? Well, no; it is not fair to force them together. Well, well!"

On the very next morning, as Susan Miller was returning from a shopping expedition, she found the artist walking by her side as she turned into the street in which she lived. He must have been waiting at the corner for her. She felt indignant, gave him a haughty stare, and hurried towards her own door. She heard his hurrying steps behind her and thought that she heard his voice as he began to say something, but her anger prevented her from understanding. She quickened her pace and reached the house.

The door was open and she hastened up the steps and into the hall. She was conscious that he was following her, and was about to call for her mother when that lady appeared. Her daughter's breathless condition and flushed cheeks suggested that she had been subjected to unwelcome attentions, and she turned with a severe countenance to the young man who had intruded.

"May I ask what you are doing here, sir, and why you are annoying my daughter?" she demanded sternly.

Ralph Overend was more confused than Susan herself; he appeared to recognise that he had placed himself in an awkward and ridiculous position. His eyes wandered from the severe face of Mrs. Miller to the pretty, flushed countenance of her daughter.

"I wish to know the meaning of this, sir!" demanded Mrs. Miller more sternly, as the young man did not answer her first inquiry.

"'Pon my honour, madam, I'm very sorry!" he began confusedly. "I admit that it is an abrupt way to ask anything so delicate, but I—well, I wish to propose to your daughter—I mean——"

His confusion redoubled; he appeared to have made a muddle of what he intended to say, but before he could set matters right Mrs. Miller interrupted with just the ghost of a smile.

"Well, it *is* rather an abrupt way of putting it, but I suppose that it is not always arranged in one set fashion. But I think that it is not quite decorous to discuss such questions in the hall! Come this way!"

She liked the artist; his frankness and his boldness pleased her. If a man wanted a woman, why should he hesitate to take the shortest cut to an introduction and victory? The poor fellow was deeply in love, of course, and had been unable to procure an invitation. And Susan? Mrs. Miller flattered herself that all would go as she wished if she took matters in hand. Her daughter would follow her lead.

Mrs. Miller led the way, while Susan looked after her in amazement. Ralph allowed Mrs. Miller to walk a few steps in advance, so as to be out of ear-shot, and then whispered to the astonished girl:

"I'm awfully sorry, I am, really! I was confused and out of breath, and I muddled it. I—I really didn't ask for your hand! I can see you don't want me, and *I* am wedded to my art! I want a few sittings for a picture that I have longed to paint for three years, but I could not find the exact model. I shall call it 'An English Maiden.' *You* are the exact counterpart of my dreams, and I have tried to sketch you at the risk of being rude, but in vain. So I determined to ask you to give me a sitting or two. Your father was an artist, and there is a kind of freemasonry among artists. I thought at last that I might venture——"

"We must go in! Mother has gone!" exclaimed Susan. "I really don't know what to say. Oh, dear! She thinks—and I don't believe she will consent if she knows that she is mistaken. And I don't care about giving the sittings, either!"

Mrs. Miller was waiting in the room with a complacent smile; it would all work out well, although the manner of it was a *little* unconventional! They were having a few words quietly in the hall!

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Susan walked slowly towards the room, but not before she had noted the look of intense disappointment on Ralph's visage. After all, there was nothing wrong in giving him a sitting or two. "An English Maiden." Yes, an English maiden likes a little fun, and it would certainly be amusing to go through this piece of acting. More than anything else, it would cure her mother of match-making, for Mrs. Miller would have time to realise how the marriage of her daughter would affect her! The thought of losing her daughter would be a trial to Mrs. Miller as it is to any mother.

"I'll do it," she whispered to Overend, on the spur of the moment. "But mind, say as little as possible to my mother, so that we do not give ourselves away!"

"Good!" returned Ralph. His heart smote him on account of his duplicity, but he smothered his conscience with the assurance that it was nothing.

"I am afraid that I have been somewhat too forward, Mrs. Miller," he said frankly, as he entered the room. "May I ask you to allow me to arrange the matter with your daughter? Miss Miller has consented to give me sittings for a picture."

"Oh, yes, mamma!" cried Susan vivaciously, partly in an effort to hide her real feelings, which were mingled with a little shame at the thought of hoaxing her mother. "I thought that we could have father's old easel down here, and Mr. Overend could come and I would sit for him, and——"

"Yes, I understand," interrupted Mrs. Miller significantly. "Certainly, you can have your dear father's easel. And what is the picture to be and where do you intend to try and exhibit it, Mr. Overend?"

He explained the title, and added that he intended it for the Paris *Salon*. "They will forget to laugh at our girls when they see that picture, I think," he cried enthusiastically.

So it was settled, and the sittings began. Both Susan and Ralph quite understood the position, while Mrs. Miller thought that she understood it, which was almost the same thing, only different, as the children say. Mrs. Miller played propriety for the first few sittings, and watched with pride the growth of the picture, which was really her daughter's portrait. Susan was dressed very simply, with a plain gown and a rose in her hair, and Mrs. Miller was obliged to confess that the plainness of the costume set off to perfection the grace of her daughter's figure and the charm of her face. It was a picture; that word, so often misused, was the only one that described the girl as she sat patiently as a model for her artist acquaintance.

But the painting of Susan's counterfeit presentment was a longer process than Mrs. Miller imagined it would be, so she decided that she might leave the young people to themselves. Mr. Overend was determined to make the picture a success, and became thoroughly engrossed in his work. That was what puzzled Mrs. Miller; she was pleased that he should prove so devoted to his art, yet she would have preferred to see him somewhat less attentive on this occasion and more devoted to his model. However, that would come when they were alone!

When she left them to themselves, however, the position did not change in the least; they chatted on a variety of subjects, just as mere acquaintances, but there was nothing that bore even the most remote resemblance to a love passage. Susan Miller began to repent having gone so far into this deception, but afterwards she took a real interest in the painting, and was anxious that it should turn out well.

One day the everyday topics of conversation failed, and the subject turned on marriage without either of them being conscious of the manner in which the turn had been given to it.

"I really think that artists ought not to get married," said Ralph decidedly. "It seems to me that a man cannot devote himself to his art if he has a wife who requires his attention! And a wife usually requires too much of his attention to permit him to give proper time to his vocation in life."

"Men are tyrants, and that is what *you* mean to say of women, Mr. Overend," observed Susan, with a laugh. "As soon as a man is married, he imagines that he has a slave to order about. I have always displeased my mother by my inclination to remain free, as I call it. I prefer liberty to slavery. One of our modern writers has said that marriage is the hardest profession that a woman can enter, and I agree with her."

"I should never give up my art for a woman!" he said, with an air of determination. "Oh, yes, I know that others have made that assertion and have conveniently forgotten it when it suited them to do so! But I fail to see what inducement there is for a man to marry when he has a profession such as mine. If he be merely engaged, now, in a commercial calling, why, he wants some other attraction, but an artist! You, however, will alter your opinions on the subject before many years have passed. You will think of yourself as an older woman, when Nature has followed its usual course with those you hold dear, and you are left alone."

"Oh, I shall not be alone!" cried Susan lightly. "Of course I shall have my occupations, and I shall have pets, and——"

"I beg pardon!" interrupted Ralph, with assumed gravity. "I forgot the cat!"

Then they both laughed merrily. Mrs. Miller would have been much disturbed in her ideas regarding the progress of the courtship had she been present then; there was nothing more free from the cares of love-making than that laugh.

Another week passed, during which the picture assumed a more and more completed appearance until completion was actually reached. The sittings were over; and Mrs. Miller would soon have to be told that they had come to nothing from a matrimonial point of view.

"It was rather too bad!" murmured Susan, "and I would not have kept up the farce so long if I hadn't promised to sit till the picture was completed. I couldn't go back on my word! That wouldn't be like an 'English Maiden.' By the way, I think he ought to call it 'A British Maiden.' But I suppose he cannot, since the type varies in each country."

Mrs. Miller was loud in her praises of the painting.

"It isn't quite a portrait. I admit that you have improved somewhat on the original," she remarked impartially. "It ought to gain a prize!"

"I demur to the statement that I have made any improvement," said Overend. "If it is only a faithful reproduction, then it must gain a prize!"

"You must say good-bye to the painting, Miss Miller," said Overend on the following day. "I must take it away to-day in order to have it packed in my studio, under my own care, for transmission to Paris."

Susan Miller turned with a light heart to the picture and took a last long gaze at it. Somehow, it seemed different. What was it that sent a throb through her frame and caused that strange look to appear in her lovely eyes. She dropped the cloth over it and turned away.

"I hope you will be rewarded for your preseverance and talent, Mr. Overend. Pack it securely, please! It would be too dreadful if it were to be injured in transit!"

"Dreadful!" exclaimed Overend alarmed. "I'll see that every care is taken, Miss Miller."

Any one who had heard him tell Susan that he had left the painting in her possession till the last minute would have been surprised to see him sitting in front of it and making no preparation for packing. He was gazing at it, yet away from it. His eyes were upon the picture, but his thoughts were round the corner. The sittings were over and the pleasant hours spent with Susie Miller were gone, never to

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return. Never! He shuddered at the word. He realised now that he had grown to love her; all his talk about art being sufficient was vain. He was no different from others, and he owned it manfully, at the same time calling himself an idiot for having said so. Art is not sufficient; a woman does not spoil a man's career, his chance of developing the talent within him; she helps him if she is a true woman. She brings out all the good that is in him and ennobles his ideas. How could he get off without a true wife? It seemed an impossibility now!

"But there is no hope of winning her!" he groaned. "A woman is more impressionable than a man, and she would have shown her feelings in some slight way if she had been in love with me, or even if she had merely thought she might like me. I don't believe she could have helped showing it, somehow! And I really think that a woman sticks to her opinions faster than a man!"

For another half-hour he stared at the picture.

"I can't part with that!" he decided. "So that settles it. I am not going to run the risk of having that damaged in transit if I can't have the original. I simply can't part with it, putting aside the question of damage. What am I to do when I sit down to work if I haven't that picture to look at now and then to encourage me? It isn't going to the *Salon*, no matter what I lose by it!"

He rammed some tobacco fiercely into the bowl of his pipe, but stopped in the act of lighting it.

"What on earth am I to tell her when she asks about it? That's awkward. Shall I see her again, to speak to? H'm, perhaps not, after her mother finds out that it was a put-up job. So I shall not speak to her again, eh?"

He laid down his pipe and thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his jacket. He strode up and down the room in deep thought for several minutes.

"I can't stand it! I'll see about it at once!" he cried aloud, and he clapped his hat on his head and went round the corner.

"Has the picture gone, Mr. Overend?" asked Susan.

"No, it hasn't."

"But you will be too late!" exclaimed Susan in dismay. "You have hardly time to get it off. What have you been doing?"

"Thinking!" returned Overend lucidly. "And I've decided that I won't let that picture go out of my studio unless I can have the original in its place! There!"

"But you can't put me on an easel, you know!" said Susan, with an attempt at playfulness which was spoilt by the quiver in her voice and the extreme pallor that overspread her face.

"I want you for my wife! I love you, Susie, I love you! Will you come to me?"

"You said that you were wedded to your art!" protested Susan, her cheeks glowing like burning coals now, and her eyes sparkling with a strange light.

"And you spoke of men being tyrants!" he retorted. "Come, own up, just as I do. I was wrong—and you?"

"I think I'll chance the tyranny!" she replied, with a laugh that was nearly a cry. Her heart was full of happiness. Like him, she had learnt the true state of her feelings when she realised that the sittings were over.

Mrs. Miller smiled meaningly when she was informed of the engagement.

"It began rather unconventionally," she remarked, in blissful ignorance of the real facts, "and you have been rather longer than I anticipated in arriving at a result, but all's well that ends well, and I am very glad."

"So are we!" exclaimed Ralph joyously, while Susie blushed.

G. E. Lingen.

TO THOSE WHO WRITE.

A Prize of One Guinea will be paid every week by the Editor for the best short story sent in by any of his readers. Contributions should not be less than 1,500 words in length, and not more than 3,000. The Editor reserves to himself the right to publish any contribution submitted. Stamped addressed envelopes must be enclosed for the return of the stories, but, while every care will be taken, the Editor cannot hold himself responsible for possible loss of MSS.

Your Editor Chats.

This week readers will notice that I have introduced a new feature into Short Stories. It is one which I feel sure will commend itself to everybody, and will prove useful as well as interesting. The column is conducted by an expert, whose services have been secured at great expense. This expense, however, will have been well laid out if every reader of Short Stories will call the attention of his or her friends to the information contained under the date of their birthday.

Surely, for example, you know some friend whose birthday occurs between July 22nd and July 28th? If so, just send them this copy of Short Stories and mark the information contained under the date. This column will appear every week in future.

On page 117 you will notice that I have renewed the great "Pass-It-Along" offer. It is early yet, of course, to tell how the scheme has been taken up by my readers, but I trust that all who entered the first competition will enter the lists again this week, for there is not the slightest reason why you should not win one of the handsome prizes twice running, and indeed, as many times as this unique offer is renewed. Your friends, too, by now probably will have entered into the spirit of the scheme, and will be only too willing to help you again, this time with more speed, so that both you and they stand a better chance of success.

And now I have another big surprise for you. At great expense and not a little trouble I have secured for subsequent covers of Short Stories several artistic designs, embodying the tartan plaids of the principal clans of Scotland.

These will be reproduced in their correct colours, and besides forming an excellent cover for the current issue of your little paper, will be well worth keeping. A correspondent who told me some few weeks back that she was preserving her covers and pasting them on to a large screen for decorative purposes, will find these tartan covers a distinctly advantageous addition to her collection. I hope to be able to use the first of these covers with next Tuesday's issue. As I am having a handsome poster of this design circulated all over the country, and as the "Pass-It-Along" scheme will be bringing in many new subscribers, it will be well for my regular readers to order their copies a few days beforehand.

For This Week's Competition I want you to construct a sentence containing only words of three letters. The reader who sends me in the longest and most sensible sentence under these conditions will be presented with a handsome and massive silver pencil-case. Ten consolation prizes of rolled gold hearts and rolled gold charms will be given to those readers whose efforts come next. As before, postcards only should be used, and they should be marked "Three Letters," and addressed to the Competition Editor, Short Stories, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C. Competition closes on July 29th.

Below I give the result of the "Word" competition. The first prize of a solid silver pencil-case goes to P. C. Leggett, 69 North Street, Sudbury, while the ten consolation prizes go to the following competitors:—A. G. Seaward, 22 Daniels Road, Nunhead; T. Allison, 18 Fleet Street, Gorton, Manchester; E. Bulleid, 60 Sherrard Road, Forest Gate; Violet Robinson, 60 Sherrard Road, Forest Gate; Mrs. Faid, Town Hall, Sunderland; A. G. Boll, 18 Double Row, Bate's Cottages, Seaton Delaval; W. Shackleton, Victoria Road, Cowling, Yorks; H. S. Parsley, 20 Grosvenor Road, Canton, Cardiff; Annie L. Nicoll, 39 Strathmartine Road, Dundee; J. Taylor, 127 Revidge Road, Blackburn.

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THOUGH, perhaps, it isn't altogether fair to tell the story, yet it is really quite too good to keep.

Besides, its recital at this time is particularly *à propos*.

She came from Devonshire—just where, I did not learn. Two things attracted my attention to her. In the first place, she was extremely lovely, and the man who cannot appreciate a woman's attractiveness is not much of a man.

Her hair wasn't like "spun gold," but it was a beautiful burnished brown and when the sun caught its wavelets the effect was all the more alluring.

Her eyes were big, brown and bright. They beamed with intelligence and goodness. They reminded me of Whittier's couplet:

How brilliant and mirthful the light of her eye,
Like a star glancing out from the blue of the sky.

He was rather an indifferent young man so far as good looks went, but I suppose what he lacked in that respect he made up in brains.

They stood on the pavement of a crowded London thoroughfare, waiting for a 'bus.

"Oh, Henry, here comes our 'bus now," she said in tremulous, but very sweet tones.

Henry knew it. He wasn't blind to that fact. Yet he was blind to the fact that several interested people lounged by and too eagerly drank in the conversation of the couple.

"Let it come; there are others," he replied somewhat recklessly.

"Why, Henry, you are using slang," she murmured, turning a pair of mildly shocked eyes upon him.

"By no means," he hastened to reply. "Intone the last clause of the sentence in the sense that I meant it, and you will see that you have erred."

Her lips moved; she was repeating the sentence. Then she smiled brightly.

"You are quite right," said she.

"I thought you would think so," he smiled back. "Do you know that I have something to say to you, Helen?"

The rich, warm colour that had suffused her velvety cheeks fled for an instant and then rushed back again.

"Indeed?"

There was a little pathetic quaver in her voice.

"Yes. Can't you guess?"

She shook her head negatively.

"No," she faltered.

"I—I——"

"Paper, sir?"

"Yes, yes; give me half a dozen."

"Henry," she said a moment later, somewhat reproachfully, "we really must take this 'bus. Papa and mamma are waiting for us."

"We'll take the next one," he answered desperately. "On an omnibus I should have no opportunity to—to—and besides, when we get home your father and mother, for the time being, will effectually exclude every possibility of——"

"Oh, Henry," she cried agitatedly.

"It's true," he said, in a tense voice. "You know, Helen," he went on hurriedly, "that ever since I can remember I have at all times expressed a most fervent——"

"Henry, if we don't take this 'bus now, mamma will never forgive me. You know that I promised to be with her at 4.30."

"Fervent—fervent. Ah, yes, Helen, a most fervent fervency. No, I don't mean that, dear. I meant I have expressed at all times a most intense love for you. Your beauty, goodness, grace—yourself in its entirety—all have buoyed me up with constant hope. My love for you has been the one bright guiding star of my life. Helen, without you——"

"Oh, Henry," she murmured, undecided whether to cry or smile and half doing both, "how can—can—we miss that 'bus. Just think—"

"Yes, just think," he said excitedly, "just think how overpowering my love for you is! Without you I wouldn't care to live."

"Jove, he's got it bad," said one of the loungers *sotto voce* to his companion.

"He's having a struggle with himself," said the other. But Henry heard them not.

"I have tried in vain to tell you how much I loved you ever since we came to London," Henry continued.

The ordeal was having a disastrous effect upon him. He was getting warmer and warmer every minute, and the starch in his collar was disappearing like ice under the rays of a hot sun.

Helen evidently began to pity him. A tender look crept into her eyes.

"Poor boy!" she murmured. "And do you love me so much?"

"I couldn't tell you in a thousand years how much I love you, dear Helen," he vowed.

"If your love for me is not a passing fancy——"

"Passing fancy! My stars, it's cast iron reality. I can't forget you. Will you be my wife, Helen? Tell me now or never, Helen."

He was very much agitated now, and he looked it.

"If I give you an answer, will you promise me to take the next 'bus?"

"Yes, a million of them."

"Well, my answer is——"

She leant forward and whispered something into his ear. I did not learn what it was, but it made Henry the happiest man in all London at that particular moment.

He almost broke into a cheer.

No doubt he wanted to hug and kiss her then and there.

A moment later he helped her on to the 'bus, and they were whisked away.

A. J. Meister.

If a burnt child dreads the fire, why does a person who has been singed by Cupid's torch so often have a lingering regard for the old flame?

She: "Why, I'm not ready to marry, Mr. Freshman." He: "Will you let me know when you are?" "Certainly, sir. I'll send you a wedding-card."

She (sternly): "What was that noise I heard in the hall early this morning when you came in?" He (hastily): "It must have been the day breaking, my darling."

". . . I'm so happy," she said. . . . "Ever since my engagement to Charlie the whole world seems different. I do not seem to be in dull, prosaic London, but in——" "Lapland," suggested the small brother.

She: "Papa says that when coming to see me you must not come in a 'bus any more." He: "Really! Does he expect me to walk all this distance?" She: "Of course not. He says all he asks is that you will come in a carriage, hired by the hour."

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START TO-DAY.

The Great "Pass-It-Along" Scheme.

FIRST AWARD, £10. SECOND AWARD, £5. THIRD AWARD, £2.

SIX AWARDS OF 10/- EACH.

(A)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMPETITOR WHO SENDS THIS COPY.

When you have carefully read these rules, put an ink line round the instructions in the next column, write your name and address in the space at the foot of this page*, and in the next column; wrap up this copy of SHORT STORIES in a wrapper, fix a penny stamp on it, and post it to a friend of yours whom you think will help you. Then wait until the copy is returned to you.

All you need do is to send out your copy or copies of SHORT STORIES and wait until they come back to you with the names filled in.

The first prize will be awarded to the person whose copies of SHORT STORIES contain the greatest number of names of people to whom the copies have been sent, provided that the wrappers which carried the copies of SHORT STORIES through the post to each person accompany the list.

It is not necessary for you to know the people whose names you will find on your list when your copy comes back; they will, of course, be the friends of your friends.

There is no absolute necessity to write a letter to your friend explaining the scheme, but if you did so it would carry more weight.

HOW TO SEND IN.

Keep the wrappers as they are sent to you, and when this copy comes back send all the wrappers, together with this copy, to the Editor of "Short Stories," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "PASS-IT-ALONG," to arrive not later than Thursday, August 7th.

NOTE.—Competitors may send out at the same time any number of copies of this issue.

The Editor's decision is final, and readers may enter only on this understanding.

(B)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE WHO RECEIVE THIS COPY BY POST.

This copy of SHORT STORIES has been sent to you by a friend who is interested in this competition and who wants to win one of the prizes offered. When you have read this announcement write your name down in the space provided, and then forward this copy *at once* in a penny wrapper to a friend of yours. If you have no friend to whom you can send it, return the copy of the paper, *together with the wrapper in which you received it*, to the original sender.

If the original sender of this paper (whose name and address is written at the foot of this page) wins the first prize, *you* will receive £1; if second prize, *you* will get 10s. The paper must be returned to the original sender on or before Saturday, August 2nd.

You must at once return the wrapper in which this copy reaches you to _____

_____

(Competitor must insert here his or her name and address.)

IMPORTANT.

Fill in your name at once and post it on the day this is received. If you keep it longer it will lessen the chance of the original sender securing the first prize, as the paper will not be able to get into so many hands within the time limit.

If you receive this copy on Saturday, August 2nd, fill up your name and post it at once to the sender, whose name appears at the foot of this page.

Why Not Try Yourself?

If you want to enter for this competition yourself, and win one of the prizes, get a copy of SHORT STORIES from your newsagent at once, and follow the instructions marked "A."

This offer will be repeated in SHORT STORIES for August 9th. (the next number but one), when another £20 will be offered in awards.

Those to whom this copy is sent sign here.

	NAME.	ADDRESS.
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Those who sign here will get £1 each if this wins first award.

*Name and Address of Competitor.....

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Brothers in Misfortune.

"Yes," boasted an Englishman in the West, "I have Tudor blood in my veins from my mother's side of the family, and Plantagenet blood from my father's." "Is that so?" said a citizen. "My blood is a little mixed too. My grandfather was a Jersey tenderfoot, an' my grandmother a Digger Indian squaw. We're both half-breeds, stranger. Shake!"

Her Transient Glory.

Jack: "What colour would you call Miss Flitt's hair?" Jess: "Now, really, I haven't seen her for a week or two."

A Distinct Advantage.

She (haughtily): "I beg your pardon, sir; you have the advantage of me." He (jauntily): "I should say I had. I am the fellow you jilted ten years ago."

Too Quiet.

Lady Visitor: "That new girl of yours seems very nice and quiet." Mistress of the House: "Yes, she's very quiet. She doesn't even disturb the dust when she's cleaning the room."

Laid up for Repairs.

His Mother: "What are you moping about the house for, Tommy? Why don't you go over and play with Charley Pinafore?" Tommy: "'Cause I played with Charley Pinafore yesterday, and I don't s'pose he's well enough yet."

The Terrors of Pride.

Mrs. Vokes: "Mrs. Crummer has a terrible cold just now." Mrs. Gilleland: "How did she get it?" Mrs. Vokes: "By wearing a fur-lined jacket." Mrs. Gilleland: "Impossible!" Mrs. Vokes: "Not at all. She had to wear it open so that people could see the lining."

Always Early Now.

A woman cured her husband of staying out late at night by going to the door when he came home, and whispering through the keyhole: "Is that you, Willie?" Her husband's name is John, and he stays at home every night now, and sleeps with one eye open, and a revolver under his pillow.

Extremes.

Agent: "What was the matter with your last place?" Domestic: "The couple had only been married a month, and I couldn't stand the love-making." Agent: "Well, here's a chance in a house where the couple have been married ten years." Domestic: "That's too long; I like quiet and peace."

She Soon Learnt French.

Lady (to a French governess): "I am shocked to find that my daughter has been receiving letters in French from a young man." Governess: "Pardon, madame, it is only my little ruse to cheat mam'selle into study. When she would reply to an unknown lover—a Frenchman—how quickly she will learn my language!"

A Sufficient Testimonial.

Cook (just leaving): "I should like to ask you for a written character." "Why, what am I to write, you idle, good-for-nothing creature? You surely don't expect me to say you gave satisfaction?" Cook: "You need do nothing of the kind. Just say that I stayed with you three months; that would be the best character you could give me. Every missus in the place knows you."

Know what it Means.

Inquiring Child: "Papa, why do people cry at weddings?" Papa (abstractedly): "Most of 'em have been married themselves."

A True Aim.

Mistress: "How is it I saw a soldier hugging you in the kitchen last night?" Maid: "I don't know, ma'am, unless you were peeping through the keyhole."

More Convenient.

Harry: "When I get to be a man I'm going to let my whiskers grow." Mamma: "Why so, my boy?" Harry: "Then I won't have only a little bit of my face to wash."

Spoilt.

Loving Wife: "You do love me, don't you, Frank?" Fond Husband: "Love you? Why, I believe that I would be ass enough to marry you a second time if I had the chance."

Wherein it Lies.

A man never realises the superiority of woman so much as when he is sewing on a button without a thimble, pushing the needle through one half of the way, and pulling it through the other half by hanging on to it with his teeth.

Quite Safe.

Friend (after dinner): "Your little wife is a brilliantly handsome woman. I should think you'd be jealous of her." Host (confidently): "To tell the truth, Simpkins, I am. I never invite anybody here that any sane woman would take a fancy to."

Thrice Spoken.

Florence: "That Miss Howard must be very popular. She said she had three proposals in one evening." Bertha: "That's just one of her tricks. I'll bet that it was that stuttering Tom Burton, and he always says everything over three times."

Art Realism.

Little Visitor (pointing to a large oil-painting): "Whose picture is that?" Little Hostess: "She was my mamma's great aunt. I never heard much about her, but I think she was a school-teacher." "Why?" "See how her eyes follow us about."

A Complexion Improver.

Mrs. Earlybird: "This is a pretty state of things. Here I have to get up at three o'clock in the morning to let you in." Mr. Earlybird: "All on your account, my dear. I read in a paper the other day that nothing improves a woman's complexion so much as early rising."

Wouldn't Harmonise.

"My dear, don't you intend to invite Mr. and Mrs. Green to your party?" asked Mr. Biller. "Certainly not." "Why not, my dear? They are good friends of ours." "What if they are? I am going to invite Mr. and Mrs. Brown." "Well, can't you invite the Greens as well?" "Why, John Biller, you shock me with your taste. Brown and Green in my parlour together! Why, next you'll be asking me to wear blue and yellow. I declare you men have no idea whatever of harmony."

Preparations.

Petted Daughter: "Papa, what has come over you? I never had a wish you were not anxious to gratify, and you even anticipated my wants, and handed me money for all sorts of things I hadn't even thought of. But now I have to ask you for every penny I need, and you growl and grumble, and ask if I think you are made of money, and you rail at women's extravagance and invariably ask me what on earth I did with the last cheque, or sovereign, or half-crown you gave me. Don't you love me any more?" Papa: "My darling. I love you as much as ever, but you are soon to be married, and I am trying to gradually prepare you for the change."

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OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

In the meanwhile Scarsdale manages to pass through several letters to Esther to which he receives replies full of hope and affection. On account of an assault upon a brutal warder, however, he is to be removed to Wrackam Convict Prison, an establishment famous for its hard discipline.

A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump. It is while returning from this concert that Revelle proposes to Esther but is refused.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther.

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned."

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Arrived at Wrackam Prison, Scarsdale suddenly recognises one of the warders.

A FAMILIAR FACE.

FOR a second, warder and convict stared at one another without speaking. The recognition was mutual. The last time Alec Scarsdale had seen the man he was wearing the uniform, not of an assistant warder, but of a police-constable—he was one of the two men who had arrested him on that fatal night when John Mansfield's house had been robbed.

The warder was the first to break the silence. With a jarring laugh he turned to the other warder, and pointed at Scarsdale.

"An old acquaintance," he said; "before I left the force I had the honour of running him in. Well, I'm blessed! Who'd have thought that Number 35 should turn out to be Mr. Scarsdale—that was!"

Unfortunately for Scarsdale, the man, like the late assistant-warder Pettigrew, was a bully, and he had it in his power to inflict misery on him, in that he was familiar with the details of his past life.

The hot blood rushed to Scarsdale's face. The sight of the man had recalled the past with a merciless vividness—that horrible night when that nightmare of an accusation had been hurled in his teeth.

"I often get news from Warham," went on assistant-warder Belton, "I've one or two friends there who keep me well supplied with information. Out of sight, they say, out of mind!"

Scarsdale understood the insinuation, but he did not stir, did not speak. He had made up his mind, however great the provocation might be, to endure in silence. He was dominated by one thought—to pass through the remaining period of Special Orders without a breach of prison discipline. A breach of discipline, however slight, might mean the imposition of another six months of Special Orders. He felt that such another period would be more than he could bear; that it would break him, bodily and mentally. Even under ordinary circumstances he knew how slender were the chances of escape. Under Special Orders there were none!

The days that followed were little less than a continuous duel between warder and convict. Assistant-warder Belton seldom entered the cell without making some reference to the past. It was during this time that the real heroism of Scarsdale's nature shone out, for there is more heroism in restraint than in aggression. But the strain was terrible. Again and again he prayed for strength to endure. He kept a reckoning on his prison slate of the days that yet remained to be spent under Special Orders. Every evening, just before the lights went out, he ticked off a day, and thanked God that he had passed through it clear of report, then prayed that the future day might be as the last. The strain showed itself in a newly-developed nervousness. Sometimes he would

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

wake in the silent watches of the night, bathed in a cold sweat, and feverishly tick off on his fingers the days that yet remained!

One morning, when Belton entered his cell, there was a peculiar look of triumph on his coarse features. Scarsdale stood erect at attention, his hands by his sides, the correct attitude of a prisoner in the presence of a warder. Belton glanced round the cell in the hope of being able to find fault. But everything was in perfect order—tins and utensils polished and shining like silver, the bedding carefully and neatly rolled up. Belton advanced a step, and stood immediately in front of Scarsdale.

"I've heard a bit of news to-day, 35," he said slowly, "that ought to interest you. It's come from a part of the world that used to be well acquainted with you!"

He paused for a moment as if expecting Scarsdale to speak, but he remained motionless, though his lips and fingers were twitching. Only those who have experienced the isolation of convict life can realise how a prisoner craves for news of the outside world.

"It's from a friend of mine that lives at Warham. It's a piece of news that will be sure to interest you!"

Warham! Instinctively Scarsdale thought of Esther. Was it something about her?

He knew that the man who stood before him, a malicious grin on his features, was capable of doing anything to torture him. He took a backward step, then steadied himself. The sickening thought that perhaps Esther was ill, or something had happened to her, had flashed across his mind. The thought loosened his tongue.

"What is it?" he gasped. "Bad news?"

"Oh, dear no! Good news. It's about Miss Mansfield!"

The man's coarse, jeering tones maddened him. The old light flashed from his eyes; then, with an effort, he steadied himself.

"Is she well?" he gasped, almost inaudibly.

"Well, yes, of course she's well, and so she ought to be, seeing that she's gone and got engaged to be married!"

Belton's face lit up with a cruel grin of triumph. He had got home at last.

Scarsdale reeled back like a man who had been dealt a stunning blow, and leant against the wall, staring wildly before him.

Esther, the woman whom he loved with all his heart and soul; the woman in whom his belief was infinite, Esther who, but a brief while ago, had whispered to him as he held her in his arms, "Till death!" No, no! It was all a lie; a cruel, torturing lie. He would stake his soul upon that. And yet——

"Yes," went on Belton remorselessly, "and the happy man's Mr. Seaton Revelle. The engagement's the talk of Warham!"

A mist had formed in front of Scarsdale's eyes. The cell seemed to be whirling round him. Seaton Revelle—the hound who had marred his life! The very mention of his name with Esther's seemed to contaminate it!

Belton was fairly satisfied, but Scarsdale was not thinking of him now; he was thinking, in a confused sort of way, of Esther, imagining Revelle beside her, whispering in her ear, perhaps persecuting her. He did not hear the cell door slam to. He covered his face with his hands. At that moment, had the Prince of Darkness been at his elbow to barter with him, he would have sold his soul for freedom!

"Till death!"

The whispered words were ringing in his ears again! If it were true, if so soon Esther had forgotten him, then the world was a lie; life was a lie; Heaven was a lie! Calumny, rumour might assail his belief in the woman he loved, they could not shake it! The belief that had helped him to endure the tortures of imprisonment, of the punishment-cell, was strong within him still.

But—oh, to be free now! Like a caged animal he paced the cell. His belief in Esther was untouched, unscarred by doubt, but to think of that hound beside her, perhaps persecuting her, a man of vice, capable of robbing a man of his freedom, a woman of her honour—to be beside her too, to protect her! That was why he clamoured for freedom!

The thought of escape literally predominated him. If only he could see Esther for a day, for an hour, they might take him back then.

Escape! Again as he'd done so often before, he clambered up to the barred window.

Never had the yearning for freedom been so great, so terribly intense as it was at that moment!

WHAT CRUMP FOUND ON THE COMMON.

"Found drowned!"

The inquest on Alice Vance, formerly parlour maid in the service of John Mansfield, Esquire, and a late inmate of the county lunatic asylum, was over. An open verdict had been returned on the same day that Esther Mansfield left Warham with her father for Gurlston Bay—the day of her meeting with Alec Scarsdale at Roxeter Junction. It had been unnecessary to summon the banker as a witness.

Groups of whispering men and women clustered outside the Crown and Cushion, where the inquest had been held. To some it was as clear as a pikestaff. Though there was nothing to show how the poor woman found her way into the water, she had evidently taken her own life. Others shook their heads. There was an element of mystery about the sad business. The doctor, in giving his evidence, had made the rather startling statement that one of the woman's legs was broken. Had she fallen in the dark, and broken it as she made her way to the water? Had she, despite the injury, managed to reach the edge? Yet, even if this were the case, how was it that she was found so far from the bank? Some said that the craving to live must have seized her after she had reached the water; that, for all the broken limb, she must have made a desperate bid for life in the dark! The coroner himself had advised an open verdict. There was no direct evidence of foul play; but it was mysterious, very mysterious!

Crump had ultimately decided not to attend the inquest; but he was represented by Tom Jackson and Fred Wilton. It was always the little man's policy to keep himself in the background as much as possible. It was at the Crown and Cushion, close upon a year ago, that his real identity had been betrayed, and though since then he had made a considerable alteration in his personal appearance, he deemed it advisable to be on the safe side. Moreover, it was quite likely that Railton, otherwise Tomlinson, might be present. He felt that he could rely on his representatives to bring him a very accurate account of the proceedings. On the previous afternoon he had paid a visit to the reservoir. The place was deserted, and he had spent some time there. He had made a very careful examination of the bank from which it was supposed that Vance must have entered the water, and had jotted down one or two notes on the back of an envelope.

"I shall miss her very much," the little man said to himself, thinking of Esther, as smoking his pipe he leant over the rails outside Woodbine Cottage, "but I'm very glad to think that the dear young lady is well out of the place!"

He was staring in front of him very thoughtfully when Pollie issued out of the cottage, and, creeping up behind him, plucked his coat tails.

He turned, and a kindly smile chased away the shadow that was on the homely face.

"Well, Pollie, what is it?"

"Oh, Mr. Penworthy, are you very busy to-day? 'Cos if you wasn't, I should like to take you for a walk on the common!"

The little man chuckled, amused at the child's old-fashioned manner.

"That's very nice of you, Pollie. Nothing that I should enjoy more; but I'm afraid that I couldn't come just now, as I'm expecting someone; but—well, I ought to be working this afternoon; but suppose I don't! Suppose we get grand.

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mother to pack one or two things in a basket for us, and you and I, Pollie, will have a quiet little picnic on the common—just our two selves, eh? How does that strike you?"

Pollie clapped her hands with glee.

"Oh, lovely! And I'll go and ask grandmother at once!"

The child scampered back to the cottage.

"It'll do me good!" said the little man. "I'm feeling altogether depressed. This poor woman's death has upset me very much. It is extraordinarily mysterious. Of course, even if proof were to hand that Mr. Seaton Revelle was Jim—and I have very little doubt in my own mind on that matter—he would be able to prove an *alibi*. He was either actually up in the balloon at the time that the poor woman met her death, or at Ocklington, where he came to ground, and stayed at the inn there. That is what he would say! But does it follow that because he ascended from the Tower grounds and descended at Ocklington that he was in the air the whole of the intervening time? Might he not have descended somewhere under cover of darkness? There was a general impression among the people in the grounds that he intended, if possible, to descend on the common. Of course, the aeronaut is largely at the mercy of the currents. It is frequently a case of a man proposing and the wind disposing. Unfortunately I know about as much as Pollie does about balloons; but, provided he was well supplied with ballast, I take it that by getting rid of ballast, he could atone, as it were, for the loss of gas entailed in coming to ground, and rise again. Therefore—I don't say that it happened—there is nothing impossible in the theory that he might have descended somewhere!"

The little man shifted his pipe from one corner of his mouth to the other. The puzzled expression, that, since the grim discovery of the previous morning, had frequently shown itself, was again upon his features.

"You may call it absurd, my dear fellow," he said, mentally addressing an imaginary person, "but to me, bearing in mind the poor creature's broken limb, her distance from the bank, and the fact that there was a stretch of deep water in between her and the shallow water in which she was found, to me it looks almost as if she might have been dropped into the water from a great height. Perhaps it is the height of absurdity to allow myself to entertain the idea for one moment; but I am at present suffering from balloons on the brain!"

At that moment Tom Jackson, in mufti, hove in sight. The little man's eyes brightened.

"Ah, Tom, my lad, is it all over?"

"Yes. A verdict of 'Found drowned!'"

Crump's keen little eyes were resting on a decided swelling on the young constable's forehead; then they noted that the knuckles of his left hand were cut.

"Fred couldn't come along with me," went on Jackson, "and I ought to have been here sooner."

"Tom, my lad," said Crump, "were the swelling on your forehead, and those cut knuckles obtained in the execution of your official duties?"

Jackson coloured up a little.

"Well, no! It was a little bit of private business. Do you know what they're saying in the village?"

"No."

"That Miss Esther's engaged to Seaton Revelle!"

Crump's mouth tightened up.

"And you, Tom, I take it, have been punching someone's head for making that statement!"

"No, not exactly; but the fellow who told me that, made a disrespectful remark about—about Miss Esther, and I asked him to come somewhere where it wasn't quite so public, and repeat the remark. And he did!"

"And I do hope, my lad," said Crump quickly, "that you gave him a downright good hiding?"

"Fairish!" said the young constable modestly, as he glanced down at his cut knuckles.

Crump beamed.

"I don't believe in excessive pugnacity, Tom; but there are times when a man is called upon either to give, or take, a good hiding. And I'm very glad to think that you did the giving, not the taking!" he patted him on the back. "Now tell me about the inquest!"

The little man listened most attentively to the account, and asked a number of questions.

"Mind you," said Jackson, "if it hadn't been for the coroner, I believe the jury would have brought it in suicide. There was some shaking of heads; but that's the opinion of most folk. And I suppose, now that it's all over, we shall hear no more about the matter!"

Crump did not answer. But he was not at all sure in his mind on that point.

"Any other news?" he questioned presently.

"I met Railton on my way up here. He again repeated his invitation to drop in and see him one evening at The Firs. He said that he could offer me a good cigar, and a really good drop of whisky! They generally can, these valets. Mr. Faversham, it seems, came a spill yesterday off his bicycle, and is altogether queer to-day. And Revelle told Railton that possibly he might be going away shortly."

"He didn't say where, did he, Tom?" questioned Crump sharply.

"No. Railton suggested that, if his master did go away, perhaps Fred and I might drop in one evening for a little supper, and a game of cards after!"

Tom Jackson winked.

"Both of us would only be too delighted, said I!"

"Revelle may be going away!" said Crump, half to himself, shaking his head. "I hope that he is not going to Gurlston Bay!"

"So as to be near Miss Mansfield?" said Tom quickly, and with a little tightening of his strong hands.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised, Tom!"

"And she can't abide him!"

"But she is playing her part very bravely, and cleverly, and she is fighting for the man she loves. I hope sincerely that he is not going to Gurlston Bay, Tom. I have been congratulating myself that for a brief time at least she would be right away from everything calculated to recall painful memories."

"Jove!" whispered Jackson fiercely. "When I think of Mr. Alec, and of what's she's suffering, it makes me feel I'd like to have my fingers round the throat of that scoundrel at The Firs!"

"I should infinitely prefer——"

Crump stopped short.

"What?"

The little man shook his head. He had almost said—"I should infinitely prefer to put a rope round his neck!"

"Tom, I quite understand your feelings; but we must both of us take great care not to allow our personal bias to get the better of us. When we feel inclined to wring anybody's neck, let us think of Miss Mansfield, and the splendid example she is setting us. I regret to say that in my days of active service I came more than one most lamentable cropper through being mastered by my own personal feelings!"

The little man shook his head sorrowfully. His expression was suggestive of a man who had failed in his career. Tom Jackson smiled to himself; then, after some further conversation, returned to the village.

After meditating for some time, Crump returned to the cottage, and interviewed Mrs. Cobb on the subject of taking Pollie on to the common that afternoon. It was about three o'clock when they set out, Crump carrying a basket, and Pollie clinging on to his hand and chattering away happily. They made their way to the common through fields and by-paths.

"Enjoying yourself, Pollie?" asked Crump.

"Aren't I just!"

The little man stopped for a moment, and surveyed the wide stretch of common.

"Now where shall we camp? What about yonder?"

He pointed to a green hollow surrounded by gorse bushes.

"That'll do beautiful! And after we've had tea, you'll tell us all about the handsome prince and the beautiful princess, all over again, won't you?"

"Certainly I will!"

Reaching the spot, Pollie helped Crump to unpack the basket.

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Soon a small kettle was humming on a spirit lamp. A serviette outspread was the tablecloth.

"Now, Pollie," said the little man chuckling to himself, "you must be the hostess!"

There is no game dearer to the heart of a child than the game of "Pretend!" So Pollie pretended that she was a grand lady, and that Mr. Penworthy was a visitor who had called upon her, and whom she had invited to stay for afternoon tea.

"Only one lump of sugar, please, Lady Mary, I never take more! What a refreshing thing a cup of tea is, to be sure! And what a glorious place you have here!"

Crump had thoroughly entered into the spirit of the thing. He had assumed a perfect society manner, and was playing his part with an earnestness that gave a reality to the "Pretend." Pollie was in the seventh heaven of delight.

Tea over, he gravely asked Lady Mary's premission to smoke. And then Lady Mary, suddenly lapsing into Pollie again, suggested a game of hide-and-seek.

Crump having promised on his word of honour not to look, Pollie darted off to hide. It was quite remarkable what a long time it took the late Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard to find her.

But when he did find her, he found also something else.

A small torn fragment of dark material clinging on to a bramble. It was part of Crump's detective creed never to neglect trifles. Almost mechanically, with no particular object in view, he unhooked the stuff and examined the material.

His small, keen eyes brightened. It was a piece of coarse, dark blue serge.

When, on the previous morning, he had been alone in the shed where they had laid Alice Vance, he had taken note of the material of the poor creature's dress. It was a coarse, dark blue serge—the material of which the regulation asylum dress was made.

"Your turn to hide now," said Pollie, a little impatiently.

"One minute, Pollie dear," said the little man.

He gave a comprehensive glance round; then, taking out a pocket case, carefully folded up the piece of serge and put it away.

So Vance, at one time or another, had been on the common. The inmates of the asylum were not allowed beyond the grounds. It was not likely, therefore, that any other inmate but Vance had been there. The point could be conclusively settled by comparing the fragment with the dress worn by the poor woman. The fact that, at one time or another, she had been on the common, might not be of the slightest importance; yet, on the other hand, it might.

"Now, Pollie, it's my turn. Promise not to look!"

"I promise. I'll go behind that bush."

Pollie scampered off to a bush that was some little distance away.

"Now, no cheating," cried Crump.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Penworthy! Come and see what I've found! It's a bag of something. It's too heavy for me to lift!"

Crump hurried to the bush behind which Pollie was crouching.

On the ground lay a long, thinnish bag. Some sand lay sprinkled round on the turf.

Crump's eyes were twinkling like stars.

"Ballast!" he said to himself. "Balloon ballast, if I'm not very much mistaken! This is indeed interesting. The balloon carrying Mr. Seaton Revelle was at some time or another over this spot, quite close to where I have found a fragment that I firmly believe to have been torn from the dress of Alice Vance; but, of course, at present there's nothing to prove coincidence of time. Yet it is curious, very curious indeed!"

"But what is it?" questioned Pollie.

"A sand-bag, Pollie dear!"

"But," went on Pollie, with inquisitiveness so characteristic of children, "how did it come here, and what's it for?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if it hadn't dropped from the skies, Pollie."

"You're making fun of me," said Pollie, pouting her lips a little.

It was characteristic of Crump that, though at that moment the presence of Pollie hampered him somewhat, he showed no signs of impatience. His manner was kindliness itself. At the same time Pollie was a child, observant, and liable to prattle. He glanced at his watch. He would take Pollie back to the cottage, and return. He wished to investigate the neighbouring ground very thoroughly.

"Well, Pollie, if it didn't drop from the clouds, perhaps it fell from a cart or something. And now, my dear, I think perhaps we ought to be getting back."

He picked up the sand-bag and dropped it among the gorse, where it was hidden from view.

Pollie's lower lip fell.

"But you haven't hidden yet, and you've never told me the story of the Prince and the Princess."

Crump patted her cheek consolingly.

"Very well. I'll go and hide, and I'll tell you the story as we go home, how will that suit?"

The lower lip was braced up again, and the suspicion of tears vanished from the child's eyes.

So Crump concealed himself, and was ultimately found by Pollie, and on the way home told her, in his delightful way, the fairy tale.

And when they reached the cottage, Pollie said:

"Stoop down!"

He obeyed. Pollie put her arms round his neck, and gave him a great hug and a smacking kiss.

"'Cos it's been such a happy afternoon, and I've enjoyed myself so much!"

"Bless her dear little heart!" said Crump to himself as he made his way back to the common. "But I don't think she can have enjoyed the afternoon more than I have. Children always give me happiness. I love 'em!"

He gave a little sigh as he recalled a past memory—a memory of what might have been. He was not without his moments of loneliness. Then the lips tightened, and the wrinkles deepened round the small eyes. He was the detective again.

Reaching the spot where he had concealed the bag of ballast in the gorse, he took paper and pencil from his pocket, and, having consulted a small compass attached to his watch-chain, sketched with considerable accuracy a map of surroundings; then marked in two crosses, one where he had found the sand-bag, the other where he had found the fragment of dress. He jotted down the date. Then he proceeded to wander round in the near vicinity, his keen eyes glancing to right and left.

"Hullo," he said to himself presently, "who or what pulled up that bit of gorse by the roots?"

Quite a large bush lay at his feet.

"Might it not have been an anchor or such a grappling iron that is carried by a balloon. But be very careful, my good fellow! You've got an idea in your head. Beware of trying to shape your facts to fit the idea!"

He pulled out the pencilled map, and added another cross. He was moving on again.

"Hullo! Another sand-bag!"

Out came the map again. Another cross was made.

It was quite dark when Mr. Penworthy returned to Woodbine Cottage. Pollie was in bed, but Mrs. Cobb, hearing her lodger enter, stepped out of the kitchen.

"I just wanted to thank you, Mr. Penworthy, for the treat that you gave Pollie this afternoon. She's gone to bed over such a happy little girl. But I'm afraid you're spoiling her with kindness!"

"We're only children once in our lives, Mrs. Cobb," said the little man.

He was carrying two bags over his shoulders, evidently of considerable weight, for the perspiration was rolling down his face

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"But, good gracious, Mr. Penworthy, what have you got there, to be sure?"

In private life Crump was the most truthful of men, but Crump, the detective, searching to find the truth, was frequently compelled to lie.

"Seeds, Mrs. Cobb, seeds! I'm so hot, not because they are extraordinarily heavy, but because I have carried them a longish way!"

And Crump carried his "seeds" into his sitting-room, and locked them away in a cupboard.

Presently he lighted his pipe and lapsed into a brown study.

"I can prove nothing at present," he said half aloud, "but it's beginning to look to me very much like——"

He pursed up his lips and stopped.

The word "murder" remained unspoken!

* * * * *

"Found drowned!" said Benny Beard as, looking very much out of sorts, and his head bandaged, he sat in the cosy little smoking-room at The Firs. "That was the verdict, Marquis!"

His voice was a little hushed, and his eyes watched Revelle rather uneasily.

The Marquis was leaning back in an easy-chair, watching the smoke ascend from his cigar.

"It should have been 'suicide'!" he said. "But, well, you know there's a prejudice about bringing in that verdict, and they avoid doing so whenever it's possible."

"Curious, though, that the poor creature's leg should have been broken."

Revelle fastened his eyes on his partner's face.

"Look here," he said, "suppose we drop the subject. It's not a pleasant, or a particularly cheering one!"

"Certainly, certainly!"

A silence followed. It was broken at last by Benny. He did not appear at all at his ease.

"I say, Marquis, this sort of life doesn't altogether suit me. Hobnobbing with dukes and duchesses is all very well for you, but it's a cut above me. And I tell you straight, I feel more of a cur than ever since Esther Mansfield behaved like a brick to me yesterday, after I had come that cropper. She's getting on my nerves more and more. It's no use you trying to kid me that she's forgotten him. She hasn't, in the least. Thank Heaven, she's gone away for a bit, and I shan't be meeting her, and feeling those dark eyes of hers on me. I believe she suspects us, I do, 'pon my soul. And—well, the long and short of it is that, if you've no objection, I shall be getting back to London shortly!"

"And what," said Revelle slowly, "about the Normanhurst business?"

"I'll stand out, if you don't mind. You're a host in yourself, Marquis; besides, you've got that inestimable jewel, Railton!"

There was rather a spiteful ring in the last words. Benny was decidedly jealous of Railton.

"Don't talk rot!" said Revelle sharply. "You're each invaluable in your respective ways. Your spill's shaken you. If you want a change, go to London by all means for a fortnight, but I shall expect you back. I'm off myself in a few days. This place is relaxing. I want a breath of sea air. The Normanhurst business can stand over till I get back, though funds are beginning to run precious low. There's going to be no standing out on your part, my dear Benny. Great Scott! You're not going to show the white feather at your time of life! Railton, yes! His nerve's gone—hasn't got the pluck of a mouse. But I didn't think it of you, Benny!"

Seaton Revelle had played the right card. Benny shuffled rather uncomfortably in his chair. He was a moral coward. He possessed a much weaker will than the man who sat opposite him, and at the same time he was hampered by his conscience.

"Come, Benny, we've gone too far along the road together to part company now."

"Very well, Marquis, but after we've brought off the

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Normanhurst business, I shall clear out from here. The climate doesn't suit me, and if I lived a hundred years I shouldn't feel comfortable in Esther Mansfield's presence!"

Revelle stared up at the ceiling again.

"You don't think you'd care to come away with me, instead of going to town?"

"Have you made up your mind where you're going?"

"Well, yes! Gurlston Bay!"

Gurlston Bay, where Esther Mansfield was, where the white chalk cliffs rose up sheer from the sea, where the wonderful caves were, in which, years back, Crump had played at smugglers with a little boy and girl.

"No, thank you!" said Benny. "I'd rather not, if you don't mind. Some other time, perhaps. Marquis, you're about as clever as they make 'em; but you're making a big mistake where Esther Mansfield is concerned."

"Am I? I tell you what, Benny, I'm prepared to double that bet!"

A FAMILIAR VOICE AND FRAGMENTS OF A CONVERSATION.

What Esther had suffered during the journey from Roxeter Junction to Gurlston Bay—her father sitting silent, pitying her, yet his heart filled with a consuming rage towards the man who had brought so much misery into her life, his sense of decency outraged by what had taken place, the sight of his daughter in the arms of a convicted felon—what Esther suffered, God alone knew!

A carriage awaited them at Gurlston Bay Station, and they were welcomed by their host, Mr. Walters, a genial, old-fashioned gentleman. At Gurlston Hall, a fine house, set in a wooded estate, and some half-a-mile from the white cliffs that skirted round the bay, there were more welcomings and greetings and introductions. There were several guests staying at the place. Somehow Esther managed to get through it all. But, at last, having pleaded weariness from the journey, she found herself alone in her room. Then she wept bitterly, and prayed! She seemed to see him again in the hideous dress, haggard-faced, old, with grey-streaked hair!

"Oh, God, be merciful!" she whispered in her agony. "Be merciful!"

She did not go down to dinner that night, and when her father went to see her, her hands were burning hot, and two bright spots blazed out on her cheeks.

A doctor was sent for. For a week a fever raged within her, and she kept her bed. During that time two crumbs of comfort reached her—kindly, cheering letters from Crump, preaching the gospel of hope and patience. Her host and hostess did everything in their power for her comfort. Her father was tenderness itself—but he believed in the guilt of the man she loved!

It was a warm, sunny morning, and they had moved Esther from her bed to an easy-chair near an open window from which the distant sea was visible. The morning paper lay on a table close beside. She was alone. Occasionally voices reached her from the lawn below. She was looking very wan and pale. For some time she stared out wistfully at the distant sea; then, almost mechanically, she picked up the paper, and opened it out. Her eyes wandered listlessly over the columns.

"CONVICT'S BRAVE CONDUCT.

"C 35 Saves a Warder's Life."

C 35! It was Alec's number! She had seen it on his sleeve at Roxeter Junction! The print was dancing before her eyes in a confused blurr. With a little cry, she pressed her hands to her forehead, as if to steady herself! At last the dancing letters shaped themselves into words:

> "On Tuesday last a prison warder attached to Wrackam Gaol, whilst on duty on St. Marvin's Island, where the convicts are engaged in fortress-building, fell into the water owing to the collapse of the staging on which he was standing. The unfortunate man could not swim, and must have been drowned but for the prompt and heroic conduct of Convict 35 who, in spite of the fact that his legs were chained, plunged in to his rescue, and contrived to keep the man afloat till assistance could be rendered. Both men were taken from the water in an exhausted condition. Convict 35 proves to be the Alexander Scarsdale who, as most of our readers will probably remember, was sentenced to a long term of penal servitude for the robbery of his employer, Mr. John Mansfield, the well-known banker. According to all accounts, he has proved a most refractory prisoner, and was wearing leg-chains in consequence of a steel implement having been found in his cell, evidently smuggled in with a view to attempting escape. He was also undergoing punishment for a violent assault on a warder. But it is to be hoped that this undoubted act of heroism will be rewarded with a remission of a portion of his sentence."

The paper fell from Esther's hand. Her heart was throbbing fiercely, proudly. He had proved himself a hero! Oh, if it would only come true! If only the cruel time of imprisonment were shortened. She dared not hope for more than this. Dare she even hope for as much?

On the lawn below, Mr. Walters and some of his male guests, comfortably esconced in deck-chairs, were smoking their cigars and chatting. Now and again stray sentences floated into the room; but Esther did not hear.

"A very charming fellow . . . staying with my friend, Winter . . . turns out to be quite an intimate friend of Mansfield's. I asked Winter to bring him over here some time!"

Mr. Walters was speaking. The broken sentences floated into the room.

"Esther, my dear child, do you think you will be feeling strong enough to get out into the open air for a little while to-day?"

Esther started at the sound of her father's voice. She had not heard him enter the room. Her thoughts had been far away.

"Yes, father. I'm afraid that I am spoiling your holiday. I'm feeling ever so much better. I shall be able to get as far as the garden quite easily this afternoon!"

"Hullo, here is Winter . . . has brought him with him!"

It was Mr. Walters' voice again.

"How are you, Winter . . . how you you do, sir! Very pleased to meet you . . . old friends of yours staying with us . . . Mansfields . . . nothing else to do . . . dine with us . . . sorry, exceedingly sorry to say . . . far from well . . . most anxious about her; but better to-day . . . thankful to say!"

There was a moment's pause; then another voice, singularly clear and distinct:

"Indeed! I'm most awfully grieved to hear that!"

This time Esther heard. She gave a sudden shiver.

"Father!" she whispered. "Is — is Mr. Revelle *here?*"

"Yes, Esther, I've only just heard. He's staying with a friend of Walters'. Quite a delightful surprise!"

Was there no getting away from this man whom she loathed? Instinct told her why he had come to Gurlston Bay. She shivered again, for a feeling of indefinable fear, as well as of loathing, had come over her.

"Esther, my dear," said her father, "you're cold, you're shivering. Let me shut the window!"

As he moved towards the window, their host's voice again penetrated in.

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John Mansfield closed to the window sharply, and glanced uneasily at Esther.

Her white lips were twitching.

"Yes?" said Seaton Revelle, who had been questioning Mr. Walters on the subject of the caves.

"He escaped from Jetland Bill. He must have been in the caves some four days. Poor fellow, he was not taken alive. It is doubtful if his hiding place would have been discovered; but he must have slipped over the ledge in the dark. They found him on the rocks below dead, and in his convict's dress!"

"By the way," said one of the guests, "talking of convicts, did you read in this morning's paper about that fellow Scarsdale—we ought to have Mansfield, he could tell us something about him—saving a warder's life. Awfully plucky act. The fellow is undoubtedly an awful wrong 'un; but, 'pon my word, he deserves a free pardon. Not many of us would care about jumping into deep water, with heavy leg-chains on. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if they did give him a pardon!"

Seaton Revelle tugged rather nervously at his moustache.

"Jim feared neither God nor man!" so the poor woman who now lay in Warham churchyard had said.

Revelle was no coward; but even the remote prospect of Alec Scarsdale being liberated was not pleasant to him.

"I see," he said, changing the subject, "that there's been another fall of the cliffs!"

"Yes. They're very unsafe!" said Walters. "I'm going to have boards put up warning folk from going too near the edge. They are particularly dangerous after wet weather!"

At that moment a young gentleman, a towel thrown over his shoulder and just back from the beach, where he had been enjoying a morning swim, sauntered across the lawn.

"Do you know," he cried out, "there's a rumour in the village that that fellow Scarsdale whom we were reading about in the paper, has escaped from Wrackam prison. The report seems to have come from the police-station!"

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THREE TESTS.

DECEMBER 1, 11 p.m. I wonder if all rich girls are afraid of being married for their money? I know *I* am, and when John Everard proposed to me to-night, I was so afraid, that it was my money he was proposing to, rather than myself. I refused to give him any answer at the time, resolving to put his love to the test. If he is proof against the tests I shall apply—and I hope he will be!—I shall be perfectly happy.

I have written a letter and signed that wicked actress Marie's name to it, asking John to meet her at the stage entrance at ten-thirty to-morrow evening. John has an engagement with me. If he goes away early, pleading business or a headache, I shall know he has gone to keep the appointment he supposes she has made with him. Then I shall never, *never* have anything more to do with him.

December 2, 12.5 a.m.—I am so happy! It is midnight, and John has just gone—I am almost convinced that he loves me for myself alone. I watched him closely all the evening to see if he would in any way betray the fact that he had received a letter from that actress. Judge of my surprise when, about an hour before he went home, he took that letter from his pocket and handed it to me! There was a time, he confessed, when he would have kept an appointment like that. "But that was in the days I call my 'wasted yesterdays,'" he said, smiling half sadly. "Now, there is nothing in all the world that is one-half so dear as the hours I spend with you." Wasn't that splendid? I am very anxious to find out what kind of husband he would be. The next time he calls I will tell him that I think a woman is most selfish who demands that a man give up his club and his card parties. If he agrees with my views I shall know that he would cling to *that* part of the old life, and I should be *so* miserable if I were left at home alone!

December 4.—John is home. He called last night and he stood the test beautifully. He told me he thought if a man really loved a woman, he would have no desire to go to the club or anywhere else she couldn't go. As for himself, he said, if he loved a girl enough to marry her, he would love her enough to want her with him *always*. It seems almost wrong to test him further, but I will just once more. He has invited me to go to the theatre to-morrow evening. In the morning I shall write him a little note and tell him I am in trouble and cannot go. When he comes in the evening to find out what the trouble is, I shall tell him that my lawyers say they are afraid all the fortune left me by dear papa has been lost and that I am practically a poor girl.

Then I'll watch his face. If he loves me for myself he will not care. If it is for my money, he will show it.

December 5, 2 a.m. — I am so happy! John is absolutely true and doesn't care for my money. When he got my letter yesterday afternoon, he came at once to me. I tried to look a picture of pathetic woe, and told him what my lawyers said. In a moment after he had heard it I was held tightly in his arms and he was kissing me! We are to be married Christmas day. I told old Mr. Sharpe, my lawyer, about it yesterday, and how he laughed! He is to write me a letter stating that by strenuous efforts that fortune has all been saved, and I will show it to John. Won't he be surprised!

My maid Nannette sits over there by the fire, half-asleep It's too bad to keep her up any later, so I won't write longer but I'm so happy, I know I won't sleep a wink.

* * * * * * *

"Nannette," said Mr. John Everard, as he stood in the reception-room on Christmas day, waiting for his wife to come down from her room, "Nannette, to-night I start on my wedding tour. Here are the three letters you wrote me, and I wish you would accept this ten pound note as a little confidential Christmas gift. There—go now, your mistress is ringing for you."

And Nannette smiled and answered the bell.

F. Harvey.

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By MADGE MORRIS.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Are Love-Letters Sincere?

"PAULA" is puzzled. She has recently met a very nice boy, who appears to be very fond of her. She constantly receives from him love letters worded in such a way as to suggest that she is all the world to him. But when she meets him from time to time, his manner is far from ecstatic. He is, in fact, rather cold and reserved in her presence. Do I think his professions are really sincere?

I do not always believe in the sincerity of love letters. People often use language in correspondence which is utterly at variance with their real sentiments. I think "PAULA" would do well to take her friend's letters just as nice, complimentary tokens of admiration, not as his heart's outpourings. She should judge his feelings towards her more by his manner, his attentiveness, and his general actions.

The Fidgety Husband.

"LUCIA" has married a man who is terribly erratic. He often takes her to towns where he has business, and when there, instead of making some sort of provision for her amusement, he keeps her waiting about outside offices and shops until she is weary to death, and, if anything disturbs him, attributes it to her presence. What is a wife to do under such circumstances?

As a married friend of mine put it, husbands always try and put their wives in the wrong. The only safeguard is for a wife to anticipate this, and contrive to put them in the wrong first. I think "LUCIA" should take up a very strong line when she visits with her husband. On arriving at the town, she should ask him at what definite time he will be through his business, and make an appointment for that time, arranging in the meantime to amuse herself independently of him. Before he has a chance of abusing her, as she says he does, she should start matters by charging him with neglect, and placing him on the defensive. I have known this system adopted with excellent results among my married friends, and strongly recommend it to "LUCIA."

A Case for Candour.

"LEONARD" at one time was somewhat in love with a certain young lady. After some months of courtship, she deliberately threw him over without any apparent reason. "LEONARD" believes her to be the merest flirt, who trifles with men so long as they amuse her and no longer. Now the other day "LEONARD" was surprised to meet her in the society of a very close friend of his own, who told him in a whisper that he "was very much gone" on the girl. Ought "LEONARD," with his own experience, to warn him of her character?

"LEONARD" would be doing no harm in telling his friend just what has occurred in his own case. Girls who thus trifle with men's affections are not entitled to any particularly chivalrous reserve on the part of those they have jilted. "LEONARD" would rather be doing a service to his friend to tell him his own experience.

The Presumptuous Stranger.

A FRIEND of "JESSIE" knows a certain man. This man has constantly seen "JESSIE" with her friend, but does not know her personally. The other day he met her out, and going up to her, introduced himself, claiming acquaintance with her friend as his excuse. Should "JESSIE" have accepted his conduct, or ignored it?

Had the man been a gentleman, he certainly would not have introduced himself, at any rate unless he had reason to believe "JESSIE" was agreeable to the acquaintance. "JESSIE" should under any circumstances have told him that while she had no reason for not wishing to know him, she resented his familiarity in introducing himself. If he wished to know her, their mutual friend would use her discretion about making the introduction.

But I must make some allowances for him. There are certain circumstances under which a man is justified in speaking to a strange lady without an introduction, such, for instance, as occasions on which he is able to be of assistance to her. "JESSIE" should make her own decision as to whether in the case in question the man had such justification.

Are Lovers Bores?

I AM afraid "HENRIETTA" is a very heretical young lady. She actually confesses that James, her sweetheart, bores her. When they meet, of course there is the usual affectionate hand-squeeze, followed by a kiss of adequate length and fulness, but when the conversation part of the business comes on he bores her to death.

The fact is, James is very attentive to his business, and persists in talking to her about it until she is weary to death. Of course she is interested in his business, but finds little details of his daily life quite uninteresting. Do I think that her feeling so disposed towards him indicates that she does not really care much for him?

It seems very strange to me that "HENRIETTA" should be in such doubt as to whether she really is fond of James. I should think she herself must best know that. However, I construe it as a very bad sign that she finds his conversation wearying. However much they may enjoy that hand-squeeze and kiss, things look rather black if they have not sufficient in common to be able to talk together. As a love-doctor, and not a wizard, therefore I must tell "HENRIETTA" that I don't think she does care very much for James, or she would not find him a bore.

A Case for Waiting.

"PHILIP."—Yes, you would be doing wrong in taking your sweetheart from a good home to share with you the sum of a pound a week, which you say you see little prospect of increasing. Wait until you are in a better position, unless, of course, your wife is able in any way to earn something at home to help keep the house with. Certainly it would not be wise for her to go out to work after you are married, seeing that she has not done so before. No, "PHILIP," I fear you must do what a *lot* of others have to, and that is wait.

Jack's Choice.

"JACK."—Evidently the girl you met subsequently was the best suited to you. It often happens that young men go on under the impression that they are fond of a certain girl, until someone else appears who "sends them crazy." It certainly is a delicate position for the latter girl, as naturally it would be extremely unpleasant for her to appear to be stealing you away from her friend. But these unfortunate things must continue to happen as long as human nature lasts. Someone must be mortified. All one can do is to see that the mortification is as gently conveyed as possible.

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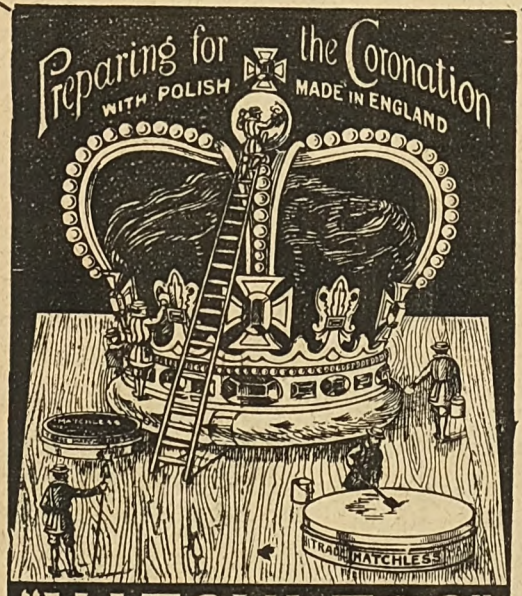

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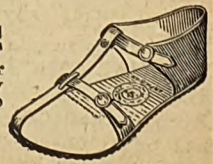

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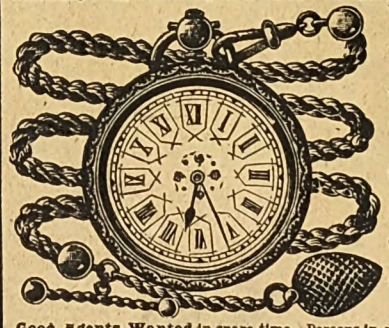

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Short Stories

No. 709. ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending August 2nd, 1902.

THE DARK HORSE.

Cinderella's Triumph Over Her Gay Sisters.

GERALDINE, Evelyn, and Sybil Manners had begun the race of life together at the respective ages of two, one, and nought years, and as no son had come to inherit their father's estate, it passed to a cousin by entail, leaving the girls but moderately dowered.

Their mother had, however, a life interest in the house, and a handsome jointure, so that their father's death made little change in their material welfare for the time being.

Evelyn and Sybil were frivolous, fair-headed flirts, but Geraldine was cast in a different mould. Having waited for Evelyn to be eighteen before "coming out," she had only had a year of country gaiety when Sybil was declared fit also for conquest, and burning for the fray. As their mother always insisted that only two of her girls should go to any entertainment, Geraldine began gradually to give place to her younger and more selfish sisters, until after a time it came to be an accepted fact that they should represent the social side of the family, while Geraldine stayed at home uncomplainingly and amused herself reading, fishing, or riding as the seasons alternated.

And now she was thirty! That aftermath of youth where a woman's chance of matrimony wanes with each succeeding year. Geraldine had never wished to be married as her sisters had done, but what woman is there who would prefer a single life if (oh, such a great big "if" sometimes) she could meet the right man.

Looking back over her life now she acknowledged she had made a mistake. She had missed most of the fun of life and had gained a little by the sacrifice. She had begun life with ideals which were too high ever to be realised. She saw men suffered little, if anything, from the countless enslavements of a coquette and that her sisters' admirers never went and drowned themselves when displaced in favour of some fresh lover. In fact, from her observation it seemed that the men usually got tired first of the wild game with the proverbial fire.

No one realised better than the eldest Miss Manners the exact position she held in the opinion of the surrounding county. A good bit of a recluse, a little bit of an oddity, and oh, horror of horrors to all the male sex—rather a "blue stocking." Others had implied, if not actually stated, that these were the reasons which satisfactorily accounted for her absence from the gaieties of the neighbourhood, and she had not taken the trouble to remove the impression. It would have been entirely against her wishes to pose as a Cinderella, even a most willing one, as she undoubtedly was; if she could with truth be called one at all, when it was only of late it had dawned upon her that the sunshine of life was not brightest in the solitudes.

Every year, during the height of the London season, one of the girls was invited for a month's visit to the house of a rich but childless uncle and aunt, who moved in the smartest of sets. Evelyn and Sybil had always been the ones to go year by year, and it was no small annoyance to their mother's sister, that, with all her efforts, combined with their pretty faces, no eligible suitor had come forward to lead them to the altar, though dozens of men worshipped at their shrines year by year. Their uncle used slyly to hint that the young men found safety in numbers, but their aunt still fondly hoped that one would come "forth from the many," and make the longed for request.

When, however, they had reached the ages of twenty-eight and nine, and their aunt's invitation arrived as usual, a difficulty arose. It had been arranged earlier that Evelyn should be the one to accept it that year, and this being the case Sybil had chosen to retire into private life for a bit in order to do a picturesque homage to the memory of a last season's lover who had been killed in South Africa. Just before the invitation arrived Evelyn had sprained her ankle and was unable to stir off the sofa, so when Mrs. Manners read out her sister's letter with a query as to what answer she should make, silence was her response.

There is no doubt that the memory of the South African hero would have been honoured at a more convenient season by the fair Sybil had not Geraldine remarked quietly, "I should like to go, mother."

Mrs. Manners looked up in astonishment at her eldest daughter, and Sybil broke out into an unpleasant laugh, saying, "Fancy Geraldine in London!"

This seemed at once to decide her mother, who, smiling at her eldest girl, said gently, "Very well, dear, I shall write and accept for you."

But Mrs. Manners was inwardly somewhat fearful as to what her fashionable sister would say to the appearance of her quiet firstborn, and she did not mention which of her daughters was to be expected until the morning of her arrival. Thus it was that as soon as Mrs. Sutledge had opened her sister's letter, she exclaimed angrily, "Well, really I don't know what Charlotte is thinking of."

"What is the matter, my dear?" inquired her husband, looking up over *The Times* and his gold rimmed glasses.

"Matter, why it is Geraldine who is to arrive here this afternoon, as the other girls cannot come. It is really too bad, and a large dinner-party this evening. What am I to do with

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a raw country girl like that? What excuse can I make to stop her coming up?"

"None, with my permission," said Mr. Sutledge. "It is the best piece of news I have heard for this long time. Egad, I shall have someone to ride with in the Park now who will not keep me in fear lest she should tumble off. She is worth a cart-load of the other misses. The best hand at tying flies I ever met, and as sensible a girl as a man need wish to talk to."

"That is just it. A man does not want sense when he talks to a woman," sighed Mrs. Sutledge.

"You mean he does not expect to find it, my dear," chuckled her husband.

"And I have Lord Beauclerc coming to-night, who wants to be taken out of himself by a woman who can show him the way," she continued, ignoring his remark. "It is really most unfortunate. Why, the last time I saw her she had her hair screwed up in a tight knot at the back."

"Ready for a canter," suggested her uncle, "I'll go surety for Gerry that she does not spoil your party," he said heartily, but his wife only mentally commented on the impossibility of making her husband realise the importance of social trivialities.

Geraldine arrived at tea-time, and her aunt was agreeably surprised to find that she passed the social ordeal of entering the room with an unostentatious dignity that bespoke her long descent, and she instinctively softened the somewhat chilly reception which she had prepared for her niece.

The girl was dressed with that excessive quietness which shows particular care and refinement of taste to the initiated, and suited her rather distinguished than pretty personality to perfection. Mr. Sutledge made his appearance in the drawing-room at tea-time, which was a most unheard of proceeding, but, fearing his wife's reception of his favourite, he had ventured into the sanctum of tea and talk. He was agreeably pleased to find his wife's brow unruffled, and his hearty welcome went a long way to make Geraldine feel that her visit was not altogether a foolish undertaking.

Mrs. Sutledge decided that she would make no change in the arrangement of her dinner party, and allow Lord Beauclerc to take his chances with her niece, and so it was that Geraldine found herself one of the dining-room procession, with her arm resting lightly upon that of a rather grave-looking man who had a sprinkling of grey hair above his temples.

"Do you know, Miss Manners?" he began with a rather sad smile, "I am afraid your aunt has intrusted you with a pupil to-night, rather than a companion. I do not know what I ought to know and talk to you about, I have been so long out of England, not to say London."

A sudden gleam of sympathy shot from Geraldine's grey eyes.

"You don't know what a relief that is to me," she said with a laugh, "I have never been in London for a season before, and it frightens me so."

"Then it was a very kind Providence that threw us together. I think it is Baden Powell who says when scouting to remember the other man is just as much afraid as you are, but I own I never expected to find the quality among the fair sex of a London drawing-room."

"But then I am even a later importation than you are, for at least you have been a few days in town, while I only can boast of a few hours."

"But how is it that you have withstood the fascinations of London while living in England, for I think your aunt said you had come up from Warwickshire?"

"Well, my younger sisters are more fond of gaiety than I am, so when my aunt asked one of us on a visit they usually came."

"It was not quite fair to leave you out of all the fun was it?"

"I think it was my own choice," she said doubtfully, "but this year I wished to see what it was all like just for once before I get too old."

It was unaffectedly said, and with a smile, but the note of underlying wistfulness was not lost upon her companion.

"You talk as if you were the age of Methuselah," he said smiling, "I thought ladies generally tried to understate rather than exaggerate their age. I always own I know little of your sex, but I am beginning to realise I know nothing at all."

They both laughed and looked into each other's eyes, and each mentally commented on what nice eyes the other had. Mrs. Sutledge from her end of the table thought that Geraldine might not be quite such a failure after all, and into her husband's eyes there crept a very bright twinkle as he read her thought.

"Our cases are very similar," said Lord Beauclerc, "for I, too, want just a peep at the gaieties before burying myself in the country, since the term of my diplomatic work in the colonies has expired. Now, supposing we compare notes at the end of your visit, since we have started exploring society with a capital 'S' at about the same time."

"Yes, willingly," said Geraldine, "but, oh, dear, it will be as bad as being a journalist! To observe for reproduction takes the charm out of life."

"That is a verywise observation; I think I was foolish to lay down my arms so quickly upon your telling me about that little white feather."

"Oh, no, please don't be afraid of me," cried Geraldine, in a voice of intreaty. "I am really not a bit clever."

"Learned, I think you mean," he corrected, bending his eyes gravely upon her.

To a person who is habitually misunderstood, to be accurately gauged is a terrifying pleasure. It was so now with Geraldine, and for a moment she was dumb, while with diplomatic instinct Lord Beauclerc addressed a remark to the lady on his other side. Turning again to her a minute later the conversation drifted into less personal channels.

"Good-night, Beauclerc," said Mr. Sutledge to his parting guest, "see you in the park to-morrow morning? Going to show my niece off. Finest horsewoman in Warwickshire. So long."

"Well, my dear," he remarked later to his wife, "you see Gerry did not disgrace you."

"No, she seemed to get on very well with our Ex-Governor, I suppose it is sometimes an advantage to a girl to be able to discuss volcanoes. Oh, I think she will do very well as her dresses are less countrified than I expected. She is a novelty too, which is something."

"Not so long in the window as her sisters, eh?"

"I am sure I have done my best for those girls," sighed Mrs. Sutledge, "I can't think why they are not married."

"Too many strings, my dear, too many strings," murmured her husband, as he wandered off to have a last cigar.

A woman either looks at her best or her worst upon horseback, and Geraldine was one of the lucky ones to whom it was an advantage, and so Lord Beauclerc thought when he greeted her and Mr. Sutledge next morning in the park.

With an almost childish delight in the novelty of the scene, and keen amusement at some of the horsewomanship displayed, she seemed as fresh and charming to the middle-aged bachelor as the still dew scented air wafted to them across the flower-beds.

"They say London without its parks would be like life without love, Miss Manners. Do you agree with the suggestion?" he asked, as Mr. Sutledge hailed an acquaintance and dropped behind.

"I think if it was possible for a life to be entirely without love of any kind its case would be far worse than a parkless city, worse, oh, far worse than the Sahara or Steppes even. But then it is like food," she said, laughing, "very much less will sustain life than people think."

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"Have you tried doing on so very little that you speak with such assurance?"

"I don't think I have ever been greedy for affection," she said, smiling, "I don't like receiving what I cannot return, and I am afraid my heart is not a very large one."

With another girl such a topic would have been sure to hit upon a vein of self-conscious awkwardness, but Geraldine's transparent seriousness and directness of remark saved it from the least touch of such a thing. It only made the man at her side lapse into silence to wonder if he had had enough affection through his life even to sustain existence in a healthy and unmorbid condition, and for the first time almost, he realised how alone he was, as his late private secretary passed him too engrossed with his *fiancée* to recognise his chief.

Thus day after day through the bright mornings at the end of May and beginning of June Lord Beauclerc sought Geraldine and her uncle in their morning rides, and it was surprising the number of acquaintances Mr. Sutledge had, whom he wanted to consult upon one important question or another. Indeed it was a matter of some flattering wonder to these worthy folk themselves, that a man, usually careless about others' opinions, and who mostly acknowledged their presence with a passing nod, should now eagerly inquire their opinions upon the topics of the day.

At the many afternoon and evening entertainments to which Geraldine accompanied her aunt, Lord Beauclerc seldom sought her, and never singled her out from other acquaintances, but in the park he seemed to resent any trespass upon her attention.

Geraldine's introduction to Society had been neither a grand triumph nor a signal failure, but on the whole her aunt was not ill-pleased with her visit. If young men did not struggle to supply her with a cup of tea, the dowagers inquired who was the distinguished-looking girl she was chaperoning, and whoever spoke to her lingered beside her unbored, even if they did not eagerly seek her again. She pleased all, but she lacked that charm which prostrates all hearts at the conqueror's feet.

Geraldine realised all this with her usual quick perception, and she felt deeply grateful to Lord Beauclerc that even during their morning rides he seemed to seek her company. This much she readily owned to herself, but she was rather surprised to find that the day before she left town she should actually jump out of bed before she was called to see if the day promised to be fine. Yes, fortune was not going to be unkind this time.

"I wonder why I did that?" mentally queried the girl. "I suppose I am rather sorry to leave town after all. Ah, London has just the charm I lack," she laughed as she covered herself up again, "it makes people want to see more of it."

Lord Beauclerc was waiting for them at the gate, and the trio passed into the park together.

They had not proceeded far when Mr. Sutledge reined in his horse with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Well, really," he said, "I don't know what has come to my memory of late. My agent may call this morning and I forgot all about him. Geraldine's last ride too. Well, it is provoking."

"If I may offer—if you will allow me to escort your niece, I shall be only too happy," said Lord Beauclerc, just a trifle too eagerly for an ordinary civility.

"That is really most good of you, Beauclerc," said Mr. Sutledge blandly, "I am sure Gerry will be grateful," and without waiting for her murmured consent, he wheeled his horse and proceeded very leisurely towards home.

"Well, when an honest man turns thief he has wonderful opportunities," he soliloquised, "why if Susan had attempted a move like that she would have been suspected at once," and those who met him wondered what was amusing the old gentleman so mightily.

Meanwhile the two unsuspecting equestrians had also slackened their pace in the opposite direction. Lord Beauclerc drew his horse close to hers.

"I think when you first came to town we agreed to compare notes as to our impressions at the close of your visit," he said gently. "But perhaps you have forgotten?"

No, she had not forgotten.

"Are you glad to leave, and sorry that you came?"

"Oh, no, I am not sorry I came," she said quickly. "I will appreciate the peace of the country far more after the hurly-burly of town. To value anything to the full one must test what life is without it for a time."

"Then you are glad to go home?" he asked very gravely.

Glad? She looked away over the broad stretch of green bordered by flaming beds in the distance, but she saw them not. It is well for a woman when she realises her heart's surrender in the solitude of her own room and not in the presence of its captor.

"Miss Manners, you are sorry to leave?" he asked again, almost sternly.

"Yes," she replied, in a low voice, still looking away from him over the park.

"Is this the comparing of notes you promised me?" he asked more lightly.

"Oh, I cannot tell you what my impressions have been," she said, looking up at him in distress, "I will have to think them out by myself."

"Well, I can tell you mine," he said, "and then perhaps you will know if you agree with me. I have realised that not only London society, but the whole world is an intensely lonely place, unless you can claim absolute possession of one heart, and although we may do with a small portion of love and not die, to live our lives to the full we must love to our utmost and receive the same in return."

She bent her head over the reins."

"Geraldine," he whispered softly, "will you give me that love, so that neither of us shall miss the best of life."

"I think I have given it to you," she said in a low tone, "at least I am afraid you came and stole it unawares."

He gave a bright happy laugh. How much younger he looked all in a minute. Youth which has not been spent lies dormant.

"Dearest," he said, "you have made me the happiest man on earth, and although we both love the country we must come up to London sometimes just to see how well off we are with our rural peace."

When Lord Beauclerc entered Mr. Sutledge's study a few hours later, that worthy man was standing with his back to the ferns in the grate, with no agent present, and a very comical twinkle in his eye.

"Want to see me about a horse, I suppose," he commented, as his lordship entered.

"I have come to ask for your consent to my marriage with your niece," Lord Beauclerc said simply, "she has been gracious enough to consent to be my wife."

"Then you might have saved yourself the trouble," said Mr. Sutledge, laughing, "for had I not approved I should not have had that lapse of memory *re* the agent."

Both men looked into each other's face, laughed, and shook hands.

"Nothing could please me more," continued the old man, "I always said Gerry would prove the dark horse in the sisters' race."

Peers Hervey.

If you want to make sure your advice will be taken, have it engraved on your umbrella handle.

The eye of a little miss was attracted by the sparkle of the dew at early morning. "Mamma," she exclaimed; "it's hotter'n I thought it was." "What do you mean?" "Look here; the grass is all covered with perspiration."

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SAVED FROM HERSELF.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

A Powerful Narrative in Two Parts.

FIRST PART OF THE STORY.

VICTOR ASHFORD, a member of an aristocratic family, has married Irene Bellasis secretly, and, unknown to her, in a manner unrecognised as binding by English law. Shortly after his marriage, however, he deserts his girl wife and becomes engaged to Miss Audrey Dacre, whose father's estate joins that of the Ashford family. Indignant and mortified by the wickedness of Victor Ashford's plot, Gwendoline Bellasis, Irene's sister, determines to endeavour to make the recreant legalise his first marriage. With this object she visits him but without success. Gwendoline swears she will stop the marriage, and leaves the house.

Ashford, however, follows her, and tries to force her to accept compensation in the shape of a handsome allowance. She, however, of course refuses, whereupon Ashford, becomes insulting. He is checked by the arrival of a stranger who promises to thrash him if he doesn't clear off. Ashford doesn't wait for the fulfilment of the threat.

Gwendoline next visits Sir John Dacre at his country seat, and tells her story to him without success. Leaving the house she sits down by the roadside and sobs as though her heart would break. Just then the stranger, who previously had intervened between herself and Ashford, approaches and offers further assistance if it is in his power. Gwendoline thanks him, and upon his asking to be allowed to see her again, tells her to be in the village church on the following Sunday morning.

The stranger, a Colonial, returns to the village inn where he is staying. Later on in the day, while passing the open door of one of the bedrooms, he glances in and sees Gwendoline loading a small, shining revolver.

"You May Leave Him to Me."

"MISS GWENDOLINE BELLASIS, sir, that's the name, least ways, I suppose it's 'Miss,' but Gwendoline Bellasis was what she wrote in the visitors' book when she came, and she'd no wedding-ring on."

"Gwendoline Bellasis," murmured Philip Ross; "ah, thank you." And he began thoughtfully to stir the second cup of coffee brought him by the little waitress at the Ashford Hotel. The latter surveyed him with profound interest as she removed the plate that had borne the savoury portion of the young Colonial's morning meal, and drew up the toast-rack and the old-fashioned glass butter-cooler.

"Is—is it the lady you fancied it was?" she queried, daringly. Philip Ross started—he had forgotten the subterfuge under cover of which he had sought to question his attendant with regard to the heroine of his two odd adventures.

"Y-yes," he stammered, and added, more collectedly, "I—I must get you to take her my card and ask her to grant me a few moments' interview about a rather urgent matter."

"I'll do that," responded the waitress with alacrity, for the Colonial's embarrassment suggested a romance, and romance is dear to every daughter of Eve, "as soon as Miss Bellasis gets back. She had her breakfast very early and went out at once; she may have been going to the Park, Dacre Park, that is—she was there yesterday, for she inquired the road to it. I wondered at first if she had come down for the wedding—Mr. Ashford's, sir, with Miss Dacre."

Philip Ross assented, but showed no disposition to pursue the conversation, and the waitress, with a sigh of disappointment, retreated, leaving him alone at the table by the window.

Leaning on the sill of the open lattice, he lighted one of his inevitable cigarettes. Everything about him was singularly peaceful—the bells from the neighbouring church floated to him over fields of ripening clover and the birds called drowsily to one another through the still heat of the quiet Sunday morning. But in the mind of the Colonial was anxiety and indecision.

To begin with, he had lain awake so long the previous evening, pondering uncertainly the problem that had so suddenly confronted him, that he had slept, haunted by terrifying dreams, far into the pleasant afternoon, instead of rising, as he had projected, and waylaying his mysterious acquaintance. For some hours of the night before, he had considered the wisdom of requesting to see her and begging her to confide in him. The vision that he had had through the door, unexpectedly left ajar, of Gwendoline Bellasis loading a miniature revolver, had kindled in his heart the gravest fears and suspicions.

Yet he guessed that she meant no harm to herself—in any case, no immediate harm; had she not promised that he should see her at the parish church in the morning? If, then, he kept her under observation from the time that she rose the following morning, he should be able to prevent any untoward event and perhaps, without scandal, to reason her out of any folly she might be meditating.

So he had decided, feeling instinctively that there was some tragedy behind her despair of the preceding afternoon and her subsequent preparation of the deadly weapon. The unknown persecutor from whom he had delivered her in London on their first meeting, seemed to him to be a link in some fatal chain. But he had perceived Gwendoline Bellasis to be both a lady and a good woman, and the impression she had made upon the hitherto fancy-free Australian was no transient one. Unluckily, his plan had been shattered by a trick of Morpheus, the slumber-god, and now he sat over his breakfast, wondering what he should do under the circumstances.

At length, warned by the stoppage of the pealing bells and the sharp clanging of a single clapper, that the hour for the morning service had arrived—the service at which he was again to encounter the remarkable person who formed the subject of his reverie—he rose, went for his hat, and strolled out into the High Street of the small country town.

Many a pretty Somersetshire lass, hastening to church in her holiday garments, paused to gaze at the handsome, sunburnt stranger, with his long, free stride and friendly bearing,

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and to compare him with the sturdy, yet slouching youths of the locality.

Stared at no less interestedly by the male than by the female members of a somewhat sparse congregation, Philip Ross walked down the simple nave of St. Bennet's. He had detected in an instant the presence of Gwendoline Bellasis, and moved unconcernedly to a position where he could observe her at his leisure.

She was grave and pale, but even more lovely in her still calm, with the yellow morning sunbeams streaming down upon her, than she had been in either of the three moods—anger, alarm, despair—in which he had previously seen her. The contrast between herself and the red-cheeked, rustic beauties about her lent to Gwen an almost ethereal delicacy and charm. The Colonial plunged deeper and deeper into love as he gazed at her. For a moment he had forgotten the problem represented by the loaded revolver.

Already the familiar English service had begun, and Philip Ross, prompted by an offered share of a prayer-book, joined in the responses, with, it must be confessed, some degree of absent-mindedness. But though his glance wandered continually to Gwen's set, white face, she did not betray, by look or gesture, that she had observed his entrance.

A startling idea sprang up in the Colonial's brain. What if Gwendoline Bellasis had come armed to St. Bennet's, with the intention of avenging, in that sacred edifice and by a sudden shot, some real or fancied injury? He scanned the congregation; but there appeared to be no one in the church, excepting possibly the rector or his assisting curate, against whom a woman of her class could have a grievance. Yet he wished that he had taken the bull by the horns and demanded boldly from Gwen an explanation of what he had seen through that partially-closed door.

An abrupt motion on Gwen's part attracted his attention. She had bent forward in her seat, clinging with her gloved hands to the back of the pew before her. The rector had begun to read various notices, the old and hallowed phrase, "I publish the banns of marriage," fell upon the ears of the worshippers. He read on—"Between Audrey Margaret Dacre, of Dacre Park, in the parish of St. Bennet the Martyr, Tiversedge, and Victor Beaumont Ashford, of Ashford Court, also of this parish. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony ye are to declare it. This is the third time of asking."

Philip Ross stirred in his seat. Gwendoline Bellasis had risen and stood, pallid yet beautiful, swaying unsteadily.

"I—I——" she faltered, and stopped, struggling for self-control. A rustle of amazement ran through the congregation. Gwen put a gloved hand to her side and the Colonial felt his own heart throb with pain and anxiety. What was she going to say? Gwendoline Bellasis grew calmer, though she still trembled pitifully.

"I—I—know of an impediment," she said, "that ought to be a just one before God and man. Victor Ashford is already married to my sister."

The rustle in the church ceased; amazement had been substituted for suspense. The rector regarded perplexedly the author of this disconcerting interruption.

"Perhaps," he said hesitatingly, "you will be good enough, at the end of the service, to see me in the vestry, when you can give me particulars—of this—this allegation."

Gwen threw up her head with a proud, desperate courage. "I will not lie, even about Victor Ashford," she said; "legally, he is not married—he contrived that the ceremony with my sister should be both secret and invalid; it was all a cruel, wicked plot. He will not consent to rectify the flaw in the marriage, nor will Sir John Dacre——"

The rector raised a protesting palm. "Really," he interjected, "this is not quite the place or the time for these details—and—assertions."

"The house of God," said Gwen bravely, "is the fittest place to protest against an outrage offered to Him and to the institution of marriage. This church is to be desecrated by the wedding of Mr. Ashford and Miss Dacre. Her father, Sir John, knows the whole of the facts, and, in common with his future and fitting son-in-law, offered us money to pay for the broken heart, the ruined life, the shattered self-respect of a girl little more than a child!"

Philip Ross' pulses thrilled with a new emotion. His interest in Gwen became in a flash not only the sentimental passion of love, but the surer one of reverence and esteem. He recognised in Gwendoline Bellasis a strong yet womanly woman, courageous, high-minded, eloquent with the rare feminine eloquence that does not unsex its possessor.

A stooping figure, aged and benevolent, was moving along the nave. It was the old verger of the church, the rector had motioned to him significantly.

"My poor lass," he said gently, and in a voice that reached Gwen only, "let me get you a chair and a drink of water in the porch. You're a bit overwrought, and I've daughters of my own. Come, come, my dear, parson is a bit hasty, and I wouldn't see a lady like you up before the magistrates for brawling in church—you would but get names published and do hurt to her you've tried to serve."

Gwen turned; her blood—the hot, fearless justice-loving blood of a good woman—was up.

"Turn me out if you will," she cried, "but I swear to you all, by everything I hold sacred, that Victor Ashford shall not marry Audrey Dacre."

She stepped slowly from her pew and suffered the verger to lead her out of the church. The Australian followed, stared at more than ever.

In the porch he found the verger alone. The old man's strength and powers of persuasion had failed to arrest Gwen's flight. Philip Ross caught a glimpse of her yellow gown at the bend of the road and hastened after her, to see that Gwen left the footpath, slipped into a little wood by the wayside, and flung herself, weeping, on the grass of a tiny glade. The Australian overtook her, quickening his pace to a run. He could not be certain what desperate purpose her wounded and defeated pride might not have in view, despite the reassuring suggestiveness of her threat concerning Victor Ashford.

Once again he stooped over her, as he had done on the preceding day in the lane hard by.

"Miss Bellasis," he said, and his tones were husky with tenderness, "I beg of you, as your sincere well-wisher, if you have with you the weapon I saw you preparing last night, that you will give it to me. Such wild justice as you may be meditating is not for a woman's hand to inflict, and I dare not suppose that you would dream of injuring yourself."

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Gwen gazed at him in astonishment. "You know about that?" she sobbed; "but I—I—have not got it here. It was for to-morrow, for the wedding—if they would not hear me at the church to-day, I was going to avenge Rene somehow; this marriage will kill her."

Philip Ross raised the drooping, graceful figure; Gwen leant upon him heavily, and sought to hide her tear-stained face.

"Fate has sent me to you, Miss Bellasis," said the Colonial; "I have it in my power to amply avenge both you and your sister. Let us go back to the hotel, and either give me your revolver, or unload it and keep it yourself. As for Victor Ashford, you may leave him to me."

"Rene Must Decide."

"You're quite sure, Ashford, that it is all as you say—that there is no possible point of law by which this strong-minded creature's sister can claim you as her husband?"

Victor Ashford snipped the end of a cigar with a little gold and steel tool that hung at his watch-chain.

"Nothing short of an Act of Parliament, Sir John," he retorted, striking a vesta and holding it in the hollow of his hand, "could make us two one. I am glad you don't mind my smoking, Audrey—it *is* so soothing to the nerves."

Audrey Dacre looked out from under her parasol of sky-blue chiffon across the broad woodlands and goodly farms of Ashford Court. She stood by the old grey stone balustrade of the elevated terrace from which Ashford Court itself commanded three counties. Near her Victor Ashford lounged in a wicker deck-chair, and her father paced the gravel walk with restless strides.

"I've too much confidence in your astuteness, Victor," she observed coldly, "to share papa's anxiety. Trust you for not doing things by halves! But, though I'm quite willing to marry you and control the biggest rent-roll in Somersetshire, I don't fancy a record scandal which may finish up by putting you in the dock."

Ashford laughed.

"I've taken every precaution against that, my dear girl," he declared; "such a contingency attracts me even less than it does you. Not that a big breach of promise action might not be forced upon us, and, after what we are told happened this morning at St. Bennet's, we must realise that Gwendoline Bellasis is prepared to go to a pretty good length in order to avenge herself, and—ahem!—the little lady with whom I was once so absurdly fascinated."

Sir John Dacre bit his finger nails. "I would not have had the scene at the church happen for worlds," he exclaimed; "law and lawyers, newspaper reports and that sort of scandal, don't greatly affect us—it all seems, even to society and in London, very far off and dim. But here, among our own people and under the very noses of a gaping Liversedge congregation!—that is a different thing."

He stopped abruptly. A servant had glided up to them, a tall, grave, supple footman in a handsome livery, and bearing a gleaming salver.

"This gentleman to see you, sir," he said to Victor Ashford; "I was to say that Mr. Ross had only been in England a short time, and may be leaving at an early date—he would be obliged, sir, if you would give him a few moments."

"Philip Ross," read his master irritably from the offered card. "I don't know the fellow—what is he like?"

"Quite the gentleman, sir," replied the servant, with the unhesitating decision of his class upon the point in question; "there is a lady with him: they are in the terrace drawing-room, sir, the library was occupied."

The other frowned. Ashford Court held a party of wedding-guests, and it irritated its owner to be reminded of the ceremony now so imminent.

"Very well," he said; "I will see him. Pray pardon me, Sir John; forgive me, Audrey; some importunate folk from abroad—I won't be long."

He crossed the terrace and entered the indicated apartment. The Australian came towards him, measuring his involuntary host with a rapid scrutiny.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr.—er—Ross," remarked Victor Ashford, civilly enough, and waited for his visitor to introduce the feminine figure that, veiled and cloaked, sat in a shadowy corner of the room. At his pause he rose, threw back the cloak, lifted the veil, and he beheld—Gwendoline Bellasis.

"A clever trick!" he sneered; "so it is you, Miss Bellasis; and who, if you please, may be Mr. Philip Ross, the gentleman from abroad?"

The Colonial answered quickly. "A friend of Miss Bellasis," he responded; "who thinks that she needs, at this juncture, some slight masculine support. I presume that by now you will have heard of the protest Miss Bellasis felt it her duty to make at St. Bennet's this morning."

"I have," said Victor Ashford, harshly, "and my answer to it will be found in the presence here this afternoon of Sir John and Miss Dacre. With your permission, my young Don Quixote, I will call them in. They may be able to convince you that, whatever happens, Miss Dacre and I intend to be duly married to-morrow."

He gained the window, went through, and retraced his steps across the terrace. A moment later he returned. Audrey Dacre and her father accompanied him.

"Mr. Philip Ross, Audrey," he said, "Mr. Ross, Miss Dacre; Mr. Ross, Sir John Dacre—Mr. Ross, Sir John, is an amateur Quixote and squire of distressed damsels. As for Miss Bellasis, you have met before. I have been telling Miss Bellasis and Mr. Ross, Audrey, that we intend, at all costs, to be married in the morning, despite the highly indecorous disturbance of to-day. May I trouble you and Sir John to confirm that?"

Sir John Dacre bent his head assentingly, and Audrey Dacre yawned. "Why will you people not consult your solicitors?" she observed, wearily; "it would make matters so much—more decent. These vulgar arguments and recriminations are most disagreeable."

The Colonial ignored her interruption. "Mr. Ashford," he remarked, "I desire on behalf of Miss Bellasis, to address a final appeal to you. For the last time, will you repair the treachery you have been guilty of towards your young and innocent wife—for Irene Bellasis is by right Irene Ashford, and you know it. She loves you even yet, will you not play a man's part and make her happy?"

Victor Ashford turned his back. "Oh, spare me any cant," he requested; "it's bad enough on a woman's lips, on a man's it is too utterly sickening."

Philip Ross drew himself up. "Very well," he declared, "I see that you are hopeless. Reformation being out of the question, the necessity for punishment remains. Victor Ashford, you are no longer master of Ashford Court, you are not fit for the place and power it gives. I take it from you."

A sudden pallor alarmed bleached Victor Ashford's face. "Fool!" he exclaimed, "what foolery is this?"

The Australian produced a legal-looking document, with a photograph fastened to it by seals. "Here is an affidavit of identification," he explained, "sworn by the best firm of solicitors in Brisbane. I am not Philip Ross, but Philip Ashford, son of that Robert Ashford who was your uncle's unloved elder son. Under the entail, however, I claim to inherit—you are little better than a beggar."

Ashford recoiled. Gwen was gazing, astounded, at the Colonial. "So this was your secret," she said, "and I—I never dreamt of it!"

"How should you?" asked Philip Ashford, smiling, "you

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knew nothing of the family history of the Ashfords, or the story of a painful feud between son and father."

Audrey Dacre interrupted them with a strange, almost hysterical cry.

"Victor a beggar!" she ejaculated; "an excellent judge of a matrimonial bargain you are, papa. Let us get out of this and countermand those idiotic wedding preparations. Fancy Audrey Dacre married to a pauper—what an escape!"

Her father contemplated Victor Ashford incredulously. "Ashford," he gasped, "you—you—surely this can't be true! You would not have deceived me so shamefully."

"It is perfectly true," said the Colonial, "though in that respect you cannot reasonably blame my unlucky cousin. My father was understood to have been killed in a railway accident in New South Wales. He preferred to be thought so and took the name of the man who really perished, a certain Ross. He grew rich, very rich, and left me all he had, Ashford Court and rent roll were no temptation to me. Had the old home been in worthy hands, I should have allowed it to remain there and gone back again. I would even have permitted this scoundrel to retain it if he would but have done justice to his unhappy wife. I gave him a last chance, he flung it away. Mr. Ashford, my lawyers will communicate with you at the earliest possible moment, Sir John, Miss Dacre, I have the honour to bid you good day."

Victor Ashford had been silent, lost in unabashed reflection.

"One moment—ahem!—cousin Philip," he rejoined, "can we not come to terms? Miss Dacre has thrown me over, and I cannot but rejoice that I have escaped an alliance with so mercenary a bride. What dowry will you give with my—my—well, let us say my temporarily-disowned wife?"

Gwen sprang in between the cousins. "Mr. Ross," she cried, using the name by which she had first known him, "you shall not answer, I would rather see Rene dead than she should pass into his power. He is monstrous, inhuman; she shall not tie herself irrevocably to him."

The Australian put her hand on his arm. "Your sister must decide for herself," he declared, gravely; "Mr. Ashford, in any case, you will hear from me at an early date. For the present, farewell."

* * * * *

Gwen, after much deliberation and intreaty, had her way. Irene did not return to Victor Ashford's roof. Yet they saw one another again, and face to face, when, in a London registry office, the flaw that had been so cunningly contrived in their marriage was rectified by a second one. Nor did any one but Victor Ashford and his returned cousin know the consideration that was paid for the formal agreement that at once provided for the righting of Irene Ashford and her husband's perpetual separation from her.

It was not Ashford Court, that is certain, though there are Ashford's there still, including some little and extremely important ones, two small boys and a girl, the latter Irene, in honour of her "pretty auntie."

Two years after Gwendoline Bellasis married her Australian lover, there came news from abroad—from South America—that clothed the elder Irene in formal black and made her sister hang about her for weeks with anxious tenderness.

"Do you ever wish—you—you had gone back to him?" whispered Gwen once, clasping the golden head to her bosom.

Irene sighed. "At—at first, a little," was her murmured answer, "till I helped to nurse your babies and—and then I was glad."

Gwen kissed her. "Ah, well, dear," she said, twisting the luckless wedding-ring on her sister's hand. "Perhaps you may one day take this off and put one of better omen in its place."

"Not I," retorted Irene, blushing.

But she did, and Gwen wept tears of joy over a gay little wedding at which the sunshine was as golden as the bride's locks, and her two boys carried a white satin train down the nave of St. Bennet's after their beloved "Auntie."

Irene had insisted on St. Bennet's as the scene of her second marriage. "Here you were shamed, dear," she said when it was all over, "and here you have been vindicated."

THE END.

IS YOUR BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK?

We have just secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his prophecies for this week's birthdays.

July 29.—The year will be rather favourable for those born on this day, but many minor drawbacks may be expected. Beware of quarrels and law.

Young girls who were born in the a.m. will have anxiety in love affairs.

A child born to-day will be clever, active, and persevering. Have much pride, and a keen wit. The temper will be quick and forceful.

July 30.—For those who celebrate their birthdays to-day a successful year is promised; business and money will increase. Those in employ will have promotion. Girls born between ten and noon will become engaged and marry. Those in literary pursuits need care.

The day is good to buy and speculate in the a.m. and from 4 p.m. Ask favours of superiors and professional people. Good to marry, or for visiting.

A child born this day will be fortunate. In disposition generous, affectionate, and ambitious; perhaps a bit too cautious. Should be in business for itself.

July 31.—To-day's children will have a changeable year. Keep things well in hand if loss is to be avoided. Many unexpected and sudden events. Don't speculate.

Young girls will experience much deceit in their love affairs, and must beware of attentions from married men. Not a good year to travel or voyage.

A child born to-day will be eccentric, and of curious ideas. Not fortunate; unable to save much. Will want to go abroad and travel.

August 1.—Business will need careful attention this year from those whose birthdays fall to-day. Some quarrels and opposition may be expected.

Young people will court and marry, but experience many crosses in love affairs. An accidental year; beware of mishaps and fire.

A child born to-day will be fond of pleasure and luxury. The mind will be quick and active, but changeable and suspicious. If a girl, health not good.

August 2.—Expect sickness in the family circle of those whose birthdays fall to-day. Keep quiet, or losses in business and through property will result. Avoid speculation.

Single girls should have a care in love affairs; their health will need extra attention against chills and serious colds. The day is bad for business. Not good for negotiating with property and land. Bad for doing business with elderly people.

Care should be taken with the health of a child born to-day, if born near nine p.m. It will be fortunate.

August 3.—An active year, giving much doubt and uncertainty. Avoid speculation, and have a care with business and money.

Love affairs will bring anxiety, and young girls should place little confidence in any attentions. Have a care with letters.

A child born to-day should keep in employ. It will be clever and quick, but extravagant and proud. Fond of speculation and pleasure.

August 4.—Many little annoyances and obstacles will come this year to those whose birthdays are celebrated to-day. Will feel much inclined to travel and change residence. See that servants don't rob you.

The day is bad for visiting, pleasure, and love-making. Keep quiet and let others make the first move. Don't engage servants here.

A child born to-day will be restless and fond of change. The temper will be bitter and the wit sarcastic.

"ASTUREL."

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A MISSING WORD.

The Romance of a Misdirected Envelope; Told by a Postmaster.

I BREATHED more freely after it was over. It was a temptation resisted—but I felt better after having done it. As I was sorting the letters preparatory to putting them in the mail-bag for Birmingham, one letter turned up and sent a jealous shock through me that sent my heart throbbing and my brain swimming with a sudden dizziness. I might have expected to have seen it there, but none the less did it affect me when I did see it. It was addressed to "Mr. Joseph Norris, Trent Hall."—and I knew that it was his. I had a dear little note in the same handwriting next to my heart then—a few graceful words thanking me for a book I had sent her—a little note I had read over countless times, and kissed often, wondering if it would displease her to know how fondly I cherished it. I thrust the hateful letter out of my sight, and leaning my hand on the table, lived over again the hopes, the fears, the wretchedness of the last twenty-four hours.

The day before, while distributing the mail, I came across a letter addressed to myself, and on opening it, I learnt that through the generosity of a distant relative, whose name I bore, I had been left an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds. What a change a few strokes of a pen had made—transforming Charles Maurice, postmaster of a secluded English village, into Charles Maurice, the possessor of a competence, well invested, yielding a certain income. And how before my good fortune I had thought of Annie Merrill as one separated from me by my poor circumstances, my salary barely supporting my mother and myself, and how could I ask any woman to share my poverty? Now the burden of poverty was most unexpectedly lifted from me, I felt at liberty to tell her the hopes I had never dared to entertain until now. What would her answer be? That I would learn that very night.

In the same post with my letter was one addressed to her, post-marked Birmingham. Her correspondence all passed through my hands, but I had never seen that writing before. It was large, clear, decisive, the writing of a self-possessed man. Who could the writer be? Annie's uncle, Dr. Merrill, had male correspondents in Birmingham. But this letter was the first that had come to her since she came orphaned from the city a year before, and had been received into her uncle's heart and home. But other thoughts put the question of the letter out of my mind. I sent by a messenger a few hurried lines to my mother at home, to prepare her for our good fortune, and then counted the hours which must pass before I could offer my inheritance to Annie, encumbered with its possessor.

When I reached home I found her there before me. My mother, who had taken her into her favour from the first, her sweetness and orphaned situation proving a passport to her heart, had sent for Annie to communicate the good news to her. She was strangely quiet, I thought, and there was a troubled look in her blue eyes I never saw there before.

In fact, after a while, a subdued feeling stole over us all. Annie's disquiet seemed to impart itself to us. I was thinking how I could venture to tell her all my hopes, and my mother, guessing what my thoughts were, left us together most of the evening, but my heart failed me. It was only when I was walking home with Annie to Dr. Merrill's that I found courage to speak. She helped me by saying that I must not think from her silence that she did not rejoice in the happy change in my prospects, for no one could be more sincere in her congratulations than herself. I answered that my good fortune would be valueless to me unless I could share it with the girl I loved.

"The girl you love?" she repeated questioningly.

I felt her hand tremble on my arm.

"The girl I love," I answered, in tones that she might have interpreted, but failed to do.

"She ought to be a happy woman," she continued. "May I ask if I know her?"

"If you know her!" I cried. "If you know her! Oh, who could she be but you?"

"Me?"

She drew her hand quickly away from my arm, and stood quite still before me.

"Me! Oh, did you say me?"

And then I saw the moonlight falling on her face, and it was not the face of a girl shining in happy confusion when she hears the story of his love from the man she prefers. It was pale and shocked, and then she hid it from me in her hands, and burst into tears.

I needed no other answer. I knew my suit was hopeless.

"Don't cry, dear!" said I. "I never thought to wound you."

"I thought you knew," she went on sobbingly. "I thought my uncle might have told. I am to marry Mr. Norris. I had a letter from him to-day. Oh, can you forgive me?"

She stretched out her little hands imploringly. I took them in mine, and I kissed them while my heart was breaking.

"Forgive you, my darling," I said, "I would forgive you if you killed me, I think. Don't grieve, Annie. I will try to bear it."

We parted at her uncle's without another word, and I went home to the motherly heart that I knew would suffer with me, but whose tender sympathy would uphold me in this hour of bitter trial.

The next day I sent off my resignation, for my mother and I agreed to leave the village where we had passed so many quiet years. It was in the afternoon of the same day that the letter of which I have spoken, that I now know was from my rival, attracted my attention. I took it up reluctantly—I felt I would as readily touch a poisonous snake—and was just about to put the postmark on, when I saw that the address was insufficient. The envelope simply bore the words "Mr. Joseph Norris, Trent Hall." "Birmingham" should have been added, but was omitted, and the letter

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must be consigned to the dead-letter office. With a thrill of savage delight I flung it into the box appropriated to the reception of such castaways, and went on with my evening's work. With that work I went on mechanically, but my thoughts were not agreeably employed.

That, then, was the answer to the missive she had received. But it should be long before he would get it—get it too late perhaps for an explanation; for misunderstandings between lovers had often arisen from a slighter cause than the non-arrival of an expected letter. I pictured him waiting and longing for the letter that would not come, and she poor girl, how her tender heart would be tortured by his imagined neglect, when no answer would be forthcoming. She, I knew, would suffer in silence, and I fondly hoped he would do the same. So I sealed the mail-bag, and waited for the messenger to carry it to the station. The express would pass in an hour and a half. And then a struggle began in my heart. The letter seemed to whisper to me that one little act of mine could send it unimpeded on its mission.

No one, I believe, unless he were in my situation, actuated by the same despairing, selfishly hopeful feelings that were overmastering him, could understand what a base impulse I conquered, when at last, after an hour's temptation, I took the letter from its resting-place, wrote in the one needful word, opened the mail-bag, and let it go. Then after it was done, some hot tears rushed to my eyes. It was my last hope, and I could not help indulging in some weakness over its grave.

Three days after I had the poor satisfaction of seeing the results of my good action in a letter in the handwriting of my rival, addressed to Annie, making its unwished-for appearance, as I knew it would, and shortly after, Dr. Merrill took it away with him as he called for his letters.

Loungers came in and out of the office and went away, finding me little disposed for conversation. Nothing yet was known in the village of my acquisition, so I was spared the pain of listening to congratulations that I was in no mood to hear. When I went home that evening I was surprised to find my mother absent, and still more surprised when, on opening a note she had left for me, I learnt that she was with Annie at Dr. Merrill's, and that I was to follow her there. Hopeless as I felt, the prospect of seeing Annie again promised me only a painful pleasure, but still the thought of being near her had a sweet and sad fascination that I could not resist. When I reached the doctor's, I found himself and my mother seated in his office, so intent on the moves of chess-men, that a mere nod on my entrance showed their consciousness of my arrival. Annie was not there; I found her in the parlour standing upon the hearth-rug, the glow of the firelight shining on her golden hair, and a look of eager, happy expectation in her glance that was new to her sweet face.

"I am glad to see you," she said, giving me her hand. "I have been impatient for your coming—and I will tell you why. There is a question I want you to answer. It perplexes me, and somehow I think I can look to you for its solution. You remember a letter I received in the early part of the week?"

She hesitated and cast down her eyes.

"I have too good reason ever to forget it," I answered bitterly.

I saw her face flush. She went on.

"I answered that letter next day. It was of vital importance to me that it should go then. I was troubled when I wrote it, and addressed it at my uncle's desk while the messenger was waiting to take it to the post. I was called away for a minute while doing so, and when I returned simply gave it to the boy, forgetting that the address was unfinished. Getting no answer for two days I wondered what had happened and suddenly remembered my mistake. I knew too well what the fate of my letter must have been. Judge, then, how relieved I felt when my uncle brought me this," taking from the mantelpiece the letter that had come that morning.

Her eyes searched my face. I took her hands in my own.

"Annie," said I, "I believe I could make no one understand what it cost my jealous heart to rectify that mistake, but I did it. I knew it must be an answer to that letter you spoke of a few nights ago. It ought to prove to you how unselfishly I love you, my darling, when I addressed it and sent it on its way to him. I never thought you would find it out. I did it to spare you a moment's uneasiness. If the man you love cares for you as much as I do, he will make your life a happy one."

"How can I repay your generosity?" she said, in a voice tremulous with feeling. "You could not have acted better if you had had a peep at the contents of that letter. But your reward may be claimed when you read this."

She handed me the missive, and glided out of the room. I took it over to the shaded lamp, and read the following:

"Dear Annie,—When beside your father's bed we entered into an engagement of marriage, I felt, as he did, that the interest of the firm in which he and I were partners would be best sustained by our union.

"I wrote to you notifying you of my readiness to fulfil my part of the agreement, and requesting you to be ready to return with me on Sunday as my wife. You say to me that I must not come. There is but one explanation in this refusal, and that is that you have seen someone who pleases you better than your humble servant. It is but natural, child; I cannot blame you. The young should mate with the young, and I am too much your senior to expect to awake in your youthful heart feelings that have long been lifeless in my own.

"I release you from a promise that I am now aware was made by you under the pressure of the sad circumstances. But this fact can never affect the fatherly regard I have ever entertained for the only child of my dear old friend."

I read no farther. Here was my reward. And how nearly I had lost it by the desire of gratifying an ungenerous impulse. Annie has since assured me that had Joseph Norris arrived on the day designated, so great was her awe of her father's old partner, that she never would have had the courage to contend against her destiny. Indeed, the circumstances of having made the mistake she did in addressing the letter seemed to her troubled mind significant of a deep meaning, and that even beyond the grave her father sought to control her actions.

Annie did not return to the parlour. I found her seated in the doctor's office, apparently interested in the game which just at the moment of my entrance he brought to a victorious conclusion.

"Check——"

"Mate," I cried, finishing the word for him, and catching Annie in my arms, heedless of the astonishment of the elderly pair, I demanded my reward.

Well, John Norris, grey-haired, common-place, and undemonstrative, came to Greenwell to other nuptials than his own. He gave away my dear one with the best of grace, and after the marriage congratulated me on my admission into the firm. My ignorance of his meaning was so apparent, that with a grim smile he enlightened me. With my bride I acquired the half interest in a huge business concern in Birmingham. If Annie had chosen to appear as an orphan, dependent on the bounty of her uncle, she had the after-satisfaction of knowing that the love she won was offered to herself alone, and not to the golden store that attracts so many suitors.

"My dearest," I sometimes say to her, "who would think that in a great measure we owe our happiness to one little missing word?"

G. Parkyn.

TO THOSE WHO WRITE.

A Prize of One Guinea will be paid every week by the Editor for the best short story sent in by any of his readers. Contributions should not be less than 1,500 words in length, and not more than 3,000. The Editor reserves to himself the right to publish any contribution submitted. Stamped addressed envelopes must be inclosed for the return of the stories, but, while every care will be taken, the Editor cannot hold himself responsible for possible loss of MSS.

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The Romance of Pleasant Alley.

Telling of a Strange Discovery with a Happy Denouement.

THE person responsible for the christening of Pleasant Alley must have performed his duty in a spirit of unconscious irony; for never was spot more inaptly described. The houses which formed the court were high and squalid, and by some mysterious law of architecture gradually leant more and more towards each other from the first floor upwards, as though mutually determined that not one ray of the sun should strike upon the paving stones beneath, or their own windows; although I am bound to say that even had this peculiarity not existed the rooms would not have reaped much benefit. There was apparently a rooted objection to glass amongst the inhabitants, for on a modest computation there were not more than six entire panes in the whole four hundred originally put in by the builders; and the holes were covered by a variety of opaque substances which varied from an old stocking to a piece of paper. A sheet of glass represented the price of a meal sufficient for a family reckoned by Pleasant Alley finances, and meals were not so easily come by as to be lightly exchanged for an entire window.

Once in seven days the court received a corporation cleansing, which was really the only bit of pleasure it ever had. This was an innovation of only a few months' standing, and at first had not met with the cordiality it deserved; but gradually Pleasant Alley-ites began to look upon it in the light of a rich joke.

No doubt the authorities' action was dictated by somebody on the board realising that the inhabitants had not much time for cleansing operations—the staple industries of the court being the making of match-boxes at twopence threefarthings a gross, and the sewing of shirts at a few pence per dozen, and to obtain a really comfortable income—say, one shilling and sixpence a day—one wanted to work fourteen out of the twenty-four hours.

Pleasant Alley was undergoing one of these parochial wash and brush-ups, when a young man, dressed in clerical attire, accosted the official who was manipulating the hose, with an inquiry as to where the court led to.

The man having first directed the stream of water at a particularly dirty corner, placed the metal nozzle on the ground, and opined that "It led nowheres as he knew on." He might have added, with perfect truth, that the same remark could be applied to the lives of its residents, but not being given to the utterance of unpleasant truths, didn't.

Undeterred by the information, the clergyman turned up his trousers legs and threaded his way between the pools of water, intent on pushing forward investigations on his own account.

Now we have intimated that the cleansing operations were looked upon as innocent recreation in the alley, and consequently shirts and match-boxes were put aside and the doors and fragmentary windows filled with faces.

Blank amazement was the predominant feeling evoked by the reverend gentleman's sudden appearance.

Nobody ever came down Pleasant Alley unless absolutely forced by duty or the fact of residence, and popular opinion was divided between the visitor being the "school-board" or the rent-collector in disguise—Pleasant Alley was always in a chronic state of backwardness regarding its rent, and held strong personal objections to sending its young to school. Consequently it was given to locking its doors and feigning absence from home when attempts were made to bring it to a proper frame of mind concerning these matters.

Imbued with these doubts concerning the clergyman's *bona-fides*, there was a general exodus of faces from the windows and a general bolting and barring of doors. No single family aspired to more than two rooms in the court, and the majority had to be content with one. For the general convenience the outer portals of the houses were always kept open, and the visitor passed in and gently rapped at the first door. Receiving no response he tried the handle, with no effect, and then passed to the next with a similar result. The first, second, and third floor of that particular house shared the apparent emptiness of the ground one. So he wended his way to No. 2. Here his efforts at last met with success, for the door of the first room he approached was actually ajar. An invitation to enter, came in answer to his tap and he did so.

A young girl rose from the table where she had been sitting sewing blouses, and stood gazing at him.

"I have just lately been appointed one of the curates at St. Peter's, and am paying a round of visits to the parishioners," he said, in explanation of his presence.

There was a pleasant unassuming tone in the way he spoke which appealed to the girl.

"And you look upon we of Pleasant Alley as part of your congregation?" she queried, whilst a smile of half-pathos, half-amusement, parted her lips.

"Certainly, are you not?" he asked, also smiling.

"As much yours as anybody's I suppose—and you expect us to come to church perhaps?"

"We should like you to."

"Then I am afraid you will be sadly disappointed. In the first place, we have little or no time; and as a second reason, there is little or no inclination—I don't mean to be rude, although it may sound so. I simply state the facts," she said apologetically, and then burst out with another question. "Do you know what it is to be poor?"

"I am not overburdened with riches," he responded simply.

"I am not referring to genteel poverty, the poverty which just manages to make both ends meet," she remarked quietly, "although that is no doubt hard enough for a proud man or woman to bear; but the never ceaseless struggle to earn the bare necessities of life, the constant suspense as to where the next meal is coming from. The kind of poverty which forces one to sew a dozen of these"—she picked up the blouse she was working on—"at tenpence a dozen. It takes twelve hours a day hard work to earn ten shillings a week. Think of it, ten shillings a week for rent, food, and clothes. Can you wonder that when the seventh day comes round we have no desire for church, we simply want to sit down and rest our weary fingers, and gather up what strength we may for the labours of the coming week?"

What could he say? What can any minister of the gospel

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say when he is brought face to face with such weary misery as this? The Reverend Arthur Wilson was a very young man, but many a one his senior has been nonplussed in a similar position. He might have offered platitudes concerning the consolation religion can bring even to such toil-worn creatures as the girl before him, but under the circumstances they would have fallen little short of insults. Intuition told him that the best course to pursue would be to put into words the fact that although he had not experienced the life she spoke of, yet he sympathised with the people who had to endure it from the bottom of his heart, and he did so.

"I am sure you do," she answered, and the bitterness melted from her voice. "Yet you are powerless to help us. I suppose we are beyond all assistance. Sometimes I wonder if the money which is spent in carrying Christianity to savages beyond the sea, might not be better spent at home. There is, I believe, an enormous building, with a large staff of clerks and missionaries, which issues I don't know how many tons of tract literature each year for the benefit of people in foreign lands, who must first be taught to read it. I would not decry for one moment the noble men and women who often give their lives for the furtherance of that work, but does it not sometimes strike them that there is labour here in Christian England for them to do.

"Do the charitable people who subscribe the thousands of pounds for this, never realise that at their very doors there are immortal souls to be saved, souls which are groping in the dark because the bodies in which they are enclosed are slowly withering away for the want of a little sustenance. To me it seems that not a penny of that money should leave the land whilst such places as Pleasant Alley and its counterparts exist."

"Hush!" interrupted the clergyman, "our religion demands that we should spread the Word of God abroad. There are religious workers in England, remember. I can quite understand how hard it appears, but I must remind you that the vast majority of the people you speak of are benighted beings worshipping fictitious gods through sheer ignorance of there being any brighter, better religion. Surely you would not be so unjust as to condemn them to remain in darkness from which they cannot hope to emerge unless we send Christian men and women out to teach them the path which leads to the light. There are places of worship here open to all, and it rests with ourselves whether we avail ourselves of the teaching their ministers are ready to impart; there would be no such facilities in the countries you speak of unless we made them."

"Maybe you are right," she answered wearily. "Yet there are so many savages who badly need Christianising here in London—the men who grow rich by doling out the merest pittance to girls and women for work such as this" again her toil-worn fingers touched the blouse—"aye, and even worse-paid for labour which you will find in some of the other rooms of this house. The draper who gives his assistants inferior food as a part of their wages; the landlords who exact exorbitant rents for such hovels as these; the thousand and one harpies who prey on unskilled labour. All would be the better for clerical ministrations. Do not misunderstand me, we would not accept charity. All we ask is a fair rate of pay for our labour, enough to allow us to have perhaps two hours out of the twenty-four for rest and recreation."

"It is not my province to speak harshly of any man," he said sadly, "but I am afraid those you speak of are solely given over to the worship of Mammon, and are irreclaimable. Is there no other way in which we can fight the evil they bring about; for instance, would it not be possible to make some arrangements of a co-operative nature, whereby the worker could be brought into direct communication with the buyer and thus get the full value of his or her work?"

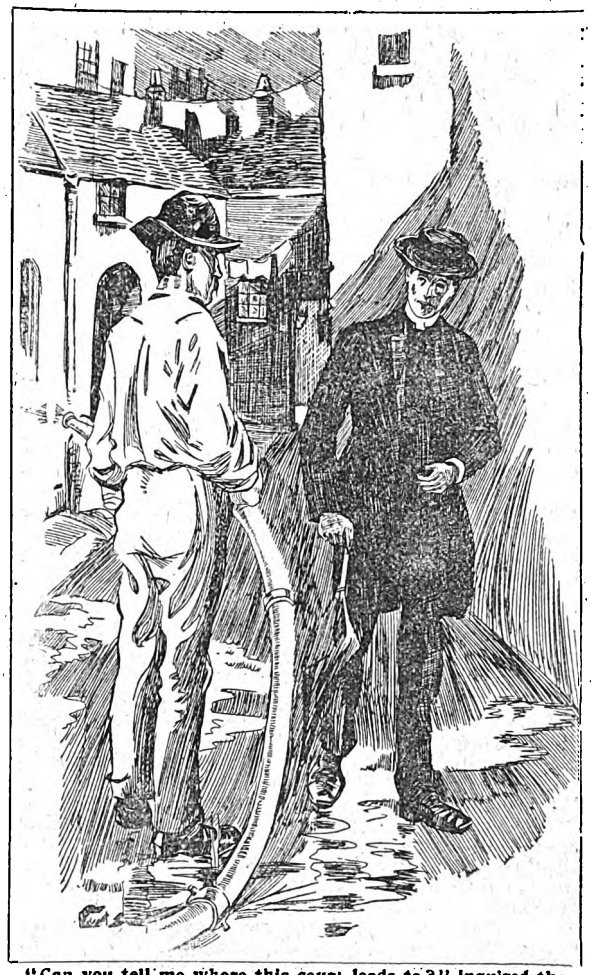
"I have often thought of that," she replied, looking at him with curious eyes, "but you know that would require capital."

"But it might be obtained," he said eagerly.

"Yes, that would be the solution of the problem," she agreed quietly.

The Reverend Arthur remained talking a few more minutes and then bade her good-bye, promising to call again. He visited several other people in Pleasant Alley, for his long stay in their neighbour's room had convinced the remainder that he could not be the rent-collector or school-board.

The same wretched struggle for existence was the predominating feature of all. He learnt that the name of the girl he had just seen was Daisy Lawson, and that she had lived in the Alley for a year. She appeared to have been a stranger to all previous to that, but she was universally loved and respected. Many a kindness had she shown to her fellow



"Can you tell me where this court leads to?" inquired the clergyman.

strugglers; each had something to tell which added to the interest he took in her.

His thoughts were very busy with her, as he walked away. There was an air of refinement about her which was strangely out of keeping with the sordid surroundings. Her mode of speech was that of an educated woman, and he had noticed that her hands were white and well-shaped in spite of the finger-tips being disfigured by the needle she so ceaselessly plied. Then she was beautiful, not perhaps judged on severely classical lines, but beautified with high resolve and steadfast courage. What could such a woman be doing in Pleasant Alley? Surely there must be more congenial work for such as her?

They met very often in the few weeks that followed. For,

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after consulting her, he had taken a large room in the Alley wherein they held a short, bright service on Sunday afternoons; then, too, he made a rule of spending whatever time he could spare from his many duties with them at their labour. Six or eight would bring their work to one apartment and he would read aloud something they were interested in, or chatted on subjects which appealed to them. He found much to admire in these people. Truly, there is no charity which surpasses that of the poor to the poor, and amongst them all there were none who showed more kindness to her fellows than Daisy Lawson, done, moreover, in a quiet, unostentatious way.

He never heard another word of complaint from her after the little outbreak when they first met, and knew now, although she had never told him, that her object on that occasion had been to point out the way in which he might be of use to Pleasant Alley.

He had been working very hard to raise funds to make arrangements which would redeem the actual workers from the grip of the middle-man, but the church to which Arthur Wilson belonged was not a rich one, and he had no influence in financial circles which could be exerted. He often lamented to Daisy his inability to do more for the people, but although plainly sympathising with the object she did not seem much perturbed or surprised at its non-success. The Reverend Arthur rather wondered at this, knowing how near the plan was to her heart. Truth to tell, it was rather disappointing. He did not like to feel that she was uninterested in his undertakings.

Perhaps the dismay this brought caused him to rigidly examine his feelings towards her. "Why should I mind? What is she to me?" he asked himself. And even as the thought was formed the answer came: "Because she is all the world to you, because you love her."

Yes, ever since the day they had first met, the affection had been steadily growing, unsuspected by him, and now he knew she was the only woman he could ever wish to make his wife.

With the timidity of the genus lover he one day put his fate to the test.

She heard him to the finish in silence, but the soft light which came to her eye gave hope.

"And in spite of my only being a work-girl—a woman of the people, you love me?" she asked, all aglow with tenderness.

"That is but another reason why you should consent. Think of the assistance your knowledge of the workers will be to me in my ministration," he pleaded ardently.

"If only for that I suppose I should have to consent," she said, with a happy smile.

He gathered her in his arms, pressing his lips to hers, as he asked jealously:

"And for no other reason, sweetheart?"

"Yes," she murmured shyly. "Because I love you dearly."

There were many other sweet things they said to one another, but it is not within our province to record them. There is one item of the conversation that must be referred to, however.

He had been speaking hopefully of some day getting enough money to bring their pet project into being.

"But suppose we needn't wait," she asked. "Suppose, after all, I should turn out to a rich woman masquerading as a poor one."

"You?" he gasped.

"Yes," she said solemnly. "For that is what I really am. I trust you will not like me the less on that account."

He gave her osculatory proof to the contrary.

Then Daisy told him that it was quite true. How she also had been struck with the idea of bettering the people's lot on the same lines as those he had laid down, and had determined to live their life for a year so that she might learn the best mode of putting it into execution.

"So now you can start as soon as you like, sir," she finished.

And they did, with most happy results. Would that there were more like them.

Martin H. Potter.

Woman and her Watch.

Perhaps a woman can't sharpen pencils and throw stones in just the orthodox way, but she can take care of a watch. Her ministrations begin with winding the watch, which she never thinks of doing unless she is going shopping or on a journey.

Then, if she doesn't break the mainspring, she tucks the watch inside her dress, where the multitudinous hooks and buttons scrape and scratch the case, and where it requires a half-hour's investigation when she wants to see what time it is.

At night, when she takes off her dress, she forgets all about it, of course, and sends it whizzing under the bed as she throws back her bodice preparatory to wrestling her way out of it.

If it stops she isn't at all disconcerted. With a serenity born of long experience she picks it up and shakes it until it ticks again.

After all it is only the unusually careful woman who wears her watch inside her dress, for the intricate fastenings of the fashionable bodices render it well nigh impossible. She has the happy fashion of tucking it into the pocket of her cloak, or dumping it into the bottom of the bag she carries about with her, and which usually contains everything, from cough lozenges to her marriage certificate, or tucking it away, along with half a hundred samples, her latch keys, and small change, in her purse.

Jewellers have wise instincts, notice quickly, and cater well to sweet woman's whims. They understand that there is no earthly use in remonstrating with women, and explaining that it is their own fault that their watches never keep accurate time, and are constantly in need of repair.

No; they philosophically set about making little purses and card-cases, with a separate apartment for the watch, and an aperture in the outside, through which the hands may be seen; they set them in bracelets to be clasped about their wrist; they introduce them into the handles of umbrellas; they bury them in the heart of flower petals with a pin at the back; and, last of all, they have produced the woman's delight—the chatelaine.

This octopus arrangement of silver and gold pins on the one side, or slides over the belt, or winds girdlewise about her waist, but in any event it keeps the watch swaying and banging against all the other knives and smelling-bottles and shears and things with which she burdens herself in a perfectly delightful way that is warranted to thwart the purpose of the best-disposed timepiece ever manufactured.

There is only one other way in which she shows her ingenuity to better advantage than in the matter of watch management. She can think of a few more things to do with a cross baby than she can with a watch, but not many.

F. P. W.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

FRANKIE WINS A DRESS, AND I LOSE EIGHT HUNDRED POUNDS.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. Mary Vernon declares that they are exactly as given to her by Lord Kinross, whereupon Kinross breaks off the engagement. The diamonds subsequently appear as a gift from Fluffy to Mrs. Norton, set in a pair of hat-pins. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket-book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The Society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation. The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room, Cynthia however stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope. While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard. On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Mrs. Norton that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. Mrs. Norton asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

WHATEVER future unpleasantness Fate—or Percival Hope—might have in store for her, at present Frankie had things all her own way. She was Society's latest fad, and, to quote the pink youth—"ran Society for all it was worth." Smart women besieged her with invitations, and a call at Pont Street was an indispensable part of the day's programme for a man about town.

Each morning, perfectly turned out, Frankie went for a canter in the Park, varied by an excursion in a celebrity's car, or a drive on a somebody's coach.

Mrs. Norton's admirers increased and multiplied in those days; among a certain set our house was called the "Barracks," because it was always full of Army men.

The table at luncheon every day was crammed. All sorts of people used to drop in. Notorieties who ate a lot and said little, geniuses who talked a great deal and drank more. Millionaires who bored themselves, Members of Parliament who bored their neighbours, actors who bored everyone impartially, and a few nice commonplace persons with good manners. The food was always lovely at Pont Street, and the wine, thanks to Sir John, excellent.

After luncheon and a half-hour's gossip over cigarettes and coffee, Frankie would change her frock and drive to a swagger "At Home," a smart bazaar, or some important function.

Her frocks were things to dream of. "What Mrs. Norton wore" was one of the principal items in the report of any fashionable gathering. Occasionally I accompanied her, more often I spent the afternoon with Lady Paula, sometimes with Toby Ffolliott, a friend of Lord Kinross and devoted to my cousin.

It was Toby who told me that Lord Chesterton was driving Frankie down to Epsom for the Derby.

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"Chesterton always drives fast nags and pretty women!" observed young Ffolliott. "His turn-out is sure to be the smartest on the road. You are coming, of course?"

I intimated that, as yet, I had not been asked.

"Chesterton told me he'd done so; he's not usually forgetful. He's very keen about having you, Miss Hamilton."

That evening Frankie came to my room.

"Lord Chesterton is going to drive me down to Epsom," she said in a casual way. "Would you care to come? I don't suppose he'd mind."

It wasn't a nice way of conveying an invitation. I felt hurt and showed my annoyance.

"If Lord Chesterton wants me to go he can ask me himself," I replied. "I don't care for second-hand invitations."

Frankie stared.

"Oh, if you are going to put on frills," she laughed, "I've nothing more to say. Good-night, Cynthia."

The next day I got a letter from Lord Chesterton inviting me in due form.

"Shall I go, Frankie?" I asked.

She looked at me steadily for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose so," she said, and the matter dropped.

All the same, I knew Frankie did not want me at the Derby—with Lord Chesterton, at any rate.

Derby day fell in May that year—a beautiful morning, fresh and sweet with a summer sky and a soft west breeze.

Frankie came down to an early breakfast looking radiant. She used to put in an occasional appearance at the meal to appease Lady Gaveston, who stigmatised breakfast in bed as ungodly.

Just as we were finishing Frankie was summoned to see Madame Clairette, her dressmaker.

"Come with me, Cynthia," she said, "I am afraid Clairette is going to be unpleasant about her bill."

Frankie's forebodings were fully realised. Clairette was most unpleasant, not to say rude. She announced that after repeated applications demanding her account she had called for it in person.

"I'm tired of waiting for my bill, Mrs. Norton, and weary of your broken promises to pay it; I have come to tell you that I must and will have my money. For nine months I have supplied your costumes, in many cases your hats and underskirts as well. I won't do it any longer. There is my account, £2,000; now, are you going to pay me?"

"Not this morning, my good Clairette," said my cousin imperturbably, "I can't spare the money. It's Derby day, you know, and I've made a heavy book."

"Then I give you no more clothes. Not even the dress for the Duchess of Warminster's ball," The little woman—she was very small and very dowdy—fairly bristled with indignation.

"So much the worse for you, Clairette; every one of your clients shall hear of your insolence before the day is out. I'm not the only woman who runs a long bill, remember. You'll find that no credit will mean no customers in your case."

The dressmaker flushed, her retort came quickly.

"My other clients are *different*," she said spitefully. "I would give them six months or six years' credit. I should be sure of my money at the end. But"—she paused—"I can't afford to run any risks, Mrs. Norton; £2,000 is a large sum."

"You are extremely insolent!" said Frankie.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I want my money."

"I can let you have £500 on account," said my cousin at last. "That will suit you, I suppose?"

Clairette paused; then, looking straight at Frankie, answered decidedly: "No! I won't supply any more clothes until the whole is paid, Mrs. Norton, and that's the truth!" She snapped her teeth, and shook her head with emphasis.

For the first time Frankie looked anxious; I had felt terribly uncomfortable throughout the interview. I was sorry for Clairette, but even more sorry for my cousin. I happened to know that she was very short of money at the moment; her dividends were as usual overdue, the account at the Bank overdrawn.

Consider the situation! She had been asked to the Duchess of Warminster's ball—the "event of the season!" She had anticipated creating a sensation, climbing another step up the social ladder. It had needed no little skill on Frankie's part to win an invitation from the Duchess; she valued the recognition it implied and was determined to make the most of it. And now at the last moment was her triumph to be jeopardised, her efforts nullified by a dressmaker? Without £2,000 Clairette would not give up the gown specially designed for the great occasion. Without the gown the ball for Frankie was impossible. And the date was fixed for to-morrow night!

How in the world could poor Frankie find £2,000—and by to-morrow night? A difficult problem, but my cousin solved it.

"Very well," she said curtly, "you shall have the money. I want my dress otherwise I should not entertain your demand for a moment." She sat down and rapidly wrote out a cheque for the amount. "As you are here you may as well see the gown on me, Clairette. It may want a little alteration, and I sha'n't have time to-morrow. Cynthia," she turned to me, "take a hansom, will you, and drive to Clairette's place in Bond Street? I want you to bring back my dress while madame waits."

For a second the dressmaker hesitated. It was on the cards for her to veto my cousin's proposition, to decline to give up either her time or the frock. She glanced quickly, half suspiciously from the cheque to my cousin's face. What she read there seemed to give her reassurance. She pocketed the pink slip of paper, and consented to remain.

Frankie followed me into the hall. "Don't you come away without the gown, Cynthia, you understand?" she whispered.

"Yes; but, Frankie, what will you do? You're overdrawn at the bank, you know. Clairette will find that out as soon as she presents the cheque, and then——" I stopped, troubled at the thought of what might happen.

Frankie smiled.

"Don't worry," she said lightly. "I'm not quite a fool. The cheque is crossed, Cynthia, and therefore won't be presented at my bank for two days at least. By that time I shall have got the money somehow."

Somehow! Long afterwards I understood what the expression meant.

I drove to Bond Street, captured the frock, and returned in triumph. Clairette put the finishing touches required and departed in peace.

"She's an atrocious woman!" said Frankie, as the door shut behind her. "But, thank goodness, whatever happens I have got my frock."

Atrocious or not, Clairette was undoubtedly an artist. Frankie was wearing one of her *chefs d'œuvres* that very day. The gown was of dead white cloth embroidered in gold. The coat bodice fitting like a glove opened over a full vest of *point d'Alençon* caught across the bust by an Indian clasp of fine gold beautifully jewelled. The waist belt and coat buttons matched the clasp. The long, closely-cut gown clung to her supple figure—a figure crowned with a picture hat framing the golden glory of her hair.

"The Norton" was a notable success that day. Everybody turned to look at the fair woman in the white and gold.

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My own frock was biscuit-coloured cloth, with a lovely little Eton jacket in tucked silk of the same shade, with turquoise buttons. When I was ready I went to show myself to Frankie.

I found my cousin poring over a letter. Frankie had the post-bag brought to her room every morning, and sorted the contents herself.

"Do you know this writing, Cynthia?" she asked, handing me the letter in question.

"Why it's Percival Hope's!" I replied. "Has he been writing to you, Frankie?"

"No, not to me," she said scornfully, "to my maid," and she showed me an envelope addressed to Ella Martin.

"You may as well read the letter," she continued. "See what he says for yourself."

Considerably astonished, I read as follows:

"I am sorry to hear of your trouble. I may be able to help you if you give me fuller details. Meet me South Kensington Station this afternoon at five, and I will see what can be done. "PERCIVAL HOPE."

Ella Martin and Percival Hope, the conjunction of names was ominous!

"Wherever did you find the letter, Frankie?" I cried; "and what on earth does it mean?"

"Never mind where I found it, Cynthia, I have it and that is enough. As for the meaning, that's plain. Hope swore he would bring Kinross proofs that I was an adventuress; he wants Ella to help him get 'em. Briefly, he's going to pump her, ascertain what she knows, and all she imagines about me. It is easy enough to see *that*; what puzzles me is how he opened up communications with her without my knowing," and she glanced towards the post-bag. "He'll bribe her heavily to speak; the question is if I can't bribe her more heavily and keep her silent."

"But, Frankie——"

"I know what you're going to say, child," my cousin cried impatiently, "that Ella knows nothing about me—nothing to my disadvantage, at all events. That is so, of course. All the same, I don't want her and Percival to meet; what is more, they *shall not*. Ring the bell, will you—I'll have Ella in and speak to her."

"Wait till-to-morrow, Frankie," I urged. "Lord Chesterton will be here directly; we shall be late if you speak now."

"Don't be ridiculous, Cynthia. I must see her at once,—at once, I tell you—there's not a moment to be lost!"

She leant back, her lips compressed, her eyes hard; there was a look of tense anxiety about her—anxiety I could not understand.

"I want you to match this silk for me, Ella," she said smiling, herself once more as the girl entered. "I'm afraid it will take you some time, the colour is so uncommon. Still, it is a bright morning and the walk will do you good. You are not looking very well," she went on kindly, "what's the matter with you?"

"A little tired, ma'am, that's all, thank you."

"A little worried also, I think, Ella. What is troubling you—anything money will help?"

"You're very kind, but it's not money, thank you."

She hesitated for a moment, then went on quickly: "If you remember, ma'am, I told you about a week ago I was in great distress about a young man who had enlisted for a soldier. I wanted to know if there was any hope of getting his discharge—his regiment's ordered to the Front!"

"I remember something about it *now*, Ella. But I've been so busy lately it went out of my head."

The girl looked sullen. She answered with a touch of resentment.

"It doesn't matter *now*, thank you. I have found friends who will help me in the matter. I shouldn't have mentioned it again, ma'am, only you asked what was troubling me."

Frankie smiled sweetly.

"I am glad you have found some friends," she said. "Who is the young man, Ella—your brother?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then it's your sweetheart."

The girl flushed. My cousin touched her lightly on the shoulder. "Come," she said in a low caressing voice, "tell me all about it."

Ella caught her breath.

"Oh, ma'am," she cried, then, with a burst of sobs: "We were to have been married next year, and now he's gone for a soldier, and perhaps he'll get shot."

"He had a tiff with you, I suppose, and like a foolish fellow enlisted?"

Ella nodded, trying to control her sobs.

"Jim's an engraver by trade," she continued, "and earning good money. But I told you all about him once before, ma'am." Resentment was creeping back into her voice. "There's no occasion for me to trouble you again."

"I am so sorry, Ella, that I didn't pay more attention at the time. However, it is not too late. Where is your sweetheart stationed?"

"At Chelsea. But I don't want you to trouble, thank you, ma'am. I have found friends whom I am sure will help me."

She tightened her lips and gazed defiantly at Frankie.

"You can't have too many friends," returned my cousin, "and I'm willing to be one of them." She looked at the girl with a bright smile. "Would you like to see your sweetheart to-day, Ella—this very afternoon?"

"Ma'am!" Ella turned crimson. "If I only could!" She looked wistfully and clasped her hands.

"Well, then you shall. I think I can manage it for you. I'll give you a note to Captain Bartlett—he's at Chelsea just now, and he will get a few hours' leave for Jim to go out with you. Dry your tears and look cheerful, Ella, or your sweetheart won't be pleased to see you. Nothing bores a man like a woman in the dumps, and men never forgive being bored. They'll look over everything but *that*. Here is a note for Captain Bartlett; get off at once and have a good time. I'll talk to you to-morrow about Jim's discharge. I won't forget this time, I promise you. Good-bye."

The door closed on the comforted Ella. My cousin took a quick, hard breath, and began to pace the room muttering to herself the while:

"Hope won't meet her this afternoon or to-morrow—I'll take care of that. The next day he may contrive to see her—call here when I'm out perhaps. By that time I must have my plans ready. Somehow or other this Jim must get his discharge through me, that will insure Ella's silence and checkmate Hope. Yes, I shall pull through yet. A little luck and then—— If only she doesn't tell about the photograph, if only——" My cousin stopped abruptly and stared at me hard.

"I've a bad habit of talking to myself," she said, "but what I say is always nonsense. Do you hear, *nonsense!*" She caught me by the arm.

But I made no reply, a vague suspicion silenced me—suspicion of Frankie. I turned my face away.

The next moment she was kneeling on the floor beside me, her hands clasping mine.

"What is it?" she said quickly; "there's a strange look, a new look on your face. It's as though you don't trust me, as though you suspected me of something wrong. What does it mean, Cynthia? What have I done?"

"Nothing, nothing!" I protested, ashamed already of my doubt.

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"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
New Series of Stories.

"I never thought *you* would turn against me," she went on. "Oh, I know there's a lot in my life you cannot understand. How should you. You don't realise how I have to fight my way. Every woman I meet has her knife in me. Because they smile do you think they like me in their hearts? I tell you they hate me, fear me, envy me. Why? Because I'm stronger than they are, and *they know it*. They grudge me success, and plot and plan to bring me failure. And you—you that I thought so different—are as bad as the rest!" She rose impetuously and turned away from me.

"No, no, Frankie; don't say such things!"

"Go!" she said, "at once, if you prefer. I would not have you stay with me a moment against your will. You can return to Bruges, go back to the convent to-day, if you wish!"

The convent! High white walls upon a green hillside, steeped in the sunshine of a summer afternoon, rose before me. I heard the hum of the children's voices, the chime of the convent bell. The sisters with their meek smiles and gentle eyes stood beside me. The wind brought me the fragrance of the lilies, full of the peace of that life, so very far from this.

For a moment I was drawn towards it—but only for a moment. Already I repented and reproached myself for doubting Frankie. I was very fond of her, and of the life, and—well, of somebody else who played a not unimportant part in it.

"I don't want to leave you, Frankie dear!" I said. "And I think nothing but what's kind about you."

For a moment she hesitated, then turned and kissed me several times. The crisis was over; we were reconciled.

"Come," she said brightly, "we're friends now, let's enjoy ourselves."

She seized my hand, together we raced downstairs, to the consternation of the butler, not to mention Lady Gaveston.

The rest of the party were waiting for us. Lord Chesterton, Toby Ffolliott, one or two Army men, and a sporting Baronet named Fulke—this last was accompanied by his sister, a sweet thing, with pink cheeks and golden hair that did not match. Mrs. Curtis Blount was also with us, but the faithful Algy for once did not accompany her. She looked very handsome in pale grey with pink roses, but did not seem in the best of tempers, and snapped me up quite sharply.

Lord Chesterton looked distinguished in his Newmarket coat. Well set up, with square shoulders, and a deep chest, his keen blue eyes looked out from a face tanned by the sun; a quiet face with reserves of power, a massive chin, and firmly-modelled mouth. A silent, and one felt a strong man.

"I'm very glad you are coming, Miss Hamilton," he said kindly. "Toby declared you wouldn't trust yourself to me. I was awfully down in the mouth about it. I want you on the box-seat, don't you know."

I felt immensely flattered, but, before I could reply, Frankie answered for me.

"It's quite nice of you, Lord Chesterton, but Cynthia's got a tiresome headache, poor child. I am afraid she'd feel the glare too much in front. What do you think yourself, dearie?" She smiled, but all the same I didn't like it.

"I'd better take a *back seat* please, Lord Chesterton." I said spitefully. He smiled but made no further protest. Frankie was placed in the seat of honour, Toby made room for me beside him at the very back.

"I'm sorry," that young man observed, glancing at Chesterton,

"Why?" I asked sharply.

"Partly for Chesterton. He wanted you beside him. Mostly for myself—I wanted Frankie."

"I do hope you are not going to be silly about my cousin," I said crossly, I was getting tired of Frankie's lovers.

"I'm silly already," he returned. "I'd give my life for her," he added with a sudden fierce energy.

"You are really very foolish, Toby. What is the good of caring for a woman who never thinks of you, barely knows you are alive?"

"That's what *you* say," returned Toby with unruffled good humour. "As for the good of it, I don't know, but it seems to me, it must be good for a fellow to care for a woman like her. It makes him hate anything low down, you know, or mean. Anyway, I can't help myself. I shall go on caring all my life. There's nothing I wouldn't do for her, *nothing*," he added under his breath.

He amused me at the time with his boyish fervour. Later on I remembered what he had said, and I felt sorry.

"It's not very likely that she'll ever want me to do anything, worse luck," he continued. "Does she ever speak of me, Cynthia?"

His honest, boyish face was terribly wistful, there was a look in his brown eyes one hated to see. I felt sorry for him, but it was no good to encourage him in being silly. The sooner he was cured the better. So with a hard heart and clear conscience I said "Never!"

"It's utterly hopeless," I continued. "You are a nice boy, Toby, not too clever and quite good-tempered. But you've no money, and you're no match, for Frankie, at all events."

He nodded gloomily, and muttered something about "prospects." But I thought it wiser not to hear, and commenced to talk about Lady Paula.

"She's gone down to Cromer with Lord Kinross. It isn't often he misses a Derby, is it, Toby?"

"First one for years. When is he coming back to town?"

"The end of next week," I said, and the words brought a touch of apprehension. The end of next week—the end also of the fortnight in which so much was going to happen.

Once arrived at Epsom, I saw little of Frankie, she went straight to see the favourites in the paddock. A lot of women went with her, but I preferred to remain where I was. People made a great fuss over my cousin that day. Everyone seemed talking about her, and a certain great personage desired an introduction, and invited, or perhaps I ought to say, "commanded" her to lunch.

It was one of the most brilliant Derbys there had been for years. The scene was dazzling. The grand stand gay with smart people perfectly dressed, the drags with their glossy horses, the crowd of pretty girls in summer frocks against the background of green trees, through which one caught a glimpse of the Downs, cool, refreshing, stretching away into the distance.

Lord Chesterton bought a bouquet of violets and mauve heartsease, which he asked me to wear.

"Violet and mauve are my colours," he explained. "I've entered Nestor for the Derby, you know."

"I hope he'll win. I think I'd like to back him, if you please, Lord Chesterton."

"In gloves?" he said, laughing. "Very well, Miss Cynthia, I'll let you know my size."

"Surely you're not going to bet against your own horse?" I asked.

"I'd do more than that," he answered, "to win a pair of gloves from you."

He looked at me quite strangely as he spoke. I turned red, and felt uncomfortable.

Mrs. Curtis Blount gave a horrid little laugh as he moved away.

"Are you going to pin your faith on the horse or his owner?" she said.

"Lord Chesterton is not going to ride, is he?" I asked.

She stared hard at me.

"No," she said, sneering, "not in *this* race." Then, "Why don't you put some money on Nestor. I will lend

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you a pony if you want it. You're sure to win, you know, and it would please Lord Chesterton. Perhaps you think it wrong to bet? Poor little innocent," she smiled in a horrid superior fashion, that made me feel very young and altogether inexperienced.

"I don't think it is wrong at all," I said bluntly, not having any very clear ideas upon the matter.

"Afraid to lose the money perhaps?" she grinned maliciously, opened her purse, and held out a note.

"I'm not a bit afraid, thank you," I returned, boiling with indignation.

She leant towards me and dropped the note into my lap. I ought of course to have refused it, but I was horribly afraid of being laughed at. Besides, Nestor was sure to win—Mrs. Curtis Blount herself had said so, and I could repay the money within an hour or two.

My fingers closed over the piece of paper. Mrs. Blount patted my hand encouragingly.

"That's right," she said. "Give it to Toby, he'll fix it up for you, and"—she paused—"if you like I'll book you a bet or two upon the nod. I know Bell the bookie quite well. You'll rake in a nice little sum this journey, if you'll leave it to me."

Flustered and annoyed both with her and myself, I gave a half-mechanical consent, which the next instant I longed to recall. I turned to do so quickly, but Mrs. Blount had vanished. Presently I saw her confabulating with a burly man, apparently the bookie.

Much of what she had said was Greek to me. I had no idea as to the extent of the transactions she was entering into on my behalf, and was foolishly ashamed to ask for an explanation. I realised I had made a bet of £25, which Toby had duly fixed up for me, but that, I thought, was the extent of my liability.

It came upon me like a thunderclap when Mrs. Blount returned and in a loud tone of voice explained that I stood to win £500, or lose £800 on Nestor.

Lord Chesterton heard what she said; he gave a little shrug and looked quite coldly at me.

"I hate to see a young girl bet to such an extent," he said to Ffolliott. He turned away and took no further notice of me.

Mrs. Curtis Blount smiled maliciously, and I hated her worse than ever.

I shall never forget that Derby. I could not follow the horses with the glasses, my hands trembled so. My heart thumped, and my head throbbed. The words "eight hundred pounds" beat in my brain.

The roar of the people on the course made me shake. I was sick with fear. Suppose I lost, what should I do, where could I hope to get eight hundred pounds?

How I wished that wretched Curtis Blount woman had not interfered with me. It was as though she had entrapped me into making the bets for some purpose of her own. And yet why should she do so? What grudge could she have against me?

I was to find an answer to both those questions—but not then.

I felt I could not bear the strain much longer. If only the race were over, decided one way or the other. I shut my eyes and waited in horrible suspense.

Of a sudden there came a lull, as though everyone had caught their breath, and then a great shout filled the air.

The Derby was over.

Nestor was beaten.

I owed eight hundred pounds!

(Another splendid instalment is published on Friday.)

Wife: "A penny for your thoughts, my dear." Husband: "I was thinking of one of Shakespeare's sayings, 'What fools we mortals be.'" Wife: "I suppose that does come home to you rather hard at times, but what particular recollection brought about this train of thought?" Husband: "The recollection of our courtship, dear, when I used to call you 'Birdie.'"

Your Editor Chats.

This week, as you will have seen, I begin my series of tartan covers with the Menzies plaid. As I think I mentioned last week I intend to reproduce, from time to time, on the covers of this little paper, coloured representations, correct in every detail, of the tartans of all the principal clans of Scotland, and I am hoping to use the next one on the cover of the number dated August 16th.

MORE ABOUT CYNTHIA.

The letter which I published a week or so ago from a correspondent who was under the impression that she met Mrs. Norton and Cynthia at a seaside boarding house, some few years back, and wanted me to give her Cynthia's real name, in order that she might be of financial help to her, has been followed by communications from several other readers, all of whom are most anxious that I should disclose Cynthia's real identity. But this I really cannot do, at present, at all events.

MY HOLIDAY NUMBER.

I should like to say here that next week's number is to be a particularly good one. It is our holiday number, and will contain a splendid selection of excellent stories, besides most thrilling instalments of the serial and the famous Confessions. The first story, the illustration of a thrilling incident in which will be found on page 154, is one of the most powerful stories which have yet appeared, and it would be well to send in your orders early or you will be unable to obtain copies, as there is sure to be an extra demand for the number. In the same issue will also be found the third offer of £20 in prizes in connection with the now well-known Pass-It-Along scheme.

CAN YOU DRAW A CAT?

For this week's competition I want to test the artistic skill of my readers. I therefore offer a handsome solid silver pencil-case to the reader who sends in the cleverest sketch of a cat, drawn solely with straight lines of which there must not be more than twenty. Drawings must be made on the back of postcards only, and should be addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C. There will be ten consolation prizes given to those whose efforts come next in order of merit and these will consist of rolled gold hearts and charms. In this case, the Editor's decision, of course, must be final. The competition will close after the first post on Tuesday morning, August 5th.

RESULT OF "WORD" COMPETITION.

I am now able to give you the result of the "Word" competition. The first award of a solid silver pencil-case goes to Mr. A. J. Lawford Jones, of 110 Westbourne Grove, W. His effort is as follows: Safeguard, Heaven, Our Royal Throne; Sadness Threatens Our Realm If Edward Sleep—thus using, as the initial letter of each word, the letters S, H, O, R, T, S, T, O, R, I, E, S. The ten Consolation prizes of rolled gold hearts and rolled gold charms go to the following: J. W. Henderson, 253 Stanton Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne; Winifred James, Castle View, St. Aubins, Jersey; R. G. Jones, 5 Afton Crescent, Paisley Road, Glasgow; Jenny Osborn, 15 Seaside Road, St Leonards; A. G. Seaward, 22 Daniel's Road, Nunhead; Miss D. Ryan, 21 Abbotts Road, East Ham; Lieutenant H. James, care of Captain Pritchard, Les Vaux, St. Heliers, Jersey; T. Tatlow, 136 Main Street, Bullwell, Nottingham; T. Allison, 18 Fleet Street, Gorton, Manchester; John F. Dell, 45 Brecknock Road, N.

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Another One.

The Heiress: "Yes, when I don't wish to accept certain men's attentions, and they ask where I live, I say in the suburbs." Mr. Selfsure: "Ha! ha! An excellent plan." (After a pause) "But where do you live, Miss Brown?" The Heiress: "In the suburbs, Mr. Selfsure."

Through Bitter Experience.

Little Girl (to her mamma): "What is a dead letter?" Mamma: "One that has been given to your father to post."

The Tramp Left.

Tramp: "Please, ma'am, I haven't a friend or relation in the world." Housekeeper: "Well, I'm glad there's no one to worry over you if you get bitten. Here, Carlo!"

An Unkind Remark.

Traveller: "You needn't make any extra preparations for my wife. The plainer the things are the better she likes them." Hotel-keeper: "Your wife seems passionately fond of you, sir!"

Very much Gone.

"You told me a falsehood last night, Ethel," said Ethel's father. "I asked you if Charlie Hicks had gone, and you said yes." "No, you didn't. You asked, 'Is that young man gone yet?' He was—awfully gone."

Future Warfare.

General (when bullet-proof uniforms become common): "What have you learnt?" Aide-de-Camp: "Victory will soon perch upon our banners. We have filled the enemy's clothes so full of lead that they can't move another step without undressing."

L'Enfant Terrible Again.

"These fish, my dear Mrs. Hendricks," remarked the minister, who was discussing a Sunday dinner with the family, "are deliciously fresh. I am enjoying them very much." "They ought to be fresh," volunteered Bobby, also enjoying them. "Pa caught 'em only this morning."

Compulsory Cleanliness.

Teacher: "Now I want all the children to look at Tommy's hands and observe how clean they are, and see if all of you cannot come to school with cleaner hands. Tommy, perhaps, will tell us how he keeps them so nice." Tommy: "Yes'm; ma makes me wash the breakfast things every morning."

Explained.

Struggling Dramatist: "I can't see how Littlewitt managed to get such a big price for that trashy play of his. They say that Miss Footlights paid him £2,000." First Nighter: "I presume you know that she is in love with her leading man?" "Yes." "Well, Littlewitt's play has twenty-five kisses in it."

An Unexpected Concession.

Stern Father: "What did Mr. Softly say when you informed him that I said he should kiss you just once each time he called? Angry, wasn't he?" Shy Daughter: "No; he seemed to be pleasantly surprised. You see, he had never offered to kiss me before, but he says your wishes shall be respected in the future."

His Definition.

Small Boy: "Uncle, what is a wiseacre?" Uncle (who is suffering from toothache): "A wiseacher? A wisdom tooth, my boy."

A Desirable Circle.

Quickson: "What exclusive and brilliant circle would you most like to enter?" May (demurely): "An engagement ring just now."

A Kind-hearted Little Girl.

"What are you going to do with your dolls, Sallie?" "I'm going to give them to a poor little girl I know, so's papa will buy me some new ones."

The Old Trouble.

Wife: "Dear me, you can never find a thing without asking me where it is. How did you get along before you were married?" "Things stayed where they were put then."

The Proper Way.

In a recent issue of a contemporary appeared a question entitled: "How should a trunk be packed?" The proper way to pack a trunk is to sit down in an easy chair and watch your wife do it.

Hoped He Might Improve.

Husband (vituperatively): "I was an idiot when I married you, Mary." Wife (quietly): "Yes, Tom, I knew you were. But what could I do? You seemed my only chance, and I thought then that you might improve a little with time."

Proof Positive.

Maudie's papa is night editor on a newspaper, a fact which Maudie apparently hasn't learnt; for when someone asked her a few days ago what her father did for a living, she replied: "I div it up. I fink he's a burglar, 'tause he's out all night."

An Unprofitable Task.

Mrs. Gadd: "You look tired, Mrs. Gabb. What is the matter?" Mrs. Gabb: "Tired! I'm nearly dead. I've sat at my bath-room window seven weeks on end, listening to the sounds in the parsonage next door, and I haven't heard a cross word yet."

Force of Habit.

Mrs. Cawker: "Don't you think it is very strange that Mrs. Stivetts hasn't returned or paid any attention to my call yet?" Mr. Cawker: "Not at all. It is merely the result of force of habit." Mrs. Cawker: "How is that?" Mr. Cawker: "She was a telephone girl before her marriage."

It Didn't Work.

Whiffers: "See here, Bliffers! You told me the way to win a girl was to devote myself to her mother." Bliffers: "Yes, sirree, that will do it every——" Whiffers: "Huh! I wanted to win Miss Beauti, and I took your advice, and devoted myself to Mrs. Beauti, and now the old lady, who is a widow, wants to marry me herself."

How She Felt.

Here is a story of a little girl who is very fond of walking with her father. One day he went further than usual, and she began to grow tired. She did her utmost to conceal the fact, lest it should make her father indisposed to take her with him on future occasions. At last her lagging steps betrayed her to her father's eye. Even then, however, she parried his questions, and could not be brought to admit her weariness, till he drew her into a trap. "Well, Lillie, if you don't feel tired, tell me just how you do feel." "Oh, I'm not *much* tired, papa," answered the diplomatic little girl; "but I feel as if I should like to take my legs off and carry 'em for a little while."

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THE SOMERSET SAPPHIRES.

A Tale of Some Stolen Gems.

Being the story of a strange claim made by the reigning Maharajah of Jutpore; Ghuzni Singh—now temporarily residing in this country—in connection with a certain celebrated and unique heirloom; for over five centuries in the possession of the family of the Somersets of Witmore Court, Bucks, and Cadogan Square, London, W. The tale is told by one Barte Yohe, Barrister-at-law, of the Middle Temple; the affianced husband of Esther Somerset, the present representative owner of the gems.

"Sir!" said the Maharajah, with Orientally regal emphasis; his naturally swarthy features darkening with visibly suppressed irritation. "I know my sapphires when I see them!—and—*these* are my sapphires!"

"But," said I, for at least the twentieth time during the interview. "Your Highness appears to altogether ignore the very pregnant fact, that the jewels in question, which you saw two nights since at Mrs. Somerset's house, have never once, except for cleaning purposes, been out of the actual possession of the family, any time during the past five hundred years."

The semi-Europeanised potentate merely shrugged his shoulders, ever so slightly, at this; a polite smile, exposing his really fine teeth, testifying to his utter incredulity with regard to my statement.

"You are," he at length said, taking up my card, and laboriously spelling out my name and dignities; which latter I had added in ink of set purpose, "You are a man of law—a Moulvie—a Pundit. You come to me, you say, on behalf of Mrs. Somerset—or her daughter; which is it? (here he smiled again, so provokingly, that I longed to personally teach him better manners) you come to me, I say, and seek to persuade me—me, a descendant of the great Rungeet!—that I claim as my own, the property of your friends. A lawyer, you!—and do this!—your law is not worth that!" and the now excited princelet snapped his fingers viciously.

Courtesy is, most of my friends admit, my particularly strong point, and this man—Indian Prince—a personal friend of royalty—was, I well knew, entitled to all deference and consideration at my hands. For once, however, I am afraid that in my zeal for those who had sent me on this errand, I so far forgot myself, as to put plain truth in the plainest possible way.

"My legal knowledge," I said, rising, "or the lack of it, is a matter which concerns myself only. With reference to that which has brought me here to-day, I simply have, in the first place, to repeat, that the Somerset sapphires, are known, as such, the world over; and, secondly, to declare that the present claim suggesting that they were—to put it bluntly—stolen; some time during the past six months, from the Royal Treasury in Jutpore; to mysteriously reappear to-day in the *quasi* possession of one of the first of English private families, is at once so palpably absurd and slanderous, that it hardly merits the being taken seriously.

"As, however, it has been seen fit to set the law in motion, I, as the friend and legal representative of the Somerset family, hereby give notice that I shall fight this preposterous claim at every point, and to the full issue, and——" here I fired my last, and, it must be confessed, absolutely random shot, "without scruple as to persons or consequences. I have the honour to wish your Highness a very good morning."

The inscrutable Oriental in attendance at the door, threw it wide; the while grinning till the whites of his eyes gleamed again; and I passed down the pile-carpeted staircase of the Alexandra Hotel, in as pretty a fighting temper, as it was possible for any decorous member of the British Bar to be.

When, a quarter-of-an-hour later I stood, with Esther, in the big bay of the drawing-room in Cadogan Square, relating my recent conversation with His Highness the Maharajah Ghuzni Singh of Jutpore, the whole thing seemed to me to be even more outrageously ridiculous than ever.

"The man must be mad!" I cried. "Why!—I can't understand any respectable lawyer taking the case up for him, big Indian pot though he is!"

"Doesn't it strike you as very strange, Barte," said my darling, as I finished my chronicle of the interview, "that the Maharajah should have instituted proceedings of this kind without word or warning at the moment of his fancied recognition of the gems? He at least might have done us that poor honour."

"Esther!—the whole affair is a puzzle! However, I have warned him, as your mother's representative, that I shall stick at nothing in order to demolish his idiotic claim, and to establish the Somerset right to the sapphires."

"But surely it is easy for us to show that we are the true and sole owners."

"There will not be the slightest difficulty in proving the Somerset ownership. The objectionable part of the whole thing is, that it means publicity (which, I think, your mother detests more than anything else in the world) a lot of trouble and worry, and a general upset just as you are all deep in the worries of the season."

"Yes, it is tiresome!" Esther said, "but if I could only bring myself to tell you something which, though it is but hazy in my mind as yet, is insensibly forcing itself upon me as the one feasible solution of the mystery, I have an idea that you would deem me to be as mad as is the Maharajah himself."

"Tell me!" I urged her. "What do you imagine is at the bottom of it all? Tell me!"

But she would not, and I had to be content with her promise to take me into her confidence later on.

A fortnight before, it should be here explained, the Maharajah of Jutpore, with a retinue of more than twenty-five persons landed in England, taking up his temporary abode at the Alexandra Hotel, Hyde Park Corner, the one place in London where the Oriental of high degree, finds himself truly at home.

The Maharajah himself was a fine specimen, physically, of our Indian dependent rulers—with the exceptional peculiarity too, of speaking English perfectly. His wardrobe, and jewels were alike magnificent; so that he bid fair to take the heart of Society by storm.

Balls, banquets, garden-parties; none of these functions were judged by their providers to be complete, without the presence of the handsome ruler of Jutpore.

I don't, as a rule, care much about the breed, myself. and declined to enthuse when my prospective mother-in-law exultantly informed me that she had secured the dusky visitor for her reception on May 10th.

All through the evening, I had noticed with disgust, the Maharajah's undisguised admiration for my Esther; admiration, however, I subsequently found, not so much for her, as for the family jewels she was wearing.

These consisted entirely of sapphires—the Somerset sapphires—and were valued at, I believe, one hundred-and-fifty thousand pounds.

A semi-tiara; an eight-rope necklet of stones, each the size of a hazel nut; wristlets, and armlets; and a corsage orna-

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ment that literally emitted fire at every movement of the wearer, made one almost to really realise King Solomon's glory; while it would certainly appeal to the barbaric side of the Maharajah's nature.

Then, on the next morning the bolt fell!

His Highness's English secretary called upon Mrs. Somerset, soon after mid-day, and, in the name of his master, laid formal claim to the wonderful sapphires.

The story he told was this.

For a hundred-and-fifty years or more, the glory of the Palace Treasury at Jutpore had been a large number of loose sapphires, of almost inestimable value.

Two years ago, the then Maharanee prevailed upon her husband—the father of the present ruler of Jutpore—to have the jewels re-cut and set, in European fashion, as tiara, necklet, bracelets and breast ornaments for her own use on State occasions.

This was done, the stones were sent to London in charge of a member of the Maharajah's household, and the ornaments were worn by the lady at more than one *dhurbah* or other Court function.

In December of last year, the Maharajah's Keeper of the Jewels reported the famous sapphires to be missing. Consternation reigned everywhere throughout the palace, from the throne itself, down to the humblest member of the royal household.

Life and death are, happily, not now in the power of the regenerate Indian Princes, or, possibly, heads would have fallen to satisfy the tiger-like craving for vengeance of Ghunzi Singh. The next best thing to be done was to employ English detective skill. Half-a-dozen of Scotland Yard's most capable men were retained, at fabulous fees, to proceed to Jutpore, and investigate.

They might just as well have remained at home, for, up to the eve of the Maharajah's departure for England, nothing in the shape of a clue to the whereabouts of the missing stones, or to the identity of the thief, or thieves was obtainable.

Matters remained in this state until the night of Mrs. Somerset's reception, when the Maharajah's attention being irresistibly drawn to the "Somerset Sapphires," as displayed on the fair form of Esther, he then and there determined in his own mind, that the jewels worn by the English girl, were his, and his only; and that he was perfectly justified in seeking to establish a claim for their restitution into his hands.

I did not, of course, anticipate that the legal proceedings would be of any length, as I was prepared with overwhelming evidence, to prove the possessive right of the Somerset family to the jewels.

Still it would be many months before the case of the Maharajah of Jutpore *v.* Somerset could, in the ordinary course of things legal, be reached; and, as the Indian prince had succeeded in obtaining of the High Court, an *interim* injunction, by virtue of which the jewels in dispute were placed in the temporary custody of an official trustee, my friend's disappointment and chagrin at the prospect of being unable to show forth the glory of the Somerset heirlooms during the remaining Society functions of the season, may be readily imagined.

Early on the morning of the fourth day after my interview with the Maharajah at the Alexandra Hotel, business, connected with the alteration of some trinket for Esther, took me to Bond Street. As it was this particular firm of jewellers there, who two years before, had cleaned and re-set the "Somerset sapphires," it was only natural that the manager, knowing me as a friend of the family, should touch me upon the topic of the Maharajah's claim.

"Of course we have heard, Mr. Yohe," he said, "of this absurd business, and, although I am not supposed to mention the matter, Mr. Walker, the senior partner, has already written to Mrs. Somerset, asking for an appointment, as he has something of importance to communicate respecting the jewels. This was late last night. Within the last half hour a reply has been received from Mrs. Somerset referring the firm to you."

"To me!—then I will see Mr. Walker at once!"

The old gentleman struck me as being nervously apprehensive of somebody, or something.

"I hardly know how to come to the point, Mr. Yohe," he said. "And yet, sooner or later, Mrs. Somerset *must* know the truth."

"The truth!—about this sapphire business?"

"Yes, sir!" replied the jeweller, with the air of a man about to make a plunge into icy-cold water, "the sapphire business; and it was only because we feared (both my partner and I) Mrs. Somerset's wrath, when she should come to know the rights of it, that we did not explain matters as soon as we heard of the Maharajah's claim."

"Yes—yes!" I said, excitedly, "go on!"

"Well, then, you know that two years ago, we had the Somerset sapphires for re-setting. But you do *not* know, that, coincidently, we had, as a commission from the then Maharajah of Jutpore, who died last summer, an order to cut, and set in European fashion some magnificent sapphires, which were at the same time consigned to us for that purpose.

Thinking no harm, as the jewels were to go out of the country, and because the arrangement would save valuable time, we persuaded ourselves to allow the stones to be set in replica of the Somerset sapphires; although we had no real peace until the Indian gems were safely on their way back to Jutpore."

"But," I interrupted him, "this puts a very different complexion upon matters; for, apart from His Highness's lack of good taste in making so peremptory a demand upon an English lady of wealth and position, and at such a time as the present, it accounts for much which otherwise would be inexplicable. But proceed, Mr. Walker."

"There is little else to say, sir, beyond that we look to you to make our peace with Mrs. Somerset."

"I think you may trust me to be able to effect that much," I said, "anyway——"

"Good gracious!" cried the jeweller, rushing from my side (we had by this strolled into the shop) to the street door and gazing wildly in the direction of Piccadilly.

Then he turned to the manager and myself. "Did you see a man—an Oriental, looking in at the window?"

We both declared we had not.

"It was Bhopi Lal, the late Maharajah's treasurer!—the man who brought me the loose stones; who remained here in London while they were being set; and who took them back again to Jutpore."

"Evidently," I said, "he is in the suite of the present Maharajah. I will find out; and if he is, I will ask you, Mr. Walker, to join me in a little scheme, which, if it be successful, will advantage both His Highness and my own friends."

"Anything we *can* do we shall be happy to do," replied the senior partner eagerly.

"Very good! Then you may expect to see me about this time to-morrow," I said. "In the meantime, not a word!"

As fast as a hansom could carry me, I flew to Cadogan Square.

"Esther, dear!" said I to her, when she came in answer to my imperative appeal, scribbled on a visiting card. "Esther!—what will you give me, if I bring this matter to a favourable conclusion in twenty-four hours?"

"Give you, Barte!—why, I'll—I'll marry you in a fortnight!"

"You will?—then I am already as good as a married man! for as sure, dear, as you and I are standing talking here, I am on the track of the Maharajah's sapphires!"

She didn't seem so greatly surprised as I considered she ought to be, so I ventured to emphasise that which I had already said, by adding that, as soon as I had left her, I should go to see the Maharajah again.

"Do you remember, Barte, my telling you a day or two ago, that I had an idea about this business? It was hazy then; it is perfectly clear now. I am quite ignorant as to what *you* know; but I greatly err if you do not put your finger on the thief of the Indian gems inside of two hours; and on a spot not a hundred miles from this house."

(*Concluded at foot of next page.*)

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The Great "PASS-IT-ALONG" Scheme.

FIRST AWARD £10.

SECOND AWARD £5.

THIRD AWARD £2.

Six awards of 10s. each.

AN ENTIRELY NEW FORM OF MONEY MAKING.

This novel and clever scheme will be continued in the next issue of SHORT STORIES. For the benefit of those who have not seen our previous announcements, we give below a rough idea of the scheme, so that they may be prepared for next week's offer.

Every person who buys a copy of "SHORT STORIES" will have the opportunity of entering for this scheme by first of all writing his or her name and address in a space which will be found at the foot of one of the pages, and then sending the copy of the paper to a friend whom the competitor thinks will be likely to sign *his* or *her* name in a space provided. This friend of yours will then post the copy to a friend of *his* or *hers*, and so your copy will go from one person to another for fourteen days, when you will find it returned to you. Then you simply send the copy to us, under the conditions which you will find next week, and if it contains more names than that sent by anyone else

You will get £10, and every person who has signed your papers will get £1 each.

Your whole expenses will be one stamp for sending a copy of *Short Stories* to your friend. Your friend, and his or her friends and friends pay the other postage. If, however, you don't want to send your own copy away, and you can't get a friend to give you his or her copy (readers, you will find, don't like parting with their copy of dear little *S. S.*), then why not get an extra copy of the next number, as thousands of other readers will do?

The copy will cost you one penny, and may bring you £10.

But don't leave it till Friday, when the next number is published, or you will find your newsagent is sold out. Just ask him to keep it by for you till you call on Friday for it.

Next week's issue, we may add, is to be our Holiday Number. A reproduction of the cover will be found on page 154, illustrating a thrilling incident in a story which will be found in that number.

"Esther!" I said, looking at her between the eyes with mock solemnity, "have you been reading 'Sherlock Holmes,' lately, with an eye to this?"

"No!" she answered me, laughing merrily, "I have just been putting two and two together, in the old-fashioned way, and I very much fancy that it is going to make four."

"I think so, too. But about this wedding-day of ours—is that to be my reward?"

She did not reply, but breaking away from me, ran out of the room, smiling back at me, however, as she tripped through the doorway.

* * * * *

"Mr. Yohe," said the Maharajah, "if what you say be correct, I certainly owe Mrs. and Miss Somerset, the humblest of apologies. You, too, for I fear that I was rude in my insistence of my claim, and belief."

"For myself," I said, "I remember nothing; while as for my friends, they will be too happy in the undisturbed possession of their property, to do anything but forgive anybody."

The Maharajah smiled, and rang for his treasurer.

Bhopi Lal, was, he was informed, out upon private business of his own.

"Send him to me, the moment he returns," was the order.

The door was scarcely shut when it was opened again by the same attendant, who announced that Bhopi Lal was at that moment ascending the stairs.

"Send him in here!" was the stern command

Silently, and with his head bowed upon his bosom, Bhopi Lal glided into the room, standing by the door, which closed behind him.

In his hand was a brown cow-hide hand-bag. At this the Maharajah glanced curiously.

The end came very quickly. A sharp demand from the prince for the bag to be handed to him; a pressure of the royal fingers on the spring fastening, and before us lay the missing sapphires, boxless; in splendid confusion.

The man made no defence. Calmly accepting the inevitable with Asiatic stoicism, in reply to his master's questions, he simply described how he had stolen the jewels; keeping them by him in a place of concealment until the expedition to England.

Once in London he hoped to be able to dispose of them, having been absent that very morning on a quest for a possible purchaser.

At my solicitation, the Maharajah consented to limit his treasurer's punishment to an immediate return to Jutpore, there to await his master's return. Of his ultimate fate, I am altogether ignorant.

* * * * *

Esther and I are to be married in a fortnight; the Maharajah not only consenting to grace the ceremony with his royal presence, but also to give the bride away.

His wedding-present has just arrived. It is a set of the finest diamonds in the Jutpore treasury. **Ralph Enderby.**

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The Thirty-first Day.

Telling of a Self-denial and a Recompense.

As he marked off another day on his calendar Wilfred Pearson smiled with a stoic satisfaction.

For three weeks now he had denied himself the exhilarating influence of Eleanor Duncan's society. He was indeed holding firmly to his promise—the promise he had given to his highest self on the day that Roy Hadley, all unconscious of the wound he was inflicting, impulsively confided to him his love for Eleanor.

Even while he marvelled at Hadley's blindness, Pearson had resolutely determined to be loyal to the friendship which, begun at college, had strengthened into a sturdy bond seemingly impossible of dissolution.

Roy Hadley should be given a fair chance, so far as Pearson's absence from the field was concerned. Thus the latter had resolved. Thus he had acted, even to the present day—the twenty-first day since he had made this promise.

Twenty-one days without a glimpse of her! They were twenty-one months—nay, years—instead of days.

Pearson began to wonder at his superb self-control and to congratulate himself upon the heroic strength of his invincible will. The fact that his unruly thoughts revelled in sweet imaginings did not as yet impress him as being inconsistent. So he steeped his soul in dreams of her and let delicious memories have their sway.

It was not until the twenty-fifth day that this spiritual indulgence of his love impressed him with a sense of its disloyalty. The startling accusation of an aggressive conscience awakened within him a fire of rebellion.

"I may chain my body," he protested, "but not my thoughts, my longings, the very impulses of my being! They belong to Eleanor. They will always belong to her—to crush them would be to crush life itself."

The twenty-sixth day, nevertheless, found him struggling against the dear imaginings which heretofore had fed his love and compensated in some degree for the sacrifice he was making. Unconsciously at first, then with direct intent, he strove to curb even the tender secret thoughts which, following the lead of his longing, winged their flight towards Eleanor by day and night.

Meanwhile he avoided too frequent meetings with Hadley, nor did he encourage further confidences. He at least need not force himself to endure another ordeal of that nature.

Then came the thirty-first day, when Pearson, looking heavily about him, wondered at the blank desolation that had settled upon the earth. For four entire days he had succeeded in keeping Eleanor out of his thoughts. But where now was the motive for living? Ambition, incentive, inspiration—all had left him. His heart was of lead, his soul of stone.

Again rebellion shook him. "It is because I have shut her out of my life! It is wrong—wrong! I love her—love her!"

The old influence swept upon him once more, magnetising his thoughts, thrilling his world with colour.

It was in the early afternoon that he strolled through the park in the vicinity of Eleanor's home. Of course he would not for the world break that sacred promise of his by venturing near her residence. He merely wished to breathe the pure air and witness the beautiful miracle of awakening Spring.

By no effort of will could he resist the onslaught of dear memories that attacked him as he paced the pebbly paths and let the magic of that exquisite day thrill through him. Eleanor, Eleanor! The image of her shone everywhere. Radiant blue sky, delicious air, budding green things, vast sweeps of velvety turfs, fragrance, sunshine—and Eleanor! It was all Eleanor!

He walked on and on, in a tumult of happiness. At a turn in the path a sudden glorious premonition throbbed through him. He looked up. The image of his brain resolved itself into the real image. Coming down the path towards him was the flesh and blood Eleanor, radiantly sweet in her dainty Spring attire.

There was no mistaking the fact that her eyes grew luminous at sight of him.

"You!" she cried. "Where have you been all this time? One whole month!"

Pearson murmured some unintelligible apology. He was aware of but one thing now—the intoxication of her actual presence.

"For shame, sir! I fear, after all, you are at heart a selfish recluse."

There was a bench near by and they unconsciously moved towards it and seated themselves. Pearson looked at her and tried to think of a fitting reply to her accusation. A soft haze hung palpitating before his eyes. Out of this haze her face smiled upon him.

"You have, of course, seen Hadley?" he questioned at length.

"Oh, yes—he comes very often. But you—you have not treated me as he has. You have forgotten me. Confess!"

Pearson looked sternly at the ground.

"Roy is a good fellow," he said; "a splendid fellow! You have no idea——"

He paused vaguely. There was a long silence.

"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

He started violently. Had his memory become vocal, or was it indeed Eleanor herself who had given utterance to the familiar quotation?

His gaze met hers and clung. In a flash he knew—knew without doubt!

"Dearest—dearest!"

* * * * * * *

After a while she tried to release her hand.

"Do you realise," she said demurely, "that we are sitting here on a bench in the park, making love in the most plebeian fashion, right in sight of everybody?"

"But no one is looking!" he protested. "No one is looking and—" he leant his head forward imploringly, "quick, Eleanor—just one!"

"Aren't you ashamed?" she panted, rosy and smiling, as she tried to readjust her hat.

"No, I am not!" he declared. "I should have some reward for thirty-one days of blank wretchedness. Oh, those awful days—each one a wilderness!"

"Each one?" she repeated. "Surely there is one exception!"

"Yes—just one," he replied, seizing her hand again, "and that is the thirty-first day."

Angela Morgan.

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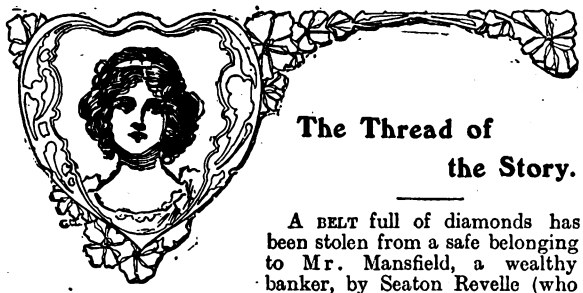
OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.



The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

In the meanwhile Scarsdale manages to pass through several letters to Esther to which he receives replies full of hope and affection. On account of an assault upon a brutal warder, however, he is to be removed to Wrackam Convict Prison, an establishment famous for its hard discipline.

A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump. It is while returning from this concert that Revelle proposes to Esther but is refused.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned." Mr. Crump next takes a walk on the common, and discovers some sand-bags.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

ALEC HAS ESCAPED.

"WHAT?" exclaimed Seaton Revelle sharply.

"That's what they're saying in the village, right enough; but I suppose we shall have to wait for the evening papers before we shall know whether it's true or not. 'Pon my word, after that plucky act of his, he deserves his freedom, though I don't suppose he will keep it for long!"

Revelle was biting his lips. The prospect of the man whom he had foully wronged being at large was not pleasant contemplation; but even if he had escaped, the chances were a hundred to one against his keeping his freedom. He was thinking rather of Esther, and the effect the news would have upon her. He knew nothing of her meeting with Scarsdale at Roxeter Junction. But the news would awaken memories and call her attention to the man whom he firmly believed she was beginning to forget.

A look of distress crossed Mr. Walters' face. He glanced back at the house, and up at a certain window that was closed. The little party gathered on the lawn was composed of men only.

"I hope," said the host in a low voice, "that you will all avoid making mention of this matter in the presence of Miss Mansfield. I trust that she will be well enough to come down some time to-day. Of course, you all know, and any reference to Scarsdale must only cause her pain. For her sake, I hope that this rumour is unfounded, and that there will be nothing about it in the evening paper. By the way, Mr. Revelle, it was you, of course, who caught him in the act!"

"Yes," answered Revelle slowly, "I caught him red-handed, and had the supreme satisfaction of bowling him over. But it was a horribly painful business. It shook my belief in mankind badly. After that, I felt almost as if no one was to be trusted. But it's a matter that I don't even care to talk about now. It's—it's too painful!"

The hint was taken. Conversation changed into another channel. When Revelle prepared to take his leave with his friend, Winter, Mr. Walters gave him a cordial invitation to come whenever it pleased him, and specifically invited him to dinner that evening.

"And," he added, "as soon as Miss Mansfield is herself again, we're going for two or three days' coasting cruise in the yacht. I should be delighted to see you and Winter on board."

"It's awfully good of you," said Revelle, "I shall be delighted!"

He was turning away when John Mansfield emerged from

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

the house. The banker greeted him with delight. He had heard of his arrival in the neighbourhood.

"Could I have a word with you privately?" said Revelle, after a few remarks had been interchanged.

"Certainly," said the banker, taking his arm.

They strolled away from the others.

"It's about that fellow, Scarsdale," said Revelle in a low voice. "I hope you won't think that I'm taking too much upon myself, Mr. Mansfield; but I've known you for some time now, and—er—well, don't you know, I think most awfully highly of Miss Mansfield, and can't bear the thought of her being pained, and—or—all that sort of thing, don't you know."

He was hesitating, and seemed obviously embarrassed. The banker had not been blind to the attention that Revelle had been paying his daughter. He was a charming fellow, evidently possessed of considerable means, and undoubtedly of good social position. John Mansfield would have been only too thankful to have welcomed him as his son-in-law. He would have given worlds to have known that the memory of Alec Scarsdale had been obliterated, and that the place that he had filled in Esther's heart had been taken by someone else.

"My dear fellow," he said, "don't hesitate to speak for one moment. What is it?"

"There's a rumour down in the village that Scarsdale's escaped—it hasn't been actually confirmed yet; but there'll probably be something about it in the evening paper. I thought that if you were forewarned, it might be possible to keep the news from Miss Mansfield!"

The banker's face darkened.

"The scoundrel!" he said harshly. "He is always coming back into her life, in some way or another! Thank you, Revelle, thank you. I shall do my best to keep this from her!"

They had strolled out of sight of the others. Both men were silent for a few moments. What followed did not take the banker by surprise. He was expecting it.

"It's awful presumption on my part, I know," said Revelle, speaking at last, with admirably assumed hesitation, "and I daresay that you can pretty well guess what I'm going to tell you—perhaps really I ought to have spoken before; but I had a sort of feeling that it would look as if I were trying to step into another fellow's shoes; but I—er—love your daughter. I learnt to love her when I thought that there was absolutely no chance for me. Then that wretched business happened at your place, and it put me in a false position. Perhaps even now I ought to have waited longer before speaking to you!"

John Mansfield held out his hand abruptly.

"My dear Revelle," he said with considerable emotion, "nothing would give me greater happiness—a load would be lifted off my mind—to know that you had won Esther's love, and had made her forget. I love my child far too much to bring any pressure to bear upon her; but you have my full consent, and I hope that I shall live to give you both my blessing; but I'm afraid that you have still a rival!"

Then the banker gave an account of what had happened at Roxeter Junction.

The muscles tightened round Revelle's mouth. A fierce, hard light burnt in his dark eyes. It had been the girl's money, in the first instance, that had attracted him; but now he desired her for herself. Jealousy gnawed savagely at his heart. He had been the instrument that had torn Alec Scarsdale from the woman he loved; he had sent him to prison; but he still stood in his path, and barred the way. Seaton Revelle realised now that he had been too quick in jumping at the conclusion that Esther was forgetting Alec Scarsdale. But the feeling of despair that swept over him was only momentary. His belief in himself was infinite. He would play the game all the more persistently. And if Esther's meeting with Alec Scarsdale represented a set-back, he had also gained an advantage. He was sure of her father's sympathy, and assistance up to a certain point.

"Well," he said, "I must be getting back to Winter. I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Mansfield. I shall be seeing you again. Walters has been good enough to ask me to dine to-night. Would you tell—er—Miss Mansfield how awfully grieved I was to hear that she had been so unwell? I hope that I shall see her this evening!"

"What a charming fellow your friend is," said Mr. Walters when, after Revelle's departure, he was joined by the banker. "I hope we shall see quite a lot of him whilst he is down here."

In her room, Esther was praying that Alec's act of heroism might result in a lessening of the awful stretch of years between him and freedom; but if not, she would wait for him.

"Till death!" she whispered, as she had whispered when her convict lover had clasped her in his arms.

Then she gave a little shiver. Again an indefinable feeling that some danger threatened had crept over her. She was conscious of a great sense of loneliness. Her father was with her; he was tenderness itself; but there was a barrier between them. Her mind had harked away to the kindly little man whom she had left behind at Warham. She felt that she wanted him near her. She would write to him at once, not to tell him of her loneliness—she must bear with that—but to let him know that the man whom she loathed beyond expression had arrived at Gurlston Bay!

There was a knock at the door. A moment later, a maid-servant entered with letters. One was from Crump. Esther laid aside the others, and opened it eagerly.

"My dear Miss Mansfield," it ran, "I am afraid, owing to postal arrangements, that this letter will only reach you after a certain person will have arrived at Gurlston Bay. I have only just been able to ascertain definitely his destination. I am exceedingly distressed. I had hoped that for a while, at least, you were going to have a little rest. I am indeed sorry! But I am going to ask you to bear with him. It is very essential that his suspicions should in no wise be aroused. I deeply regret that I cannot contrive to come to Gurlston Bay; but certain complications have arisen, and a splitting-up of parties, that compel me to divide my attentions between Warham and London. A certain person's motive in going to Gurlston Bay is, I am afraid, painfully obvious—it is to be near you! But you will, I know, be very brave. I do wish that I could be with you; but I feel that his motive is obvious, and that I ought to concentrate my attention on matters here, and the movements of a certain party now in London; but, should the unforeseen arise, should you need me, please send two telegrams, one to Warham, another to London. There my telegraphic address is 'Penworthy, Azaleas, London.' 'Come' is all that is necessary. I shall be with you at the earliest opportunity, should such a message reach me. The excuse for coming to Gurlston Bay will be my affair. It grieves me very much to say that matters are still more or less stationary; though the air is very highly charged with possibilities, and there is any amount of work to be done that I believe is destined ultimately to bear fruit. Once again let me preach the gospel of patience and hope. Let these be our colours, and let us nail them to the mast-head, and, though doubts and fears attack ever so fiercely, we will, with God's help, keep those colours flying! I have just come back from London, and am writing from Warham. Tom and Fred have just been to see me. The lads are working well, very well. I am proud of them. Have you been to the caves yet? If not you will find them full of romantic interest. You will doubtless find time to visit Reefe Castle, most interesting historically. I know the surrounding country very well. I wish that I could be with you. Ah, we should have some delightful rambles! The cliffs, too, are magnificent; but please be careful! They are not very safe. You won't venture too near the edge, will you? Altogether, please take great care of yourself. And now, my dear young lady, I must cease writing for the present. Tom and Fred asked me to send you their devoted respects. Will you please also accept mine, and will you be offended if I also add to that—my love?"

Esther felt better and happier after having read Crump's kindly, sympathetic letter. It had braced her up. She would play the game; there should be no faltering! And

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the knowledge that, if she needed him, he would come to her, brought comfort.

Crump had been very busy. Benny had left The Firs for the nonce, and had gone to London. It was very essential that his movements should be watched, and note taken with whom he associated. It was just possible that a clue might be obtained, in this way, as to the channel through which the stolen property had been disposed. Crump had shadowed him personally for a while, and then had intrusted the task to a certain former colleague, of his at Scotland Yard. Railton had been left in charge of The Firs, and Tom and Fred were frequent visitors there now—much to the little man's satisfaction.

And there was another matter that he was not neglecting—the mystery of Vance's death.

On the map that the little man had drawn of Aversham Common, another cross had been added.

Crump had found a third bag of ballast, and it was locked away with the others in the cupboard at Woodbine Cottage.

On his map Crump had drawn the points of the compass.

A line drawn from the cross that indicated where the first bag of ballast had been found, through the second and third crosses, and continued on, pointed directly to Warham reservoir.

Was this the course taken by the balloon?

* * * * *

"What time," said Revelle, "do the evening papers get here as a rule?"

He was sauntering with his friend along the brow of the white chalk cliffs that rose up precipitously from the sea. Their base was burrowed with caves. In some places the water immediately below was deep; in others, cruel-looking rocks jagged up like sharp teeth from the combing foam of the breakers.

"They come down with the six-three train!"

"H'm, well I think that I shall get round to the station."

Would it prove true, this rumour of Scarsdale's escape?

THE ESCAPE AND AFTER.

Scarsdale's act of heroism had been rewarded, not by a remission of any portion of his sentence, but by a remission of the remaining period of Special Orders. Though he still wore the black and drab dress, his leg-chains had been removed, and he had returned to the ordinary routine of prison life. He was no longer submitted to the frequent and monotonous searchings and espionage that had made life well-nigh intolerable. Moreover, his quarters in the prison had been changed. He was no longer in charge of Belton. He had also been shifted into another gang. So terrible had been the strain of Special Orders that he experienced a feeling almost akin to exhilaration when he passed out through the gates for the first time with his new associates.

St. Helen's Island, their destination, stood on the river Reedway, and was separated from the mainland by a small stream that was traversed by a wooden bridge, barricaded on either side. Along this bridge were posted at intervals armed sentries of the civil guard. Owing to its commanding position, the island was being fortified, the work being done by convict labour. Every precaution had been taken to prevent escape. Elevated sentry-boxes were posted round, and a wooden palisade, spiked and of a formidable height, inclosed the half-finished fortifications, and cut off the convicts at work upon them from the river.

The gang reached a small eminence where they were engaged in constructing a bastion. Scarsdale gazed hungrily

WHEN DOES DEAFNESS BECOME INCURABLE.

Although great advances have been made in the treatment of Deafness in the past twenty-five years, it has remained for the Drouet Institute to modify the almost universal opinion, that long-standing cases of Defective Hearing are incurable. In this respect, the report of thirty-six cases cured by the Drouet Method during the past month is truly surprising, as a large number of these patients had been afflicted by deafness of long duration, and had previously tried other special treatment without receiving definite benefit. Some of them, indeed, had been operated on. In contrast with these failures, the success of the Drouet Treatment is so great, that the Editor of the "Journal for the Deaf" has published details of these thirty-six cases in the form of a "Supplement."

Among these cases the following are of great interest:

At the age of 64 years, Mr. Horne presented for treatment, by the Drouet Institute, a case of long standing deafness accompanied by distressing noises in the ears, which had been pronounced incurable by his doctor. As Mr. Horne held the responsible position of Inspector for the British Homes Assurance Corporation Ltd., the deafness was a great drawback in his occupation, and it was therefore with much gratitude that he reported the successful result of the Drouet method:—

48 Penge Road, South Norwood, May 29th, 1902.

Dear Sir,—I am extremely pleased to inform you that I can now hear quite well. I was afraid at my age, viz., 64 years, perhaps I should not get my hearing restored, especially as my doctor informed me he thought I should be permanently deaf. I shall recommend your treatment to all I come in contact with in town and country. With kindest regards and many thanks.—I am, yours faithfully, J. HORNE.

In the case of Mr. S. T. Taylor, the Drouet Treatment restored the hearing after a well-known Yorkshire specialist failed. The deafness was so extreme a watch could not be heard ticking unless pressed closely against the ear. There was a continuous noise in the head, like the hissing of escaping steam, and also severe complications in the form of catarrh of the nose and throat. The completeness of the cure effected by the Drouet Treatment is shown by the following letter:—

High Pittington, Durham, May 30th, 1902.

Dear Sir,—I have much pleasure in reporting that my hearing is now as good as ever it was. I could not hear anyone speak, now I can hear all right. Thanking you for your kind attention.—Yours truly,

S. T. TAYLOR.

Those who are interested in reading a full description of the Drouet treatment for deafness and diseases of the ear, nose, and throat can obtain a free copy of the "Journal for the Deaf," with a "Supplement" containing detailed accounts of the cases cured during the past month by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. Each Journal is accompanied by a Patient's Report Form which enables applicants to receive full particulars for applying the treatment at home. Any advice by correspondence is absolutely free.

It is, however, always advisable, when possible, to be personally examined at the Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park Road, Primrose Hill, London, N.W., where consultations are held daily, except Sunday, from two to four in the afternoon. Special consultations may also be had at any time by previous arrangement. For all personal consultations a fee is charged.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

at the broad river, the sunshine upon it, and many tan-sailed barges sailing lazily before the faint breeze. If only he were aboard one of them! If only he had his liberty!

Wrackam Prison was notorious for the strictness of its discipline, and a spirit of discontent had long been smouldering among the prisoners. Scarsdale had not been long at work before he gathered from certain muttered whisperings that something was in the air—something in the shape of a meditated mutiny. Presently the man working alongside, sidled a little nearer.

"Mate," he whispered, with motionless lips, "will you stand in along with us?"

"What do you mean?"

"Some of us can't stand things as they're going on no longer. We can't petition the 'Ome Secretary, and the visiting director won't listen to us. We're going on strike. It ain't no use doing so on the parade ground, 'cos we'll be surrounded by walls and screws; but out 'ere on the island it'll be different. When the signal's given, every man jack will chuck away 'is pick and refuse to do another stroke of work. If one cove was to do this, they'd march 'im off double-quick time to the punishment cells, but if something like a couple of hundred of us do it, it'll be a different matter. There ain't going to be no violence. It's only going to be a kind o' protest as will make them in authority think, and p'raps, by getting into the papers, do a bit of good that way."

Scarsdale had seen enough of the workings of Wrackam Prison to realise that there was a crying need for reform.

"There'll be no violence?"

"No! Honour bright!"

"Then I'll stand in with you!"

"The signal will be given this afternoon. I'm going to give it. I shall chuck down my pick, d'ye see. You keep your eye on me!"

When, that afternoon, the gang returned from the prison to the island, Scarsdale, as usual, glanced across the river. Though on the island itself the atmosphere was clear enough, a faint mist lay over the water. If the mist would only increase, and roll over the island—he glanced at the warders, then at the palisade. The hectic flush of a moment coloured his haggard cheek. He was free of his leg-chains now. It would be the opportunity for which he had so feverishly longed! Thoughts of Esther, a confused vision of Seaton Revelle, his smooth lying face close to hers, breathing some insinuation into her ears, flashed through his brain. For a moment he had forgotten all about the impending strike.

Crash!

The convict beside him had thrown down his pick. A warder promptly hurried up.

"Boys," shouted out the convict, "all of yer that are going to stand by me, knock off work!"

Someone else in the next gang took up the cry, and, barely thirty seconds later, some two hundred convicts had thrown down their tools.

Scarsdale had already flung down his pick. Warders' whistles were ringing shrilly out. Instinctively he glanced at the river. The mist had thickened and was beginning to roll towards the island.

The intention of the convicts who had organised the strike had been to avoid violence. But it is one thing to make plans, another to carry them out. The spark had fallen among gunpowder. One of the warders, a nervous man, had whipped out his revolver, and took a step towards one of the rebels. Quick as thought the convict snatched up his spade; whether the blow drew the fire, or the fire the blow, was never known. To those nearest the scene, they seemed simultaneous—the flash and the report of the revolver, and the swift downfalling of the spade that stretched the warder senseless on the ground.

Then followed a scene of the wildest confusion. Every fierce passion that had for so long been pent up, was let loose. Revolvers cracked out; cutlasses flashed. Convicts, warders, and civil guard were all mixed up in a tangled, struggling mass!

For a moment Scarsdale stood irresolute, gazing at the fierce fight. It could only end in one way—discipline and fire-arms must prevail. Detachments of the civil guard were pouring over the bridge on to the island.

Now or never!

He made a rush towards the tall, spiked palisade; clambered up it — the sentries had deserted their posts to hurry to the main scene of action — the spikes tore him, cut into his flesh; but he scarcely seemed to feel pain.

"Freedom, freedom, freedom!"

It was as if a thousand voices shouted the word into his ears.

Then the sharp crack of a rifle rang out!

One of the civil guard, hurrying towards the general *melée*, had seen Scarsdale as he clambered up the palisade. Over three hundred yards divided them. Dropping on to one knee, he had taken deliberate aim and fired. A hot, scorching pain seared Scarsdale's left shoulder. At the moment of firing he was astride the top of the stockade. He swayed and fell, but on the far side. The rifleman sprang to his feet, but, before he could rush forward, an infuriated convict, armed with a spade, flung himself upon him. One fierce blow of the spade smashed the rifle from his hand; and a moment

OUR COLOURED COVER FOR NEXT WEEK.

A thrilling incident in a powerful story which will be found in next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES.

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later the two men were locked together in a mad struggle, each trying to wrench the other off his feet.

Dazed and wounded though he was, Scarsdale was on his feet again in an instant. With breathless speed he covered the ground intervening between him and the river. He had not seen what had taken place immediately after the shot had been fired.

The haze that covered the water was already beginning to roll over the edge of the island. He passed into it, reached the water, and plunged in. He was a powerful swimmer, but his left shoulder was stiff and aching. The river was at least a mile in breadth; even if he reached the other side, he still wore the fatal convict-dress. The mist obscured his vision; even as he struck out, the thought flashed through his mind that he might be swimming in a circle, and would only land on the island that he was striving to leave behind.

He set his teeth. All the determination, all the endurance of his nature was now revealed. He could still hear the cries of the fighting convicts, the occasional crack of firearms. His heavy boots and the wounded shoulder were beginning to drag upon him. If only the mist would lift for a moment that he might see where he was! The water was choppy, and now and again a wave dashed down his throat, half-choking him. Every moment seemed to add to the leaden weight of his boots, and made it more difficult to keep his head above the surface.

For Esther's sake he would not give in! He would struggle on while he could move a limb, so long as breath remained in his body. Esther, Esther—her very memory seemed to buoy him up and give him fresh strength in his fight for freedom and life!

Suddenly, from out the mist, something dark loomed up before him. A gasp of joy escaped his lips. It was a boat—an empty boat that was lying at anchor in the stream. Twice he failed to drag himself out of the water into it. The third time he succeeded, and, bleeding, breathless and exhausted, sank down to the bottom of the boat. But he was up again a moment later. Every second was precious. The mist might rise before darkness came. He must get away, but to where? If he rowed across and reached the other side, his clothes would betray him. Perhaps, even now, the news of his escape was being telegraphed across the country. Every one, on land and water, would be on the watch for the escaped felon wearing the parti-coloured dress.

A hundred different plans crowded through his brain. The tide was running out; perhaps it would be best to drift out with it. The mouth of the Reedway adjoined the Thames. Reaching it, he might work his way up the Thames with the turn of the tide. By that time he would have the darkness in his favour. If he could only obtain a change of clothes!

Casting loose the anchor-chain, he put out the sculls. The tide was with him. Once he nearly fouled a sailing-barge, but though he heard the voices of those on board her, he could not see them, and they could not distinguish, close as they were, the felon's dress. Scarsdale thanked God for the haze that still cloaked the water.

When darkness came at last, he was still toiling at the sculls, though his shoulder had become almost unbearable; and his limbs ached, and his teeth were chattering with the cold. But hope and love still gave him strength. In after years, when he looked back upon that day and the night that followed, it all seemed to him like a dream.

It was quite dark when he reached the mouth of the Reedway, but the mist had risen. Away before him twinkled out the Nore light. Sheerness harbour lights shone out on his right. Once, before his convict days, he had spent a week on a friend's sailing cutter, cruising round the mouth of the Thames. He had roughly learnt the various points, and had sometimes taken the tiller. He thanked Heaven for his knowledge. The tide had turned. It was dead against him as he laboured round the bend that separates the Reedway from the Thames, but once round, it was in his favour, and swept the boat up into the Sea Reach, the broadest part of the Thames before it becomes merged in the sea.

A Mad Cyclist.

An inmate who recently escaped from a private asylum was recaptured whilst trying to ride a bicycle he had seized upon, up the side of a railway cutting. There was but little more foolishness in his attempt than in the daily attempts of scores of people who drive their systems to do impossibilities. Summer heat robs them of their appetite. Food becomes distasteful, and is avoided, yet despite the fact that they are taking less nourishment, they force their systems to do the same amount of work as before. Women are especially sufferers in this direction, and the result is debility, anæmia, "heat fag," and serious ailments peculiar to their sex. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans are a seasonable tonic. They create an appetite, give the weakened digestion power to deal with the food, stir up the sluggish liver, and stimulate it to normal action. They remove congestion which causes headache, and in all the common ailments of the home act like a charm. Your chemist will supply them at one and three halfpence or two and nine pence per box, or you may receive post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, E.C., for prices. They are not sugar coated, and may be carried loose in the waistcoat pocket. This is a point for business men to remember.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

He was feeling now utterly spent. He was close in shore, and, with the exception of an occasional stroke to keep the boat straight, had ceased sculling, allowing the tide to work for him.

It would be something if only he could snatch an hour's rest; body and mind alike required it, for never once during the long hours that he had been sculling had he ceased to rack his brains on the question—how was he to obtain a change of clothes? Another thought that haunted him was the knowledge that the further up river he went, the greater was his risk of encountering the Thames police. His escape must be known by this time; the boat he had taken would be missed, and perhaps the river-police were already patrolling in search of him.

He had swept past several barges moored up to buoys, and anchored for the night. From some of them came the sound of voices; others seemed deserted. It was no time to stick at trifles. If he could come across an empty barge, he would not hesitate to board it. Somehow or other, he must obtain a suit of clothes. But he would snatch some rest first. A buoy loomed out of the darkness ahead. Catching hold as he passed, he made fast to it, and then flung himself down full length on the bottom of the boat.

Utterly dead-beat, he lay there like a log, too weary even to think. A few seconds later, he was in a dead sleep—a gracious sleep that gave him rest from pain, anxiety, and anguish.

He awoke with a start, fancying himself back again in his prison-cell, but the stars twinkling down upon him told him that he was beneath God's free Heaven. The rest had refreshed him. The pulse of hope was throbbing more strongly than ever. He sat up, but his shoulder had stiffened to such an extent that he could scarcely move his left arm. The blood had clotted, glueing his shirt to the wound. He cast loose, and once more took to the sculls. It was positive torture to row, and, with all his endurance, more than once a groan was wrung from his lips. He feverishly glanced at the sky; the stars were beginning to fade before the first grey light of dawn. And he was still wearing the hideous prison-dress. He ceased rowing, and looked round. In the distance he could just distinguish a couple of barges lying at anchor. He was getting desperate. If no sounds of life came from them, he would board one of them. The tide bore the boat towards them. Straining his eyes and ears, Scarsdale felt his heart leap into his mouth.

Across the deck of one barge stretched a line on which a number of clothes were hung up to dry.

He shipped his sculls. As the boat glided past, he grabbed the side of the barge. No sounds came from it. Quickly he made fast; then, with difficulty, owing to his shoulder, he drew himself on deck. A shirt, a rough blue flannel suit, a cap, a pair of socks, hung on the line; their owner had evidently had a tumble overboard.

It was the work of a moment to whip them off the line.

As he noiselessly lowered himself into the boat, he glanced at the name painted on the bows of the barge, "*The Lively Polly*, Rochester." If he came through all right, if ever the opportunity were granted him, he would make good the owner's loss.

Hope was stronger than ever now. Some distance along, he ran into a little creek. It was cruel work getting out of these convict clothes. The wound, furrowed across his shoulder by the rifleman's bullet, started to bleed afresh, and he almost fainted with pain as he tore away the shirt. Dressed in the other clothes, he had all the appearance of a riverside character. He rolled up the hideous parti-coloured dress into a bundle, weighted it with a couple of stones taken from the bank; then cast it into the water.

It sank with a hollow plunge. A great weight seemed to be lifted from his soul; he was free now from that hideous dress, with its arrow-brands, the tokens of infamy and degradation.

It was quite light when he shot out of the creek and made for the mid-stream; he was not afraid now of being recognised.

Esther—she was the keynote of his existence, of the almost superhuman strength and endurance that had buoyed him up.

But he was spent now, and tide and stream were against him. A mist rose up before his eyes. He sank forward over the sculls. He was vaguely conscious of a dark shadow, of a hoarse voice, of what seemed a faint crash; then all was a blank!

* * * * *

"That's better, mate, I thought you were never going to show signs of coming round!"

Scarsdale stared up blankly for a moment, then became conscious of a bronzed, bearded face staring down at him.

"Where am I?" he whispered. "What's happened?"

"You're aboard the *Mary Ann*. What came over you? You looked as if you were going to cross our bows right enough, and then you fell forward over your sculls. And we were on you before there was time to say Jack Robinson. Anyways, if your boat went to the bottom, we managed to haul you aboard. There now, get some more of this grog down your throat!" Everything returned to Scarsdale's mind with a rush.

"I didn't see me way to heaving-to and putting you ashore with the best of the tide under us, and seeing that I'm on a contract job where time counts; but I daresay you'll be all right here till to-morrow, when you'll be able to go ashore. Now you just keep quiet for a bit whilst I see about getting some sort of grub for you. We can talk of things after you've got something in your inside."

"Where," whispered Scarsdale, "are we bound for?"

"We've got a cargo of bricks aboard for Gurlston Bay!"

WHAT ESTHER SAW FROM GURLSTON PIER.

The rumour had proved correct. The evening paper had contained an account of Scarsdale's escape; but as yet Esther did not know. On the afternoon of the day on which she had learnt of Revelle's presence at Gurlston, she had left her room, and had spent some time in the garden; but when she heard of the invitation given by her host to Revelle, she pleaded her indisposition as an excuse for not appearing at dinner that evening. She told herself that it was only postponing the inevitable; but she was thankful for even a day's grace.

Esther breakfasted in her room on the following morning; but she was feeling much stronger. When she descended shortly before mid-day, she asked one of the servants for a morning paper.

"Please, miss," said the servant on her return, "I can't find any of the London papers. The gentlemen have gone out on the yacht this morning, and I think they must have taken them with them!"

The banker had wished to stay with his daughter, but Esther had insisted that he should go with the others. She had gathered from him that Revelle was to be one of the party. Another brief reprieve! Since his arrival at Gurlston she had not met him.

The village of Gurlston nestled in a sheltered bay, and was of sufficient importance as a seaside resort to boast a pier. In the old days, prior to the advent of the railway, most of the traffic had been water-borne, and even now barges and small coasting craft might be seen drawn up alongside the wooden jetty, hard by the pier, unlading their cargoes.

Esther's only companion at luncheon was her hostess. It was afterwards, while sitting alone in the garden, that a longing came over her to get a nearer glimpse of the sea.

Mrs. Walters was expecting a caller, and could not accompany her.

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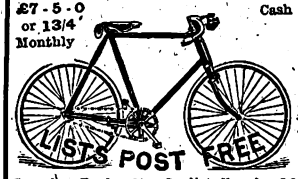

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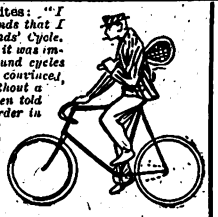

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ARE YOU SHARP AT STUDYING OUT WORDS? If so, here is a chance to win a **Cash Prize** and also your choice from at least **1,000 Special Prizes** to be given away by **"The British Fireside."** See this word below. Can you make **seven** other words out of it?

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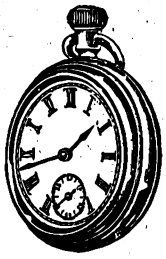
We shall pay a Prize to every person who can make seven words from the above letters. For example, "Fire" is one of the words, and "if" another, etc. We are doing this to advertise our Journal. We wish the word **"Fireside"** to burn itself indelibly into your memory. The only condition therefore is that you take in our paper, which you can easily do, and we show you how it may cost you nothing. Sit down and study it out. It may be easier than you think. We shall pay a Cash Prize of **£50** among those who send in seven words, and besides this you have your choice of **Special Prizes**—a beautiful gold-plated **Genuine Lever Watch, a Wonderful Camera, a Tip Top Phonograph,** our **Standard Stereoscope, etc.**



We shall also give a further sum of £30 to be divided into three Capital Cash Prizes, as follows:—

£15 to the person sending in the longest list of words made from "Fireside."	**£10** for the next longest list made from the word "Fireside."	**£5** for the third longest list made from the word "Fireside."

This is a contest where energy and brains count. **If you can make seven words from "Fireside" you get a Prize Award.** Altogether we guarantee that the Prizes in this unique contest cost at least **£1,000.** If we do not carry out our conditions, you receive your money back. This is not for lazy people nor idlers, but for smart men and women, boys and girls to show their skill.

What You Have to Do. If you succeed in finding seven words, send them in at once. You thus win a Special Prize under the stated conditions and a cash prize, and you qualify for the Capital Prizes. The fuller lists can be sent later. Do not delay. Work out the words quick, and send two stamps for copy of **"British Fireside"** prospectus, conditions, postage, etc. We hope you will try for this, but we shall award the £1,000 in prizes anyway. Names and addresses of chief winners will be published. If you like, send 6d. and we will forward you the prospectus, conditions, award *and* a pretty Gift of Jewellery that will surprise and please you. Address—

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The pills are packed in the following size boxes, and forwarded post free:

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The David Macqueen's pills are privately and securely packed in turned wood boxes, and forwarded post free to any part of the world.

One of these small pills should be taken daily. They do not purge like other pills but afford that gentle laxative so beneficial to general health.

Remember, David Macqueen's "Vegetine" Pills will not cure every disease under the sun, but they will purify your blood, cleanse the liver, clear and beautify your complexion, and strengthen and invigorate the whole physical system.

A FEW RECENT TESTIMONIALS.

Mr. H. R. Francis, Beaulieu House, Shandon Road, Clapham Park, S.W., writes (May 15th, 1902): "You will be pleased to hear that after taking your pills my complexion has become most beautiful and clear. Though I am not vain, I find it difficult to abstain from seeing myself in every mirror I come across. I trust you will be able to make your remedy known to all the thousands of sufferers from sallowness and skin blemishes."

Miss M. A. B., of Brixton Hill, S.W., writes (May 5th, 1902): "I have much pleasure in informing you that since I have begun to use David Macqueen's Pills, a great change has come over me. My health has greatly improved, and my complexion (so my friends tell me) is charming, thanks to your pills. I shall certainly recommend them to my friends. P.S.—You can make what use you like of this, with the exception of the full name and number in address."

Miss A. K., Railway Road, King's Lynn (June 28th, 1902), writes: "I am very pleased to say that after taking your pills my comp'exion and health have improved wondorfully."

Miss Bertha H., of Stroud Green, N., writes (May 8th, 1902): "Gentlemen, I write to thank you for the pills which have certainly proved most beneficial. I intend to recommend them to my friends."

Mr. A. Kay, Chadwell Heath, Essex, writes (May 2nd 1902): "I have been taking your pills for a short time only but really must say they have a wonderful effect on my health. They do not purge or act violently in any way, but gently and surely bring about a most healthy state. Apparent *outwardly* and inwardly felt."

Mrs. S. Wilson, St. Margaret's Terrace, Station Road Bognor (May 15th, 1902): "I enclose 1/1½ for your pills, which please forward to me as before. I think it only right to let you know that I am more than satisfied with the results, and think that every word in your advertisements is true; as my complexion and skin was a great annoyance to me, but after taking one box of your pills my skin is getting simply lovely which I can only attribute to your wonderful blood purifying pills. I feel, when out, bound to stop everyone I see with a bad skin and tell them of your great remedy."

Order Form.

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"Are you quite sure that you feel strong enough; let me order you the carriage. Your father seemed to think that you ought not to go beyond the grounds to-day!"

"Oh, but I'm feeling ever so much better, and a little walk will do me good."

It was not a far cry down to the village. Esther made her way on to the pier. She was the only soul upon it. She sat herself down in a glass shelter. One or two craft were drawn up alongside the jetty, so close that she could read their names. For a while she stared out wistfully across the sea; then a flutter at her side called her attention to a paper that had been left behind by some previous occupant of the shelter. Picking it up, she opened it mechanically.

CONVICTS MUTINY AT WRACKAM PRISON.
ESCAPE OF A NOTORIOUS CRIMINAL.

Wrackam Prison, where Alec was! The blood rushed to her cheeks, then died away, leaving them bloodlessly white!

Feverishly she read through the account of the rising, how the civil guard had been compelled to fire upon the mutineers. So far there was no mention of Alec's name. Had he been among them? Had he been one of those wounded? She could scarcely bring herself to read on.

"It was during the confusion that No. 35 contrived to escape by climbing over the stockade and taking to the river. One of the civil guard fired at him, but was immediately overpowered by another prisoner, and prevented from giving the alarm. It was only after the rebellion had been quelled by the arrival of a strong force of soldiers from the barracks, that the identity of the missing man was established. He proved to be No. 35, the Alexander Scarsdale whose act of heroism in saving a warder from drowning was chronicled in our issue of yesterday. Search-parties were at once organised. At first it was thought that he must have perished in attempting to swim the river, but it now appears that a boat, anchored some little way below St. Helen's Island, is found to be missing. The prison officials are confident of his capture. Convict 35, at the time of his escape, was wearing the parti-coloured prison dress that denotes having assaulted an official."

A low cry of half-joy, half-agony, burst from Esther's lips. She clasped her hands together convulsively!

It was joy to think of him free; agony to think of him being hunted like some animal. Then her brain started to throb with a hundred tumultuous thoughts. They had fired upon him. Was he wounded? Where was he? Drifting out to sea in an open boat?

She clasped her pulsing forehead with her burning hands, and stared with great wild eyes across the bay.

A picturesque-looking barge, lying low in the water, moving lazily before the gentle breeze, was creeping round the headland into the bay!

"Oh, my love!" she wildly murmured. "Where are you—where are you? Oh, God! That I could be beside you now! Only to know!"

* * * * *

"But, Mr. Revelle," said Mrs. Walters, "I understood that you were going with the others on the yacht!"

Seaton Revelle had been ushered out on to the lawn where Mrs. Walters was taking tea with her visitor.

"Well, I had every intention of going; then I had a worrying letter from my solicitor this morning, about a little property that I've got up in the north, a fellow threatening me with a law-suit. It meant a long letter from me, so I gave up the idea!"

He glanced round casually.

"No, thank you, awfully good of you; but I won't take tea. How's Miss Mansfield? I hoped to see her!"

"Oh, she seems considerably better. In fact, she's gone down to the village. She wanted to be really near the sea. She said something about going on to the pier!"

A few moments later Revelle was sauntering down to the village.

Esther neither saw nor heard the well-built figure, spotless in "ducks" and blue serge, the yachting cap bearing the flag of a select club, that was strolling towards her.

She was staring in front of her, her eyes fixed unseeingly on a sailing barge that was being warped up alongside the jetty.

The name on the stern was distinctly visible:

Mary Ann!

(A further splendid instalment is published in the Holiday Number, ready Friday next, August 1st.)

A Very Poor Plan.

"HENRY is late again to-night," sobbed Mrs. Nubride, "and he knows well enough that I told him I wouldn't speak to him for a week if he didn't take to coming home earlier." "My dear child," said her mother, "you are very young yet, or you would never try that plan."

To Deceive the Baby.

MRS. JONES: "Why are you setting the alarm for half-past two? You surely don't want to get up at that time?" JONES: "No; I'd like to go to sleep at that time. When the baby hears that, he may think it's time for him to turn in."

Still Unlucky.

A YOUNG man who had been rejected thirteen times by a girl didn't stop there. Remembering that thirteen is an unlucky number, he proposed for the fourteenth time and was accepted. He is now prepared to believe that fourteen is a more unlucky number than thirteen.

Too Weak to Stain.

JINKS: "I called at your lodging-house to-day and saw the table nearly set for dinner, and I must say things looked very neat. I never saw a whiter tablecloth in my life." Blinks: "No, my landlady doesn't make her tea, coffee, or soups strong enough to stain."

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IN CONFIDENCE

By MADGE MORRIS.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Who Should Start Making It Up?

"PUZZLED" has had a quarrel with her lover, but is very proud, and thinks it against maidenly modesty for her to write first. Should she not wait and see whether the overtures will come from him?

* * * *

No, "PUZZLED." If you are conscious of having been foolish, and have in any way wronged him, you should yourself be the first to write to try and set things right again. He will not think any the less of you for it. Do not let pride—which in this case is certainly false and foolish—stand in your way if you are really fond of him.

❦❦❦

The Friend's Sweetheart.

"A VERY great friend of mine," writes "S. K.," "has a young lady whom I find I am getting more fond of every day, and now I feel I must have her, or I shall die. I cannot live without her. Please tell me how I can win her without offending my friend. She herself seems to like me very much."

* * * *

You should not make any advances at all. She is your friend's possession, and, for all you know, they are extremely fond of each other. To thrust yourself on her notice would be very dishonourable and unmanly. Be as nice as possible when you meet, and if, after all, her liking for you is greater than for your friend, she will in time reveal the fact. When that happens your course should be clear, but not while she is your friend's sweetheart.

❦❦❦

Should He Write?

"I AM in rather a poor position," writes "T. S." "and have frequently met a young lady of independent means and good education, who I am almost sure would like to make my acquaintance. She has no male friends, so I cannot get an introduction. She is about to leave the district. Should I write to her and ascertain whether I am right in thinking she would like to know me?"

* * * *

You say the girl is of independent means. I suppose, therefore, she is not living with her parents. Being a free agent, therefore, I do not see why you should not write to her as you suggest. It seems to me to be the most natural thing to do.

❦❦❦

Suspicious Ena.

"ENA" has for a long time known a certain man by sight, but having heard something against his personal character has never wished to meet him. Recently, however, she has been invited to a party, and after accepting the invitation has heard that the man in question will be there. She believes that if he is introduced to her he will make objectionable advances. Should she go to the party at all, and if so, how can she treat the undesirable man?

"ENA" should tell her hostess in confidence that she would rather not know the gentleman, and ask her to avoid, if possible, an introduction. If this cannot be done, it will be quite easy for her to convey to him by a very cool bow that, while she is compelled to know him, she desires no further acquaintance. Unless the man is devoid of pride and manners, he would scarcely attempt to embarrass you after such a definite snub.

❦❦❦

A Case for Restraint.

"PERCY H." has for long admired a girl he met once at a friend's house. But while they have met very often since, and had every opportunity of speaking, she has always avoided him. When she meets him out she gives the coldest of nods, and turns her eyes away.

* * * * *

Evidently the girl does not want to know you, "PERCY H." That being the case, be man enough not to embarrass her. She probably is attached in another direction. Try and put yourself in her place, and imagine how you would feel if persons were continually seeking your acquaintance without any desire on your part to possess it. The girl has probably made up her mind that she could not care for you, and decided that rather than be compelled to inform you of the fact she will avoid any closer acquaintance, a decision which you should respect.

❦❦❦

Must Make His Choice.

"HOWARD" has been "keeping company" with a young lady in Wales, but since coming to London has met another girl whom he has got to like very much. How can he be honourable to both?

* * * *

He cannot. He must decide which of the two girls he is the more fond of, and be loyal to her. Attempts to maintain relations with two distinct girls invariably end in disaster, so, while there is yet time, "HOWARD" should take the path which is at once wise and honourable—that is, to select the girl whom he feels he could best love.

❦❦❦

The Intractable Mother.

"AUSTRAL" is employed in an office where there are several young ladies. One of them he is very fond of, and he knows that she likes him. But one day her mother discovered some rather compromising correspondence, and made the girl promise not to have anything more to do with "AUSTRAL," as she thought her too young for such things. If he got to know the mother, and confessed the whole truth to her, the latter lady would certainly remove her daughter from the office.

* * * *

I think "AUSTRAL" would do well, after all, to make a clean breast of the position to the mother. Otherwise there would be nothing else for him to do but either deceive her, and thereby involve the girl in trouble with her parent, as well as breach of her promise, or allow his acquaintance with her to drop. "AUSTRAL" should tell the mother that he is attached to her daughter, and that he wishes his actions to be thoroughly straightforward. If he is able to convince her of the honour of his intentions, and would promise that his conduct towards the girl would be always discreet, possibly the lady might be induced to waver in her decision. Whatever may be the consequences, I always think it is better for the dealings of a suitor with the parents of his sweetheart to be open and candid. Sooner or later, parents must recognise that they cannot always oppose the wishes of their children, even though it often takes years to convert them to doing so.

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SHORT STORIES.

Splendid Holiday Number. 1D.

No. 710.

August 9th, 1902.

Suddenly, without an instant's warning, my bicycle seemed to leap into the air, and I was flung violently into the road.

(A Thrilling Incident from the Powerful Story, "The Hound of Death." See Inside.)

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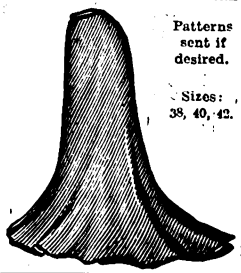

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Short Stories

No. 710.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending August 9th, 1902.

THE HOUND OF DEATH.

A Thrilling Little Tale of a Lover's Rescue.

"I appoint as sole guardian to my dear daughter, Enid Lennox, my old and valued friend Derwent Lauderdale."

The words fell on my ears like a funeral knell. I half rose from my seat and muttered a suppressed exclamation, then, remembering that expostulation was useless, and seeing the grave faces round me, I sank back into my chair again with a stifled groan.

I was listening to the reading of my father's will, and I had never felt so alone in the world as on the day when I learnt that I was a wealthy heiress, in possession of more money than I had ever dreamt my father owned.

For all the long list of shares and stocks and estates that were mine, fell upon deaf ears, after the sound of those opening words, appointing as my sole guardian the man I feared and hated beyond anyone in the world—Derwent Lauderdale!

Why he and my father had ever been friends was one of those mysteries impossible of solution. Why I disliked him seemed to be very easy of explanation as I glanced across the library at his thin, evil face, with its closely shut, smiling lips, and the little grey eyes which flashed across at me from under their beetling brows.

The reading of the will ended at last and Mr. Lauderdale crossed to my side.

"I trust, Miss Lennox," he said, in his suavest accents, "that in our new relations of guardian and ward, we may continue on the excellent terms which we have always maintained."

I laughed. I could not help it, unseemly as the sound was in that hushed atmosphere. But it was so absurd to talk of our excellent terms, when he must have known I had always hated him—always—always!

"I shall consult your wishes, of course," he went on smoothly. "Would you like to remain here in your own town house with a chaperone, or will you allow my wife to welcome you under our roof?"

"I will stay here," I answered shortly—too shortly for diplomacy. I saw his brow darken, and though he smiled assent I had made him more of an enemy than before.

He left the room then, and the old lawyer explained to me that I should become my own mistress only when I was twenty-five, or when I married.

"Until then Mr. Lauderdale controls your property, and you are in his charge," the old man said—"and——"

He broke off his sentence suddenly, fidgeted uneasily from one foot to the other, and then, stooping towards me, whispered—

"I should advise you to marry as soon as possible, Miss Lennox."

He said the words so very earnestly that I was surprised, though my sad heart gave a quick, responsive leap, as I thought of a kindly face, and tender eyes that had grown very dear to me during the past six months.

True, Brian Dalrymple had not yet asked me to be his wife, but I knew (Oh! a woman always knows) that he loved me as I had learnt to love him. I realised intuitively that only my father's long illness had hindered him from coming forward as my suitor, and I felt that it would be easy indeed to comply with my lawyer's advice, though I wondered why he advised me so urgently.

Well, his words comforted, whilst they puzzled me.

Ever since I had heard those ominous words appointing Mr. Lauderdale as my guardian, I had wondered whether he would allow me to listen to Brian Dalrymple's wooing, for the man I loved was not rich, and Mr. Lauderdale, I had feared, would regard his suit with scant favour.

But the lawyer's urgent words cheered me! Perhaps, after all, if they were so anxious that I should marry, my guardian would listen to Brian's suit, and surely, I reflected, Mr. Lauderdale would be only too glad to get rid of me and the responsibilities I entailed as fast as possible.

I was happier that evening than I had thought it possible I could be, but, alas, my happiness was short-lived indeed!

Two days later Brian Dalrymple stood with me in the library, telling me how dearly he loved me, asking me to be his wife, holding me in his dear arms close against his breast, looking into my eyes with eyes so full of love that I shivered from sheer joy.

"I only wish, sweetheart," he said, "that you were less rich. I had a hard battle with my pride before I could make up my mind to come to you."

"And love was stronger than pride?" I whispered back. "You would have spoilt two lives if you had let pride win. Now, we shall be so happy—so very, very happy!"

How little I dreamt when I spoke what a terrible gulf lay between me—and happiness!

The blow fell two days later, when, in answer to a letter I

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wrote my guardian telling him of my engagement, he appeared in person in my Sloane Street house.

As he entered the drawing-room I sprang up to greet him, recoiling at sight of his face. It was blanched and stern, and his eyes positively glared at me.

"Miss Lennox," he said frigidly, when we had shaken hands, "Let us understand one another at once. I should be fulfilling my duties as guardian very ill if I allowed you to marry a man of Mr. Dalrymple's circumstances."

I pleaded with him, I argued with him; finally I grew angry with him. But all was in vain. His smooth manner had vanished completely. I felt the iron hand under the velvet glove. He was stern, implacable, immovable.

"The marriage is impossible," he said, and I, when I found my pleading of no avail, fell silent, only determining in my own mind that come what might, I would marry Brian—some day.

But oh, how my heart sank when Mr. Lauderdale ended by saying quietly, in a stony voice that sent a chill of terror through me.

"My wife is with me. I consider the chaperone you have inefficient. You will return with us to-night to my house—for a time, at least."

I began by flatly refusing to go with them. I went on to beg to be allowed to remain in my own house. I ended—well, as any woman would have ended upon whom Mr. Lauderdale's cold, snake-like eye was fixed, by agreeing with a shiver to go with him and his wife.

I disliked her as much as I did him.

She was one of those women who remind one of cats; soft and pussy like, smooth outwardly, with claws under their dainty paws, and teeth behind their pleasant smiles.

She expressed unbounded pleasure at the idea of my going with them to Danmore—their house in Surrey—and appeared ignorant of the reason of my sudden move.

All the same, she never left me alone for a single minute whilst I made my preparations for the journey, and though I did contrive to scribble a hasty line to Brian to warn him of what had occurred, I had no opportunity of giving it to one of the servants, or of posting it myself before we left.

The Lauderdales watched me as cats watch mice, and a nightmare feeling began to settle down upon me that I was like a prisoner, never again in all my life to be free. Yet why, why—why should they treat me in such a fashion? That was the question which revolved wearily in my mind during the whole journey to Danmore.

Evening had fallen when we drove from the little country station up a long ascent between high hedges which made the lane absolutely pitchy in its blackness.

I had never known the Lauderdales in their country house. They had been London friends of my father, and to me scarcely more than acquaintances, and under the present circumstances I was less than ever inclined to feel amiable towards them, though they were both almost gushing in their attentions to me.

They had succeeded in sweeping me away from London, and in preventing me from communicating with the man I loved, they had every reason to feel satisfied, whilst I grew more miserable at every step we went.

The more I thought over my hurried departure from home the more bewildered I grew.

Why was my guardian so averse to my marriage? And why had I allowed him to bring me away?

I could answer neither question, but each time I met his grey, basilisk eyes and looked into his stern face with its smooth, set smile, I felt how impossible resistance would have been.

"Danmore at last," he said, rousing me from my meditations with a start. We had been driving for miles and miles, now I dimly discerned the outlines of a house before which the carriage drew up with a jerk, and in whose windows lights were burning.

"Welcome to Danmore," Mr. Lauderdale exclaimed, as the front door opened and he helped me up the steps into a large, bare hall, "May you be happy here!"

There was nothing sinister in the words, yet as he spoke a long shudder ran through me, and as the servant shut the great front door with a clang, an agony of fear shook me from head to foot.

* * * * *

"What is it? Oh, what is it?"

I heard myself say the words, and as I spoke them I leapt from my bed with a cry of intolerable fear.

Something had wakened me suddenly—what was it? What——

There it was again!

Upon the night air there fell an awful sound, a sound that seemed to chill the very marrow in my bones—the deep, angry baying of a big hound, and the sound seemed to come from close, close under my room.

Never pausing to think, I flung on a dressing-gown and rushed into the passage, breathless with fright—a nameless horror gripping my very soul. I almost ran into somebody moving towards me. There was a sharp exclamation and I found myself face to face with my guardian.

"Miss Lennox!" he cried.

"I am frightened!" I half sobbed, "What is that noise? The dog, where is it—why——"

He laughed pleasantly.

"Poor Rex! Has he frightened you?" he said. "He is an amiable hound—old and toothless, whose bark is his sole strong point. Do not be afraid of him, Miss Lennox."

I crept back to my room ashamed of my folly, and lay down again—but not to sleep. and early morning found me up and dressed, determined to survey my new surroundings before my keepers, as I called them in my own mind, were up.

My heart sank as I looked out of my window. A neglected garden lay below, bounded by a high wall, over which I could catch a far-away glimpse of a white ribbon of road. But how far away that road looked! How utterly inaccessible!

I was a prisoner! There was no doubt of it; I was a prisoner and closely watched—though why the Lauderdales wished to keep me in seclusion was more than I could imagine.

The weary, weary days dragged by, and no news came to me from the outer world of Brian. I heard nothing, nor had I any means of writing to him. The Lauderdales took good care of that.

And a great despair began to settle on my soul; I began to feel I should go mad if I stayed much longer in this dreary house, where my nights were disturbed by the baying of the hound, and my days dogged by my guardian and his wife. Over and over again I felt I could have screamed aloud for sheer misery, and I could not understand it all—nor would Mr. Lauderdale ever vouchsafe to explain it.

I grew thin and white, I scarcely knew my own face in the glass. I got into a way of crying quietly when I was alone; I felt like an old, old woman, and as if I had lived in that horrible place for years, so cut off was I from all I had known and loved before; and then—a strange thing happened.

One day I was walking in the garden between those hateful high walls, when suddenly, as I passed the kitchen window in my trampings to and fro, I heard a voice say softly:

"Don't look round, or answer, but listen."

The voice seemed strange to me. I tried not to look towards it, as it went on:

"He would kill me if he knew I warned you,

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but I must—I must—if you do not leave this house your life is in danger. You must go at once."

I paced on as if I had heard nothing; then I came back again—the voice resumed:

"Don't you know that by the terms of your father's will, your guardian receives a large annuity till you marry and pass out of his hands. And—" here the voice dropped mysteriously, "if you die half your property goes to your guardian."

I started violently. I could not help it.

"You must go at once," the voice said again, "at dinner to-night make an excuse to leave the room; take the bicycle from the shed; you will find the door in the wall unlocked. I——"

Curiosity overpowered discretion. I glanced round and to my unbounded amazement saw Mrs. Lauderdale's face pressed against the window bars.

"You?" I gasped.

"Hush," she said, "for—it is I—you—you are so like my child who died, I could not see you injured—perhaps—perhaps—worse. Ah! go to-night, and beware of Rex."

With an abrupt movement she left the window, and I walked on, my brain in a whirl.

Was Mrs. Lauderdale my friend then—after all?

* * * * *

It was evening, and I stood trembling and alone beside the shed in the yard where the bicycle was kept, every nerve strung to the highest pitch of tension.

How everything seemed to creak and groan as I took the bicycle from its place and carried—because I dared not wheel it—to the gate.

Yes! the gate *was* unlocked! Mrs. Lauderdale had been as good as her word, and I slipped softly out, closing it behind me. Oh! the good white ribbon of road; how I loved it! How my heart sang for joy as I mounted my bicycle and rode swiftly away.

Was it true that I was free again? Was that nightmare of a house behind me for ever?

Should I be able to shake myself free of Mr. Lauderdale, and marry Brian and be happy after my long misery? Should—Hush!—what was that? My heart stood still.

Far off along the road behind me I heard the baying of a hound.

Then I laughed at my fears, for had not my guardian said the dog was old and toothless. Had not——

Cold perspiration all at once broke out all over me, for Mrs. Lauderdale's words swept into my mind:

"Beware of Rex," and as I thought of them, the awful bell-like notes of the dog's voice came less faintly in the breeze.

He was no longer chained in his kennel; he was loose somewhere on the road behind; he—the thought gripped at my heart like an ice-cold hand—he was pursuing *me!*"

I pedalled furiously. Leaning down upon the handle-bars I rode at a pace I could never have dreamt of riding in more sober moments.

Fear lent me strength, and I rode like the wind, whilst the baying behind me rose loudly, then died away, only to rise again with renewed vigour.

I came to a hill up which I had perforce to walk, and those awful sounds seemed each moment to draw nearer and nearer, and yet I tried to still my fears by assuring myself that the dog was old and harmless in spite of my remembrance of Mrs. Lauderdale's warning.

On the brow of the hill an old man met me. His face looked white in the twilight.

"Is the dog loose?" he whispered fearfully.

"Yes—but he is old and toothless," I answered.

"He is the fiercest, youngest bloodhound in the county," the man replied, "and if he is after you, ride for your life."

"Ride for your life—for your life,"—the words sang and shrieked in my ears as I mounted and tore on again—the wind whistling round me.

Oh! the horror of it, the horror of it! "Ride for your life—for your life—"

I found myself sobbing out the sentence in a kind of ryhthm; whilst my eyes seemed literally starting from my head with fatigue, my limbs almost refused to move from sheer exhaustion.

"Ride for your life—for your life"—my pace had slackened, I could not keep it up; already I was breathing great painful breaths, my heart thumping like a sledge hammer—and the baying drew nearer—nearer—nearer.

The darkness was gathering round me. I could scarcely see the road over which I skimmed, my mind was wholly intent on the one thought of flight, when—all at once—without an instant's warning, my bicycle seemed to leap into the air, I was conscious of a grinding, crunching sound below me, and in another second I was flung violently into the road.

A stone in my path, hidden by the darkness, had done the work, and I lay in the dust for a moment too stunned to even rise.

Then the fearsome sound behind me recalled me to my senses, for it was close, close upon me now.

With a cry of unutterable despair I sprang to my feet, and rushed towards the bicycle that lay by the roadside.

But I was too late! Already round the bend of the road I caught a glimpse of two bloodshot gleaming eyes. I could hear the laboured breathing of the great hound; yes, I could even feel his hot breath upon me. With just one thought in my mind, "I will die game," I gripped at my bicycle and stood upright beside it, as the dog with a fiendish yelp of delight, sprang towards me, bearing me downwards by his great weight—down, down, down, until a great darkness seemed to settle down all around me—and I knew no more.

* * * * *

When the light came back to me I lay in Brian's arms—his dear face was close to mine, and the great dog lay dead at his feet!

Nothing seemed strange in that night of strange things; it was only natural and beautiful that Brian should be there to help me. But as full consciousness came back to me I realised that his presence was little short of miraculous.

He had vainly tried to discover my whereabouts, and at last, in despair had accepted an invitation to stay with his friends in Surrey.

Feeling tired and wretched that evening he had strolled out along the road near his friends' house, taking a gun with him!

And—he had saved my life.

The long arm of coincidence is more wonderful sometimes than we know, and the age of miracles is not ended yet.

Needless to say that I was able to bring such damning evidence against Mr. Lauderdale that he no longer resides peacefully at Danmore, but is detained in one of His Majesty's convict establishments.

For poor Mrs. Lauderdale I have something akin to affection—my great likeness to her daughter induced her to rescue me from what she believed would be my fate. She was sure her husband intended—either to keep me a permanent prisoner, or to put me out of the world altogether.

Brian and I are married and are very happy, but we shall neither of us ever forget the ghastly night long ago, when, but for him, I should verily have fallen into the jaws of the Hound of Death.

L. G. Moberly.

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An Innocent Intrigue.

A Comedy-Drama of Real Life.

CHARACTERS.

Ethel Harte	*Spinster.*
Cecil Havergal	*Bachelor.*
Max Edenheim	*Scientist.*

"I CAN'T think what it is that is coming to you lately, Ethel!"

"No? I am afraid that I am very much in the same predicament; only that my ignorance doesn't worry me—in the least." "But the thing does worry—and annoy *me*."

"Perhaps you will be a little more explicit, sir; for, so far, your statement can hardly be said to be definite. We will agree to waive the question of its politeness."

"I impolite—to *you?*"

"I didn't say so."

"Oh!—I thought you did."

"First thoughts, as you ought to be aware, are nearly always unreliable."

"Look here, Ethel!" said Cecil Havergal, hardly able to control his irritation. "This word-fencing leads to nothing. I mean——"

"There!" she petulantly interrupted him. "It is to know what you *mean* that I am patiently waiting, instead of keeping a most important engagement."

"Engagement!—what engagement?" he blurted out; not over diplomatically, it must be confessed.

A surprised lifting of the eyebrows, together with the faintest possible shrugging of the shapely shoulders, was all she vouchsafed him in reply to his undoubtedly too bluntly-put query.

High-spirited, and of a naturally independent position, Ethel Harte was a girl not by any means inclined to be dictated to by even the man to whom she had promised herself; and was altogether indisposed to look favourably upon a dress rehearsal by her *fiancé* of his part in the forthcoming matrimonial drama.

As for allowing herself to be disturbed by any manifestation of jealous feeling in the person of her future lord and master, such an idea never entered her pretty little head; being no believer in the contention that jealousy—masculine jealousy, that is—is to be accepted as an infallible test of love.

"Come, Ethel! You'll tell me all about this engagement of yours, won't you?"

"No! If I'm not worth trusting, I'm not worth having."

"Nonsense, Ethel! I have a right to know!"

"I think not—at present."

"Well," he said desperately, "you will at least say if it is a man or a woman whom you are going to meet?"

"I see no objection to my answering that question. As a matter of fact, it is neither; and yet one of them. My appointment is with a gentleman."

Her emphatic rendering of the last word fairly infuriated him.

"Very well!" he said, taking up his hat and moving towards the drawing-room door, "very well! Perhaps you will favour me also with the gentleman's name?"

"Certainly not!"

"The object of your visit to him then?"

"No!"

"Of course, you are aware of the construction that may be placed upon your refusal?"

"That is a matter which concerns me but very little. But you must excuse me. I have no more time to spare."

There was evidently nothing further to be said, and Cecil Havergal, for once forgetting his courtesy in his disappointment and chagrin, left the room without word or sign of farewell.

At the end of the street something impelled him to look back. There was a hansom at the door of No. 17.

Presently she came out, got into the cab, and drove away in the opposite direction.

Angry beyond measure, both with himself and with her, he sought his club, and buried himself in the current news of the day.

But it would not do; Ethel Harte's eyes seemed to be looking at him in every line of the newspaper—now mockingly, now wistfully—but always honestly and truly.

"Confound it all! if I've made a mistake. I'm a brutal humbug!" he said to himself. "And yet, she admitted herself, that she had an appointment with a gentleman! No, there's nothing for it, but to find the fellow—thrash him—and break with her for ever."

At this moment a club friend drew his attention to a paragraph in one of the illustrated papers.

It had reference to a trial trip, that afternoon, from a well-known pleasure park in the north-west of London, of a new air-ship; the invention of one Dr. Max Edenheim, an eminent young German scientist.

"You are always discussing things aeronautic, Havergal; this ought to interest you," said Major Palliser. "They tell me that nothing has as yet been seen like it, and that even Santos Dumont himself is shaking in his shoes about it."

Now, if there was one thing more than another which appealed to Cecil Havergal's intelligence, it was the scientific conquest of the air. It was not strange that he should not have heard of this particular bid for fame and fortune, in connection with the blue ribbon of aerial navigation, inasmuch as Max Edenheim had kept his secret until nearly the hour of trial. He had selected this country for the experiment, for reasons too sufficiently obvious to need detailing here.

"I would go with you myself," remarked the Major, "bu the War Office claims me this afternoon. I very much fancy however, that Dr. Edenheim and the War Office are not altogether unacquainted, and that sooner or later we shall be hearing something about military air-ships."

Regarding it as something which might distract his mind a bit from other and more worrying matters, Cecil Havergal

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decided to run northward, and witness the German inventor's experiment.

* * * * * * *

Wentworth Park is the happy hunting ground of the sport-cyclist, the running man, the footballer, and the holiday maker.

On this particular occasion, however, it was being used strictly in the interests of science.

The crowd assembled there was eminently well dressed and orderly; consisting, as it did, largely of that class which usually affects the Royal Institution lectures in Albemarle Street.

Towering above everybody was the fair, stalwart son of the Fatherland, who, although the object of a thousand questions —mostly idiotic and irrelevant—had eyes and ears for little else than the child of his brain and patience—the wonderful machine floating at anchor above the heads of the gaping throng.

It wanted some twenty minutes to the arranged time of starting, when Max Edenheim had a card put into his hand.

"Tut-tut!" he said, half aloud, and knitting his brows impatiently. "I thought that I had made this foolish young lady to see the folly of this whim of hers. Well, I must go over it all again, I suppose, for I can't and I won't take her!"

Good humouredly elbowing his way through the crowd, he strode in the direction of a small wooden building used, on this occasion, as a sort of workshop for the convenience of the Doctor and his assistants.

"Ah! Miss Harte!" he said, with continental, if not too effusive politeness. "I did not expect you here to-day after our talk the other evening at Sir John Kinnerton's."

"And, Dr. Edenheim, I fully intended not to come; but —but something occurred to-day——to make me change my mind."

"Ah! that was a pity—a great pity—for, you see, I cannot possibly allow you to accompany me. For myself, as I told you, the risk is nothing; for you, or rather for those who love you, it is everything."

"But Doctor! supposing that I agree to ignore the risk; to think only of the intense delight this maiden trip in your wonderful air-ship would give me—what then?"

"Just this!—that I must still refuse you your request."

As Max Edenheim said, he had reasoned with her at the Royal Society President's *soirée*, seeing clearly that her desire to share the risk and glory (if successful) of the trip, was due to a mere craving for adventure.

Though she had made up her mind to gracefully accept the Doctor's decision, she had allowed her disappointment to colour her treatment of her lover. When, therefore, he ventured to remonstrate with her, she, in the contrary spirit common to most women of a like nature, resolved to make another effort to get her way, and at the same time to punish her betrothed for his contumacy.

Now, Max Edenheim was not as are the majority of men; he was a man of many moods; a man of impulse, but one whose impulses seldom led him to make mistakes.

Looking at his watch, he saw that but five minutes remained to starting time.

"Miss Harte," he said, seriously, "it is only fair that as you have changed your mind, so I have changed mine. You *shall* ascend with me; and I will trust to the god of good fortune to bring you safely to earth again."

Then did she begin to regret her success.

"Dr. Edenheim," she said nervously, "if you really think it better that I should not go, I will not."

"That is just it!" he replied. "On consideration, I have come to the conclusion that it may do you good."

He quite thought that it would; this big, brainy German; for he had such supreme confidence in the ultimate triumph of his machine, that, although he was ready to face whatever risk there might be, he felt no real fear in inducing this wilful girl to make the venturous attempt.

"Come!" he said, "everything is ready! and if you will be good enough to follow me, I will settle you in the car at the moment of casting-off."

In the front rank of the excited spectators there now stood one who had arrived during the last ten minutes.

As has been said, Cecil Havergal was an enthusiast in all matters aeronautic, and, so far as was permissible, was closely examining the machine, and everything connected with it.

The parting of the crowd behind him made him to look round.

In an instant he saw, or imagined he saw, it all.

Within a few feet of him was Ethel Harte, in earnest conversation with the tall German, who, he was informed, was the hero of the day.

He was so absolutely dumfounded that, instead of addressing Ethel, he let the pushing crowd edge him further away from her.

What followed was so lightning-like in its action that before he could speak or move Edenheim had lifted Ethel into the car, the anchoring cords were loosed, and, with a mighty "swish" upward, the almost animate monster launched itself into its proper element.

Like a man demented he sought the secretary of the Aero Club, whom he saw watching the airship's flight with a pair of powerful binoculars.

"Carter," he said (being himself a member of the club he knew the secretary intimately), "for God's sake!—tell me—do you think the thing's safe? I want to know! for—for that young lady—you saw her—well, she is a—a friend of mine, and I wouldn't have anything happen to her for—for—what do you think?"

"My dear fellow! there's a risk, of course; there always is in these trial trips; but, so far as I'm able to judge—knowing Dr. Edenheim and the value of his work—I should say that the chances are more than even that his ship will make port, and that its inventor will wake to-morrow morning to find himself famous, beyond even any dreams that he may have dreamt."

"Well, Carter! I think you know. Now, tell me, where does Dr. Edenheim propose, if he is successful, to descend?"

"At St. Albans. If, however, you contemplate being in at the finish, I'm afraid you will be disappointed; for there is nothing fast enough to get you there in advance of the ship."

Cecil Havergal, for the second time that day, was strangely discourteous; for, beyond a curt nod, he said or did nothing in acknowledgment of his friend's informatory kindness; turning away in feverish haste and making for the entrance.

Outside were carriages and cabs without number.

Signing to the driver of a hansom, he jumped in, and, almost shouting out "station!" soon found himself bowling along at a hand-gallop.

A train for St. Albans was signalled and in sight as the cab dashed into the station yard, and drew alongside the platform as he rushed out with his ticket and change in his hand.

That ride to St. Albans was a record one for him.

As he detrained at the old Hertfordshire town, he instinctively looked up into the sky, in search of that which contained all that he held most dear in the whole world.

His range of vision was, however, limited; the booking-office buildings blocking out his view on that side.

He could see nothing.

There was no official about to whom he could address himself for information, except a solitary bucolic specimen in porter's corduroy, who, grinning

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vacantly, pointed in vague fashion in the direction of the town, in reply to an excited query as to whether anything had as yet been seen of the airship.

Deaf to the porter's demand for his ticket, Havergal rushed through the wicket, out into the station road, to see a big crowd—townsfolk and railway people—gazing up at Max Edenheim's wonderful machine as it floated gracefully over the Cathedral, preparatory to a descent.

Evidently it was the "Doctor's" intention and desire to come down in a large meadow some half mile to the south of the old Abbey church.

But Havergal and the others, intently watching the intrepid aeronaut's operations, soon saw that something had gone wrong with the rudder ropes, and that, to a large extent, Edenheim had lost control of the aerostat!

* * * * * * *

Ethel Harte, white of face and trembling in every limb, did not dare to speak to her companion, whose set features and compressed lips showed that the situation was at least serious.

Crouched down in the fore part of the "basket," so as to enable Edenheim to have a good look-out ahead, everything in her, save the sheer "woman," died once and for ever.

Frightened, not only for herself, but for what might mean the loss of a good and true man's love and trust, she could do nothing but bitterly reproach herself for her worse than foolish obstinacy.

Max Edenheim, though pre-occupied with striving to force the machine against the wind in the desired direction, glanced down once, and saw that the girl had learnt her lesson. She was shedding hot, blinding tears, as though her heart would break.

Judging it best to say nothing, he made one more big effort to clear the rudder lines.

At an altitude of about seven hundred feet, the ship was now free of the Cathedral, and immediately over the fifteenth century tower of St. Michael's Church.

Then it began to descend, and not all the "Doctor's" efforts could, unless something miraculous intervened, prevent a terrible catastrophe.

Among the gaping crowd below was a certain local steeplejack. Breaking loose from the throng, this man made a bee-line for the church.

First trying the door of the tower, he found it locked. But he knew every coign and projection of the outside walls.

Selecting a spot up which ran an iron water pipe, he proceeded to shin up it, hand over hand.

More than once in the ascent he kicked with his foot a piece of crumbling mortar or a loose brick, which fell with a crash on to the stone paving below.

It was doubtful which sight, the imperilled air-ship or the venturous steeplejack, had the greatest interest for the spectators.

One supreme moment there was, when, the "ship" having dropped to within touching distance of the top of the tower, the framework supporting the car and the mechanical apparatus, became perilously entangled about one of the four corner pinnacles; the car, with its two occupants hanging, suspended by irresponsible ropes and bamboo débris, literally in mid air, from, what the aeronaut feared, the tottering stone ornament.

More than three parts of the way up, the steeple-jack was half blinded and badly bruised by the shock-dislodged material.

"He's down!" shouted one section of the crowd below.

"No, he isn't!" was the reassuring roar of another.

As, indeed, he was not; for just pausing an instant to take breath, the brave fellow continued his upward climb, till, with a mighty last effort, he gripped the guttering at the base of the castellations, and swung himself over on to the tower leads.

The rest was comparatively easy. Hauling on the main car rope, he managed to bring the basket close alongside the battlements.

Max Edenheim's first thought was for the half-fainting girl. Raising her in his arms, he handed her carefully to their rescuer, following himself when he saw that she was in safety.

By this time the church officials had opened the tower door and were prepared to render every assistance.

As though Fate were determined to make him suffer to the bitter end, Cecil Havergal, in his eagerness to find a quicker route to the scene of action, got hopelessly involved, and amid a maze of side streets and lanes, so that when he arrived at the tower foot it was to learn that the "Doctor" and Ethel had gone to the "George Hotel" for rest and dinner.

The young lady who presided in the combined bar and office at the "George," could not help wondering at the excitable manner of the good-looking gentleman, who wanted no refreshment, no accommodation, only some information.

"The lady and gentleman who descended—I mean, who accidently fell—in the airship—half an hour ago, are they staying here?"

"Yes, sir. Dr. Edenheim is in the dining-room and the lady is resting upstairs."

"Thanks! I will go to the dining-room, and see—er—Dr. Edenheim."

"Very good, sir."

It must have been Fate again that brought Ethel downstairs at the precise moment that Cecil Havergal opened the door of the dining-room; either that or fortuitous circumstance.

She quickened her steps upon seeing him, and he, letting go the handle of the door, took both her hands in his, and wrung them till she cried out.

It was she who spoke first.

"Come in! Come in! There is someone in there whom you must know."

He drew back a little at this, but she would not be denied, and before he well knew where he was, she had him inside and was introducing him to the fair, smiling giant, who stood under the chandelier with outstretched hand.

"Dr. Edenheim," cried Ethel, "please tell Mr. Havergal the whole sum of my wickedness in wanting to do what you denied to your own wife. Yes, Cecil, Mrs. Edenheim, whom we are expecting here every minute, was wiser than I, for she obeyed."

"But I don't quite understand," said Havergal slowly. "If Dr. Edenheim did not approve of your mad desire to go, how came it that you went after all."

"That, Mr. Havergal, I must plead guilty to," said the Doctor, with the mock air of a penitent. "I fancied that by letting Miss Harte go, it would in the end be better for her; as it would, I believed, almost certainly result in her never wanting to undergo such a risk again. And I don't think I was wrong, Miss Harte, was I, eh?"

"Are you angry, dear?" she asked, as the Doctor discreetly left the room, ostensibly to make himself presentable for dinner.

"Angry, sweetheart! No. But you won't do it again, will you?"

"Never!" she said, with a happy look in her eyes.

And he would stake his life that she never will.

Ralph Enderby.

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THE LADYBIRD.

A Mere Episode.

It was all so absurdly trivial. In fact, she had almost forgotten what it was about. They had quarrelled before, lots of times, and over much more serious matters, but they had always made it up again directly afterwards — until now.

Now she came to think of it, it was always she who had begun the quarrel and he who had begun the making-up.

And quite right, too, she said to herself. When he proposed to her, he had told her that he worshipped her, that he was her slave till death, that, for her sake, he was ready to go through fire and water. She had only to command, and he would obey.

Very well, then, she had taken him at his word. She had commanded, and he had obeyed—until now.

She had never asked him to go through fire or water for her. No, she was much too reasonable for that. She had never demanded the impossible. The things she had expected him to do were all quite simple and easy.

"I wouldn't order George about quite so much, if I were you, Kate," her sister had said to her the other day.

"What do you mean?" she asked, in amazement.

"Well, I don't exactly know how to explain it," said Em. "You know you're quite a pleasant, easy-going sort of person, generally speaking, but with George you're a perfect tyrant. I sometimes wonder why he puts up with you."

"You don't understand," returned Kate, loftily. "When a man is in love with his wife, it is the greatest pleasure and privilege in the world for him to do her bidding."

"Even if it makes him look a fool?" asked Em, whereupon Kate preserved a dignified silence.

Of course, Em had never been married, never been engaged even, and consequently knew nothing about the feelings of people in love.

Yet, somehow, those words of Em's rankled.

She thought of them now, as she stole into the garden, where George had taken refuge after dinner. She knew where she would find him. He was sitting in his favourite place, under the old apple tree at the back of the lawn, unconscious of her presence.

Noiselessly she stole up behind him, and stood watching him, as he moodily puffed at his pipe.

A ladybird had dropped from some overhanging bough, and was crawling slowly up his back, in the direction of his collar.

Had she really made George look a fool? And did he mind looking a fool—for her sake? Surely the ideal, the perfect husband should shrink from nothing, not even ridicule, incurred in his wife's service. And yet—and yet—no man likes to be made to look a fool. It isn't in human nature.

Thoughtfully she stared at the ladybird, as it made its slow, laborious journey across George's light coat.

After all, perhaps she had expected him to do a little too much fetching and carrying, and all that sort of thing.

Of course, man should wait on woman. That was perfectly right and proper, but—there are limits to everything. Was George beginning to recognise this? Was that the reason why he had not been as ready as usual to patch up their last little squabble?

Now she came to think of it, she remembered how the squabble had originated.

She had commissioned him to get a certain back number of an illustrated paper that contained a portrait which she admired.

The offices of the paper were in Fleet Street, and George had an office in Holborn, so that it would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to get that paper. But no, he had simply forgotten all about it. He had had a busy, harassing day, he said. He was awfully sorry, and he would be sure to remember to-morrow.

Now, she had particularly wanted the paper that very day, but what upset her most was, not so much the want of the paper, as the fact that he should have forgotten to fulfil a wish of hers.

His business worries had, for the time, obliterated the remembrance of her! The thought was unendurable. She had told him so, and that is how the squabble had begun.

The ladybird had by this time reached the rim of George's coat collar.

Well, certainly, he had been looking rather worried lately. Perhaps it *was* a little unfair to expect him to devote his entire thoughts to her and her wishes.

She began to remember a hundred petty tyrannies which she had exercised and to which he had submitted patiently. Harmless little tyrannies, most of them, but quite unnecessary too. Tyrannies she had practised simply because she loved to see him at her feet.

She remembered reading somewhere once that the true secret of married happiness was the principle of "give and take."

The woman, as well as the man, must be prepared to give and take. Up to the present, *he* had done all the giving, she all the taking.

How blind, how selfish she had been!

She saw it all now.

Why, why should the man be always on his knees to the woman? Why should *she* be the queen, and *he* the slave? She had never questioned her right until now, and now she could find no reasonable title to the claim.

Surely the woman who loves her husband should be as ready to serve as to be served. There could be no question of commanding or obeying on either side.

The ladybird was balancing itself in a reckless manner on the edge of George's white collar. If he moved his head ever so slightly, the tiny thing would inevitably be crushed.

In the midst of her remorse, she was seized with a sudden solicitude for the ladybird.

Stepping up behind George, she flicked it lightly and dexterously from his collar.

He felt the gentle touch, and turned his head in surprise.

The next moment, a pair of soft arms were flung about his neck, a hot cheek laid caressingly against his own.

"George, I want to make it up," she whispered, "and—and there's such a lot I want to say to you."

When she had said it, with her pretty head very close to his, he turned to her with a glad smile.

"I'm the proudest, happiest man in the world to-day," he said. "I didn't realise, until this moment, what a sensible little woman I had married. Don't think, dearest," he added, hastily, "that I ever regretted the vows I made to you when I asked you to be my wife. There is nothing I wouldn't willingly do for you. It was only when I found that my love was in danger of spoiling you that I began to resent the—the——"

"The horrible tyrannies I practised upon you," she interrupted quickly. "George, what a selfish little wretch I've been!"

Grete Hahn.

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Telling the Sad Ending to a Flirt s Proposals.

JACK EDSON was a male flirt. There wasn't a girl in the town who hadn't received attentions from him, and just those attentions which, when a young lady receives them from a young gentleman, are generally considered to "mean something."

But the girls—or all of them but one, at least—found out that such attentions, when they came from Jack Edson, instead of "meaning something," meant precisely nothing at all.

Lucy Brown didn't believe that all Jack's pretty speeches and fine compliments meant nothing. He had walked with her more than with any girl in the town, and she had begun to think a good deal of him. He was so devoted and kind, that she had faith in him.

"Better be careful," said Mary Spooner warningly. "He's the biggest flirt in Christendom. He doesn't mean half what he says."

"I don't believe all I hear about him," said Lucy stoutly. "He's not a flirt."

"Yes, he is!" said Mary, in a tone that indicated that no arguments would change her opinion on the subject. "Isn't he always paying attention to every girl that comes along, Lucy? Isn't he always ready to make love to a new face? You know he is."

"No, I don't know any such thing," asserted Lucy. "He is gentle and polite, and if the girls will insist on taking the attentions which are prompted by politeness for attentions of another nature, he isn't to blame, is he?"

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Mary, in disgust. "Talk to me about its all being prompted by Jack Edson's politeness! Humph!" and Miss Spooner gave her nose an upward turn, thereby expressing her opinion of Lucy's argument, if not adding very much to her beauty.

When Jack went up to London to live, he kissed Lucy after a very lover-like fashion, and made her promise to write often, which Lucy, putting implicit faith in him, was quite ready to do.

She couldn't help feeling a little disappointed to think that he hadn't said anything more definite. He had known her a year, but never had said a word about marriage in all that time; and if he hadn't the idea of marriage in his head, why had he been so devoted and lover-like?

"Perhaps he wants to get started in business before he settles down," thought Lucy, and that thought comforted her.

Jack hadn't been in London a week before he struck up an acquaintance with Miss Grant.

Miss Grant was tolerably good-looking and had a rich father.

Jack began to be serious in his attentions at once. Those attentions Miss Grant received cordially.

"Business is business," thought Jack. "A few thousands won't come amiss to me, and if I can get a good wife and a snug bank account at the same time, I ought to think myself lucky. I say, Jack Edson, old fellow, go in and win!"

And Jack Edson did "go in" accordingly, and for a month devoted himself wholly and unreservedly to Miss Grant.

Then Fate, or accident, or some other means, thro whim into a dilemma by getting him acquainted with Bella Graham.

Miss Bella Graham was a very pretty young lady, with bold black eyes and a mischief-loving disposition, and as Jack had not flirted for some time, he proceeded, after his old fashion, to lay his heart at Miss Graham's feet, metaphorically speaking, and for a month was her most devoted cavalier.

Miss Graham liked a flirtation as well as Jack did, and was nowise backward in playing her part.

Jack was always looking for and expecting sincerity in others, and concluded at once that Miss Graham had found his fascination irresistible, and was ready to capitulate and surrender, whenever he chose to speak the word.

By and by Miss Graham went out of town on a visit, and then he packed up his devotions and the other necessaries to love-making and returned, like a prodigal son, to Miss Grant.

He had been so busy! Work had been unusually pressing for the last month. He couldn't get away from the office. Jack invented a score of excuses to account for his absence, and Miss Grant graciously accepted them all, and reinstated Jack in her good graces, and "Richard was himself again."

In August, Miss Grant went out of town, and Jack had a lonely time of it for want of someone to pay attention to. While she was gone, he thought over the matter seriously.

Here he was, young, good-looking, and earning a good salary, but in need of a home. The first step towards securing a home was to secure a wife. Why didn't he get married? Sure enough, why didn't he?

The more he thought of it, the more firmly he made up his mind to take the decisive step, and accordingly he cast about in his mind as to whom he should honour by giving the privilege of becoming Mrs. Jack Edson.

Jack knew of three who would be glad to have him—Miss Grant, Miss Graham, and Lucy Brown. All he had to do to get one of them to be his, "for better, for worse," was to give them half a chance to say "Yes."

"I like Lucy," he soliloquised, "but she's a plain little country girl, and her father isn't worth much, and I don't think I'll throw myself away on her. There's Miss Graham; she's smart and handsome, and her father's worth a great deal; but she's got too much temper for me. I'm afraid I don't want one of those high-flyers! Miss Grant's the most desirable person of all. Old Grant's bank account is one very satisfactory feature about the transaction. When she gets back I'll speak to her about it, and have the thing off my mind."

Miss Grant came back the next week, and Jack wended his way to her home shortly after her return, to inform her of the decision he had arrived at during her absence.

Miss Grant was rather cool.

"She's piqued to think I haven't spoken on the important subject before," thought Jack.

A good opportunity presented itself, and Jack proceeded to offer his heart and hand to Miss Grant after the most genteel manner possible.

He expected to see her burst into a flood of thankful tears, or perform some other equally original feat to demonstrate the gladness of her emotions; but she did not do anything of the kind.

"You do me a great deal of honour, I suppose," said she, in a tone which seemed to imply that she hardly considered that she was speaking truthfully. "But I don't feel like accepting it. I would refer you to Miss Graham."

Jack was thunderstruck.

He had never dreamt of anything like this. It embarrassed him terribly for a minute or two. Then he rallied and tried to explain matters; but Miss Grant was as obstinate as a woman ever was, and would not listen to a word from him.

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"Go to Miss Graham," was all she said, and Jack at last withdrew from the field discomfited.

"It's plain as the nose on my face that she's heard something about my flirting with Miss Graham, and she's upset about it. Confound Miss Graham!"

But after sober second thought on the matter, he concluded to accept Miss Grant's advice and go to Miss Graham.

Accordingly he set off to inform Miss Graham that he had concluded to marry her.

Miss Graham was all smiles and pretty words, and Jack felt that he had but to say the word and the thing was settled.

And by and by he proceeded to inform her of the honour he had decided to confer upon her.

"Marry you?" exclaimed Miss Graham. "Why, I couldn't think of such a thing!" And she laughed as if it was the best joke she had ever heard.

Jack began to feel scared.

"Why not?" demanded he.

"Because I'm engaged to one man already, and the law objects to our marrying two, you know!" And thereupon Miss Graham laughed again, as if it were immensely funny.

For the life of him, Jack could not see the point.

"How long have you been engaged?" stammered Jack, feeling cold and hot all over.

"For as much as—let me see"—coolly—"as much as a year, I fancy. Yes, it was in October that it happened. Just about a year ago."

"And you never told me!" groaned Jack.

"You never asked me," said Miss Graham.

Poor Jack! He gathered up his lacerated heart and withdrew from his second battlefield, completely routed.

"I won't give it up!" he decided. "There's Lucy Brown. She'll have me, and jump at the chance, and she's worth forty Miss Grants and a trainload of Miss Grahams! I'll write to her and ask her this very afternoon."

And write to her he did.

He had not answered her last letter, received three months before, but he put in a page of excuses for his negligence, and smoothed the matter over to his satisfaction, if not to Lucy's.

The letter was sent, and he awaited a reply with considerable anxiety.

At last it came.

"It's favourable, of course!" he said, as he tore open the letter. "Lucy always thought the world of me."

But his opinion as to its being favourable changed somewhat as he read it:

"Mr. Jack Edson,—I am very thankful for the honour, etc., but I'd rather not have second-hand articles when I can get them at first hand. John Smith says: 'Tell him I have something to say about it now, and I'm not going to forego my claim on Lucy Brown for all the Jack Edson's in the world; and it isn't quite the correct thing to propose to other men's wives.'

"Love to Miss Grant; also to Miss Graham.

"Yours, Lucy Brown Smith."

"Good gracious! Lucy married!"

Jack's eyes were like saucers when he read that name.

Then he suddenly dropped into the nearest chair.

"Well, I've gone and done it this time!" he groaned. "Jack Edson, you're a fool!"

Poor Jack! He's in the market yet! Who bids?

Ted Lane.

"You're not in love, Bobbie. You only think you are." "Well, how the dickens am I to find out my mistake if I'm mistaken?" "Oh, marry the young woman, by all means."

Fred: "How are you getting on with Miss Angell? Did you speak to her father as you determined?" Frank: "Yes." Fred: "And what happened?" Frank: "I said to him, 'Mr. Angell, I love your daughter.' Said he, 'So do I; now let's talk about something else.'"

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have just secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his prophecies for this week's birthdays.

August 5.—This will be an unfavourable year for business to those whose birthdays occur to-day. Do not lend to friends or loss will result.

Single girls will find love affairs interesting, but unexpected events appear to hinder matters. Put little faith in promises.

A child born to-day will be sharp and clever; not fortunate in a business of its own. If a girl, she will not marry well.

August 6.—A good year for to-day's birthdays. Favourable for farmers, aged persons, lovers, and those in employ. Voyages and long journeys should not be undertaken.

Young people born in the early morning marry. To those born later, there is danger of crosses and intrigues.

A child born to-day will be abrupt, affectionate, and thoughtful. Can go into business for itself and be fortunate. Not so good for a girl.

August 7.—Not a good year for marriage or love affairs to those who celebrate their birthdays to-day. Those born in the evening will have cause for jealousy. Girls born then meet with deceit.

Let others make the first move up till noon, and even then it will be wise to go quiet. Better to sell than buy.

A child born to-day will have a quiet life. Will be rather extravagant and fond of change.

August 8.—A fortunate year for business and employ for to-day's children. Have a care with papers and agreements. Some danger of quarrels and law.

Young girls will quarrel with lovers, and need caution in what they say and write.

A child born to-day will get on in life. Will be active, clever, and ambitious, but will possess a quick temper.

August 9.—A changeable year. Some sickness in domestic circle may be expected by those whose birthdays fall on this day.

Some disappointment comes into love affairs. Young girls must be cautious; guard against intrigues, and attentions from married men.

A child born to-day will not be fortunate, and should keep in employ. If a girl, danger of disgrace and an unhappy marriage.

August 10.—An active year with many changes. Avoid speculation and lending money. Some anxiety over wills or insurance.

Love affairs are unimportant. Girls born near 9 p.m. must have a care; much deceit and little confidence should be placed in opposite sex.

A child born to-day will be active, improvident, and fond of change. Should be in employ of others, as good fortune is not promised.

August 11.—Care will be needed this year with money and business, by those who celebrate their birthdays, to-day.

Young people will be favoured in their love affairs, though girls born early in the morning will be in danger of some deception.

A child born to-day will be rather fortunate in life. Possess a cheerful disposition, be studious, and have good business abilities.

Asturel.

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Passing the Love of Women.

By Gertrude Page.

Author of "Dearer Than Life," "Maurice Dale's Love Story," &c., &c.

When the firm told Tom Earle to go to Vienna, Tom told the firm to go considerably further, but that, of course, was under his breath.

"I shouldn't mind so much if I could get back by Easter," he grumbled to his friend, Dick Davis, "but it's a beastly shame to send a chap off now. The work could very well wait for another two weeks. If I have to spend the Easter holiday out there I shall swear like a medical student for two solid hours."

Davis looked amused.

"Rough on poor Maisie, too," he said slyly.

Tom did not reply for a moment, but kicked an unoffending hassock half across the room.

"It'll give Haslem all the running;" he said at last, disconsolately.

"A good thing too," was the unsympathetic rejoinder.

Tom took it very well.

"You're always unfair to Maisie," he said. "It isn't her fault if the chaps all run after her."

"Oh, no, not at all. Still, I'll lay a wager she doesn't object."

"A girl can't help being pretty. You wouldn't have her tie her face up in a bag, I suppose."

"No, but I'd have her keep her eyes a little more for you, if you really are to be the one and only."

Tom turned angrily, but meeting his friend's frank blue eyes only said, with a shrug of his shoulders—"I'd knock you down for that, Dick, if you weren't such a thundering good chap."

Dick made no reply, but looked at his friend a little wistfully. He was a good deal fonder of him than he would have dreamt of owning, and he did not want him to marry Maisie Travers. As things stood at present, however, it seemed more than likely that he would do so, unless his eyes were opened in time, or Maisie landed a bigger fish.

"I expect there'll be about three feet of snow," said Tom, returning to the first subject, "to add to the delights of Austria, "and it's as likely as not I shall get lost on the way, and never be heard of any more."

"I'll come and look for you," said Dick, "and I'll find you or die in the attempt."

"If you'd go instead of me, there'd be some sense in it."

"I shouldn't mind at all if it were possible. Having no Maisie, you see, Vienna has considerable charm for me."

The following day they had dinner at Gatti's together, with a view to sending Tom off in better spirits, but the attempt was not attended by any brilliant success.

"I suppose you saw Miss Travers last night," Dick said at last, to try and draw Tom.

"Yes. She's awfully sick about Easter. They are giving a dance, you know, and she won't like it if I don't get back in time."

There was a pause, then Tom remarked suddenly—"I say, Dick, old chap, you might do a fellow a good turn."

"Well?" said Dick, "Say on."

"It's just this way, you see," continued Tom, playing with some crumbs, "What riles me as much as anything is the idea of Haslem having it all his own way, such a bounder as he is, too. Now, if you wouldn't mind just cutting him out for that one evening, I should be so awfully glad about it."

"But, my dear chap—" began Dick expressively.

"Yes, I know," interposed Tom, "but Maisie doesn't really care a fig for him, and knowing you were my special chum, she'd like several dances with you. She's a thundering good waltzer, so you wouldn't be making a martyr of yourself at all."

"But what if I have a special friend there of my own?"

Tom looked up amused, for the idea of Dick Davis with a special friend was decidedly a novelty, he being notedly averse to ladies' society.

"Anything in the wind?" he asked.

"No, old chap. I'll be a cat's paw if you like. As you say, Haslem is an awful bounder, and it would be a bit of sport to worry him."

"Beastly nuisance!" he ejaculated to himself later, after seeing Tom into the train. "If there's a girl I detest—Ah, well, so long as she doesn't attempt to get up a flirtation with me afterwards I suppose I needn't mind!" but it was with rather a gloomy face he turned into his club.

Meanwhile, both looking and feeling extremely sorry for himself, Tom embarked at Dover upon the steamer for Ostend, and after a bad crossing, arrived in a somewhat pitiable condition on the opposite shore. He knew little French and less German, and he began to wonder if he would ever get to Vienna at all, or anywhere else for the matter of that. He felt fairly secure about getting as far as Cologne, because he was in a railway carriage bearing that name as a destination, though that in itself was no certainty, as many a stranger to London can testify after getting into a 'bus labelled Charing Cross and finding it was going in the opposite direction. However, Tom made himself as comfortable as he could, and hoped for the best. But the Fates were not kind, indeed, much the reverse, for though he got to Cologne safely enough, he steamed away again, later on, in the wrong train. It would hardly be correct to say he was in blissful ignorance of this, for any semblance of bliss seemed distant enough just then. Things had not gone smoothly at Cologne at all, and it had been with a scowling brow, muttering imprecations upon the German nation in general, that he had fled in the middle of a much needed meal and jumped into the wrong train. He discovered his mistake on Sunday morning, when the train came to a standstill somewhere in the wilds of the Rhine country. His feelings then being altogether beyond expression, he relapsed into an ominous silence, threw down his portmanteau with a suggestive thud, and went to get some breakfast looking rather like a death's head at a feast.

While stolidly attending thus to the "inner man," he

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became aware of the fact that his "outer man" was apparently of some interest to a bright-eyed English girl at the next table. Several times when he looked up he met her eyes, and though she turned away at once he could not help feeling she was watching him. When he had finished his breakfast he tried to discover from the waiter how he was to get on to the right route again, but without much success. Then suddenly a happy thought struck him—why not appeal to the bright-eyed English girl? She had left the table, and was only just outside, so he went up to her, and raising his hat, said—"I beg your pardon, but I am hopelessly lost; I wonder if you would mind helping me?"

"I will do my best," she said at once, with a frank smile, "Where do you want to go?"

"I am on my way to Vienna, but I got into the wrong train at Cologne. I have no idea where I am now."

She looked amused.

"You are rather a long distance out of your way," she said, "However did you manage to get here?"

"I got into a Rhine train at Cologne, which was what I thought I was told to do."

"Then you must have got into one going the wrong side of the Rhine. Yes, of course, that's what you've done. You've been travelling all night down the wrong side of the Rhine."

"Must I go all the way back then?" he asked disconsolately.

"No. Your best plan will be to come to Frankfort and get into the Train de Luxe. I am going to Vienna myself, and that is what I am going to do. It is a first class train, but you will find it is well worth the extra money."

Tom looked up quite cheerfully. "Expense is no object now," he said. "I must get to Vienna by to-morrow if I have to have a special train. It serves the firm right for sending me, when any other chap would have done."

"Oh, you will like Vienna," she told him. "It is a magnificent city. I have been studying music in Germany, and now I am going to Vienna to stay with an aunt for a few weeks, and I expect to have a grand time."

Half an hour later they started off together, and Tom's views on continental travelling modified considerably as they went along. Indeed, Helen Hamiltonp roved such a charming companion that in the end he began to think regretfully of what he had the previous day longed for before all things, the termination of his journey. When it came, however, he was much gratified by an invitation to call at the aunt's; still more so by his reception when he made the call. Miss Foster was one of the old maids whom everybody loves, and being fonder of young people than anything else in the world, she welcomed Tom most cordially, and bade him come to see them as often as he liked. In consequence he went a great deal, and the subsequent discovery that he must remain over Easter was far less terrible than he had imagined.

Not so for poor Dick, however.

When he had asked Maisie for four dances, and had been given them with a good deal of gush that was abhorrent to his soul, he felt the ties of friendship could expect no more.

"I suppose you are secretly in mourning to-night?" he said to her during their first rest. "It is very hard lines Tom could not get back."

"Oh, I love dancing!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "Of course, if it had been anything else——. And then you are such a charming substitute, Mr. Davis"—with a little more gush—"really, Tom is rather rash."

Dick knit his eyebrows and stared straight before him, and his thoughts ran away to a bonny English girl he had met on the Calais steamer crossing to the Continent last autumn, and who constituted in ignorance the untold romance of his life. A sudden storm had come up with great violence, causing the machinery to get disabled, and they had had a very bad three hours' experience. He did not know who the girl was, but he and she together had tried to look after some of the passengers, who were not blessed with so good a nerve as they, and ever since she had been the secret heroine of his dreams. And this meant all the more in Dick's case, because there had never been any heroine before. He was what is known as not a marrying man, and the designation pleased him. Yet he knew that if he ever met his friend of the Calais steamer again, he would be her slave. Indeed, he was almost that now, for by night or day, whenever he allowed himself the leisure to dream, she immediately became the chief object of his thoughts—and he loved her in a quiet way that was in itself a prayer for her return. And Maisie was so different. The wideness of the comparison made her all the more distasteful to him, and her persistent flattery the more obnoxious. Tom was such a good fellow, he could not understand at all what charm she could possibly have for him. If this Vienna trip ended in freeing him from her influence Dick felt he would be more glad than he could say.

Meanwhile Tom and Helen Hamilton fast became great friends, and for Tom at least, England grew a little less desirable, and Vienna a little more so every day.

Then came the picnic in the mountains and the climb in the afternoon, followed by a sudden mountain mist, and two young travellers were lost together this time, both in equal trouble.

Tom did everything he could think of to take care of her, but they had got up to the snow line, and he was far more concerned than he liked to show. Helen, with her usual pluck, laughed at their misfortune, and showed a brave face all the time, until she began to feel the bitter cold, and then, though she looked just as hopeful, she grew very quiet. If was impossible to make any progress in the mist, for a single false step might have been their death, so Tom found a small, cave-like hollow, and taking off his coat insisted upon wrapping it round her, in spite of her violent protests.

"I will not allow it," she said at last resolutely, "unless you share it also. We are lost for the present, you and I," looking with her clear, frank eyes, straight into his, "we must forget everything else until we are in safety, and just take care of each other the best way we can, like two children."

He understood her, and with a simplicity as genuine as her own, crouched down beside her for life and warmth. But he was less strong constitutionally, and presently she discovered with horror that he was growing numb with cold. He seemed almost stupefied by it, and unable to speak to her coherently. She took a few steps to try and penetrate through the mist, but returned baffled in every direction. So there was only one thing left, and with a little gulp in her throat, she folded her arms round him and pressed close to keep him alive.

When the mist rose again she was still holding him, and Tom, with returning warmth, lay still in great content.

That night there were two troubled, anxious hearts in Vienna. Helen sat a long time at her window and looked at the stars fixedly, thinking—thinking—thinking. For though he had made no confession, she knew that Tom Earle loved her, and her heart had no answer ready.

"It is not likely I shall ever see *him* again," she mused, with a sudden, swift sadness in her face. "Chance threw us together that once, but tore us apart again immediately, still nameless and unknown to one another. Yet how he looked at me—Shall I ever forget it? Has he forgotten already?

"Ah, but how absurd to care for a man met in such a way, and known so slightly! I am surprised at *you*, Helen Gordon Hamilton, with your strength of mind and purpose!

"Only he was so different from other men—he looked so different.

"And then he changed so, even in that little while. At first he was just callous and a little cynical, even while help-

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ing everyone—I think he must dislike women. And then afterwards he was so changed. It seemed that he must have liked me."

She got up and walked restlessly about the room.

"Only how can we ever meet again?" she urged. "How is it possible seeing we know nothing of each other—nothing at all—not even our names.

"And then Mr. Earle is such a good fellow—if it had not been for that other, how easily I could have loved him. Why, oh, why, do I remember?"

And Tom Earle smoked a last cigar on the verandah of his hotel at a late hour, strolling up and down with a troubled face. "I can't desert Maisie," he said over and over. "I don't know that she cares much, but I can't desert her without being sure."

"There has never been any engagement," said his heart, "You are perfectly free."

"No, no," answered his better nature. "It was understood to be only your position that barred an engagement. It is the same thing really, only if anything more binding because she trusts to your honour."

"I suppose I must wait," he finished, "and hope. I was fond of Maisie, but I did not love her. I did not know what love was until I met Helen Hamilton."

Three days later, in a letter couched in delicate terms from Dick Davis, he learnt that Maisie had been faithless. "They say the chap has ten thousand a year," he wrote. "I hope you won't take it to heart much. She could never have been true, for she had not got it in her."

That evening Tom and Helen stood under the stars and plighted troth together.

* * * * *

Helen had heard so much from Tom of his great friend Dick Davis, that she looked forward quite eagerly to meeting him at the Tennis Club Dance.

"He is a ripping waltzer," Tom had said, "And he will want several with you, because of all he has heard about you."

"Poor man!" she laughed. "I am afraid there is a sad disappointment in store for him, if he has been foolish enough to believe all you have told him."

But she forgot everything when they stood face to face, except a certain Calais steamer and a sudden storm.

"This is Dick," she heard Tom say in a dazed way, and then she gave a little gasp, and the room reeled somewhat, and she held out her hand wondering if she were in a dream, or if it were all real.

Then she noted a sudden sternness in the man's eyes before her, and about his mouth, and she knew that he gripped her hand until it hurt because of some deep emotion.

She waited for him to acknowledge their acquaintance, but he made no sign of doing so, and hardly knowing why, she took her cue from him.

"May I have some dances?" he said simply, and took her programme.

"Have as many as you like, old chap!" laughed Tom happily, "I can afford to be magnanimous to such a friend as you."

Later on they danced together, and still he made no sign.

At last, when the evening was nearly over, they stood alone in a small conservatory.

"You have not forgotten?" he said, and she felt his eyes were looking through into her soul.

"No, I have not forgotten," she replied, struggling to speak with perfect naturalness. "Why did you not mention it before?"

"Because I could not," a little brusquely.

"Why?" Helen stood squarely before him, with her small head thrown back slightly—and clear eyes looked into clear eyes with understanding.

Dick had not intended to give any explanation at all, but now they stood face to face like this, he saw that in her eyes which told him he could trust her.

And his heart so longed to tell her all—was there not pain enough without the added bitterness of silence?"

"I did not mention it because it must cease to be," he told her slowly, "that is, it must cease to be for me."

She waited, and presently, after taking a turn down the conservatory and coming back to her, he said—"In anything that moves me deeply, I am very direct, forgive me if I am over blunt now. Ever since we parted on the Calais Pier I have loved you, and dreamt of meeting you again. It is not easy for me to love, women have never appealed to me, and just as there was never anyone before, so there will never be anyone again. I have known this all along, and waited, praying that you might come.

"Sometimes I hoped, and then at others I was afraid to—it seemed too great a thing to expect. That what has, could happen, never crossed my mind. I may not ask you the question I meant to ask you if I ever met you again, but I cannot think you are quite indifferent since our meeting to-night. What I ask instead is—*Never let him know.*"

She had grown white to the lips, and now she made no answer.

"I shall go away," he said very quietly, "out of the country altogether, and I leave my secret in your hands. I know you will not betray me. It would spoil all his life to know the truth. We love each other, Tom and I—We don't say much, but it is there, 'passing the love of women'! Do not let him know we had ever met—forget if you can we ever did."

And still the girl stood white and silent, making no sign.

"I cannot help being glad you had not forgotten me," he said. "I shall take that thought away with me to the other side of the world, as my best possession."

Then she held out her hands suddenly—

"I love you," she cried brokenly, "Oh, I love you!"

He bit his lip and stood silently wrestling with himself. Then he raised her hand and bending down kissed it reverently.

"Thank you," he said, "God bless you for that. Only it cannot be. I would rather die than take his happiness. For my sake give him all, and be always just what you would had we never met. If you will promise me this, you will take half of the bitterness out of the future for me."

"I will try," she breathed, "for your sake."

Then he turned hurriedly and left her.

* * * * *

There was a good deal of surmise on Helen Hamilton's wedding-day, as to the deathly whiteness of her face. No one had ever known her to be nervous, so it did not seem possible it could be that, yet her voice faltered strangely over the vows. Afterwards, in spite of much persuasion, she and her husband drove straight to the railway station, and later on came home from the wedding-trip without saying a word to anyone.

And in the five years that followed, though she lost none of her actual charm, she never unbent to make a great friend again, and this also was the subject of much surmise.

Then her husband died, and as soon as it was possible, she went away quietly alone without seeing anyone.

But there was most surmise of all when it leaked out a year later that she was going to be married to someone from over the sea. At first it had been generally supposed that she was broken-hearted, and much sympathy had been expended upon her. When it was known, however, that she was to be married again, the sympathisers were not so pleased as might have been expected. To be broken-hearted was one thing—to be consoled by a second husband quite another. Everyone, however, scented a romance in the background, and made strenuous efforts to find it out. But they were baffled on every side, and finally gave it up.

And there was no one in the big, gloomy, London church the day Helen Earle was married to Dick Davis. Even the passers-by did not think it worth while to waste a second on them, since there were neither carriages nor horses, nor any paraphernalia whatever.

Yet it is generally such weddings that have the true spark of interest in them, and just that element of the ideal which is what we would fain look for at the hymeneal altar above everywhere else.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

MRS. NORTON RAISES £5,000.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket-book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The Society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation. The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room, Cynthia however stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope. While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard. On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Mrs. Norton that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. Mrs. Norton asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind. Mrs. Norton and Cynthia go to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, entices Cynthia to bet heavily, by which she loses £800.

WE were a very silent party coming home from the Derby. Even Frankie's spirits flagged; she had lost heavily, and the thought of her bets, plus Clairette's cheque, that somehow or other would have to be met on the morrow, weighed on her mind.

As for me, I was too wretched to think. I sat crushed by the consciousness that I owed eight hundred pounds, and had not as many shillings!

When we arrived at Pont Street, Frankie suggested that the rest of the party should come in to supper; they were all too tired—or cross—to accept, however, except Toby Ffolliot, who eagerly grasped at the invitation.

Lady Gaveston had long since retired to rest—somehow one could not say "gone to bed" when speaking of Milady—and Frankie ordered supper in the morning room.

It was a cosy little place, with low, soft-cushioned chairs, and rose-coloured draperies, and a general air of luxury. The decoration was Frankie's special fad, and consisted of shoes. Shoes of all sorts, sizes and descriptions twinkled at you from the walls, pointed their toes upon the mantelpiece, danced wickedly on the shelves of a giant Japanese cabinet. Dainty *pantofles* in blue velvet embroidered with pearls, coquettish *pompadours* with red heels and diamond buckles, thin Moorish slippers, a tiny pair of sabots, Canadian snow shoes, and Indian mocassins.

Every woman in the smart set was bound to cultivate a fad for *something*; it might be animal, vegetable, or the other thing, but it must be original.

Lady Wetherall, for instance, had a unique collection of snails. They lived in a crystal tank, and were white and black, and pearly green. Mrs. Curtis-Blount went in for metal curios, and boasted a number of ancient pots and pans in iron and copper, and a few modern "gods" in gold and

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silver. One couldn't hope to be even faintly smart without a fad. Snails and saucepans I thought rather slow, but I was enthusiastic over Frankie's shoes. They were all pretty, and some of them had histories.

Leaving Toby in the morning-room, my cousin went upstairs to change her frock for a tea-gown. I followed, misery at my heart.

"If you don't mind, Frankie," I said, "I won't come down again. I want to go to bed."

"What's the matter?" she asked sharply. "You look positively wretched."

"It's nothing to what I feel. Oh, Frankie, what am I to do? I owe eight hundred pounds."

She turned round and gazed at me. Her hair was loose on her shoulders; in her soft white draperies she looked wonderfully young, and very lovely.

"Tell me all about it," she said kindly, but an odd smile twitched at the corners of her mouth, and her eyes danced with mischief.

She heard me out in silence, fixing her hair the while.

"You've got yourself in a nice mess," she remarked. "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, Frankie, won't you help me?" I said earnestly.

"My dear child, I'm stony broke myself. Still, we must manage it somehow, I suppose. You'd better speak to Fluffy and see what he can do. What a cat dear Vi is, to be sure."

"I'm certain she let me in for those bets hoping I should lose. Does she dislike me, Frankie?"

"Dislike is a mild word, my dear. If there's a person on this earth whom Mrs. Blount would cheerfully roast to death, it's you."

"But why? What have I done to her?"

"The worst possible injury; you have superseded her in a man's admiration—affection doesn't count nowadays. Don't look so innocent, Cynthia, it annoys me. You must know what I mean. Chesterton, my dear, Chesterton's the man. He and Algy Tresham were dear Vi's special property up to last Christmas, then his lordship grew restive. In other words, Vi was too exacting, and Chesterton retired to the Rockies to shoot big game. He has only just come back, and showed signs, I am told, of a reviving interest in dear Vi until—he saw you. Since then he has pointedly and painfully ignored the lady, who is naturally indignant with you as the cause of his indifference. Now, she knows that Chesterton hates a young girl to go the pace, though he's not particular about married women, and her game is to make him think you a forward and frivolous young person. To that end she inveigled you into making these preposterous bets. All things considered, I must confess dear Vi has scored. Whether she will win all along the line depends on you."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Curtis Blount *cares* for Lord Chesterton, is—is—in love with him?" I gasped.

"My dear Cynthia, we don't use such expressions in Society. Chesterton and Vi were very good friends—until you appeared."

"But Frankie, Mrs. Blount is married, her husband——"

"Is in South Africa, so he doesn't count," interrupted my cousin. "Besides, poor Teddy Blount knows his part to perfection. You and Vi are rivals, Cynthia, but"—she used—"unless you play into her hands, I'll put my money on you."

"I don't care a scrap about Lord Chesterton," I cried indignantly.

Frankie shrugged her shoulders.

"You always were a fool," she observed politely. "However, we have talked enough about your affairs, I've my own to think about. We must go down to supper. Toby is hungry, and as he's got to help me raise some money he mustn't be kept waiting. Come, Cynthia, don't look so glum, we'll talk about your debts to-morrow."

It was difficult to suppose the impecunious Toby could help anyone to raise money—he certainly had none of his own. However, I held my peace on that score, and followed Frankie, slim and girlish in her white satin, amber roses at her throat and in her hair.

Supper that night was a great success; never had I seen Frankie so light-hearted or so gay. She told smart stories that sent Toby into peals of laughter, imitated distinguished people, their gestures, and their tricks of manner, till I forgot my troubles and felt light-hearted too. We had lobster salad, cold chicken and strawberry ice, and lots of champagne—I was beginning to quite like champagne.

Under the influence of Frankie, the supper and the wine, Toby waxed eloquent. He lost his shyness, said some amazingly brilliant things, thought others even more brilliant, and made a desperate though futile effort to look fascinating.

Supper over, Frankie lit a cigarette and made room for Toby beside her on a lounge. I sat in a rocking chair by the window. I felt tired, not to say sleepy. The room was heavy with the scent of flowers—roses, roses, everywhere—and the light from the shaded lamps was soft and pink.

I leant back and closed my eyes. All the happenings of that eventful day passed through my mind in a strange medley. Lord Chesterton, Mrs. Blount, Clairette and Toby danced before me in sabots, high-heeled Pompadours, or Moorish slippers. Of a sudden Mrs. Blount took off her shoes and threw them at me sharply. I started—wideawake in a second.

It was not, all things considered, an opportune time for me to awake. Toby—poor foolish Toby—was stammering out a declaration of his love for Frankie. It made me impatient and irritable to listen. I wished my cousin would arrange not to receive proposals in my presence. One feels so horribly *de trop* on such occasions. It was no good for me to attempt to escape, however, Frankie would not have asked me down to supper had she not intended me to stay, no matter what occurred. There was nothing before me to do but grin and bear it.

"You won't mind my telling you, Frankie?" said Toby. "Of course, it's nothing to you. I daresay you are bored at hearing it. But—but—" he grew white and caught his breath. "I love you," he said hoarsely. "Yes, I love you."

An easy smile came to my cousin's lips, she leant towards him, her fingers rested lightly on his arm, the scent of her hair thrilled him.

Toby clenched his hands and tried not to look at her. He was a nice boy, as I have said, and his reverence for Frankie was a thing to marvel at. He would not so much as touch her gown unless she willed it.

Smiling she moved nearer. Her face was close to his.

"And are you sorry that you love me?" she said softly.

He stared at her then, and the light on his face was good to see—there came a flash of comprehension. He rose, and with a little laugh, tender yet exultant, took her in his arms.

She let him kiss her, heard his protestations, ardent, simple, strong, listened to his endearments fresh and sweet as young love alone can be—and still she smiled.

"You are all alike," she said at last. "Ready to swear any and everything. But when it comes to proving your words!"

"I only wish there was a way for me to prove the truth of what I say," he interrupted. "I long to do something. Can't you think of anything you want, Frankie?"

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"I want lots of things, dear boy; most you couldn't get for me, one you might, but——" she paused.

"Tell me, and if it's humanly possible you shall have it."

She laughed and laid her head upon his shoulder.

"I want five thousand pounds," she said softly, "and I want it by to-morrow. That is, of course, the difficulty, otherwise I could sell out some securities, get an advance from my trustees, or a hundred other things. As it is, I have to make a payment—bets, you know, can't wait—and unless I have the money——" She let her hands fall with an expressive gesture. "You'll help me, Toby, won't you?"

"On my soul, Frankie, I couldn't lay my hands on £20. My salary is mortgaged six months ahead, and my uncle would not advance a penny of the allowance he makes me."

"I didn't suppose you had the money," said Frankie. "But"—she looked hard at him—"there are such things as money-lenders, you know. Nathan will let me have £5,000 on my own and another's security. Will you"—she looked meaningly at Toby—"supply that other?"

"I? Why, Frankie, no money-lender in London would take me as security for £5,000. You see, I'm not sure of inheriting my uncle's money. I'm bound to come in for the title, but that's about all. Sir Edward can leave his fortune as he chooses. There's no chance of raising any money on my expectations."

"It's the mere matter of a name that is wanted," said Frankie. "Look"—she took a paper from a table at her side—"this is the bill. As you see, I have put my signature. Another name under mine and I should have £5,000. The bill will not fall due for three months, by that time I shall be able to pay it three times over. You see"—she paused, fixing her eyes on Toby—"it is only a signature we want—nothing else."

"If you think mine is any good at all," said the boy in a bewildered fashion, "I'll sign like a rocket, but I'm sure Nathan won't take it."

"Can you think of anything else?"

"Chesterton would back a bill for me, or Kinross. I'll ask them, if you like, they wouldn't know it was for you."

"You evidently don't understand me, Toby. I must have the money by to-morrow, therefore I want the signature to-night. What of your uncle?" she asked abruptly.

"He'd order me out of the house if I were to suggest such a thing. He has a horror of money-lenders. Besides, he's not in England. He left yesterday, for Egypt."

Frankie made no answer. Going to the table she poured out some brandy. She drank it off, then lit a cigarette, and leant against the mantelpiece.

Toby went to her.

"I have vexed you, somehow," he said. "I am stupid, I suppose, and don't understand. What is it—dearest?" He uttered the last word shyly, rapturously. To be able to call the woman he loves "dearest" seems a wonderful thing to a young man, at first. Later it comes to mean something altogether different.

Frankie put down her cigarette and turned quickly. Her face was flushed, her eyes brilliant.

"Not five minutes since you swore you loved me," she cried; "declared there was nothing that you wouldn't do for me. And now, when I take you at your word and ask you for something, you quibble and pretend you do not understand. Listen," she snatched the bill and held it before him. "I want another signature beneath my own, and you must put it there. No, don't ask questions, nor offer explanations—*write!*"—and she thrust a pen into his fingers.

The boy listened with a bewilderment that gradually gave place to a horrified understanding. He threw down the pen, and sinking into a chair hid his face.

In a second Frankie was kneeling at his side.

"It doesn't mean anything dreadful," she whispered. "You've only just to write the name. No one will ever know but you and I. The money will be paid for certain when the bill falls due. Won't you do it for me, Toby? Think what it will mean if you refuse. If I don't get the money to-morrow, I shall be ruined, disgraced——"

"What of me," said the boy in a low voice, "how can I ever hold up my head again if——"

"No one will ever know, dear, but you and I. And we are the only people that matter, so long as we love each other."

"And if I sign—what then?" He raised his head, meeting her eyes. He looked white and drawn, and there were lines about his mouth, lines that, traced by the suffering of the moment, cut deep into the boyish face and left it hard.

"If I do this thing what am I to get?" He grasped her wrist and must have hurt her, for she gave a quick, sharp cry.

"I'll marry you—I swear it," she said quickly.

He caught her to him, kissing her eyes, and mouth and hair, then half staggered to the table and signed for pen and ink.

The lamps were burning dim so that he could not see to write. Frankie drew back the curtains. The dawn was breaking in the city, and the daylight stole into the room, making all things look garish in its clear purity. The greyness of the dawn fell full upon his face; so strange and terrible it looked that with a cry I rushed towards him.

I was too late. Toby had signed his uncle's name!

Another minute he had left the room, and Frankie followed him. I sat and cried, and wished that I and Toby were both dead.

My cousin took a much more cheerful view of the situation.

"You are really too silly, Cynthia," she said, "anyone would think that Toby had committed forgery to see the way you're going on."

"But it is forgery," I protested.

"Not a bit of it. It's forgery if a person signs another's name to get money for himself, not otherwise. You often write letters for me and use my signature, don't you? Well, *that* is not committing forgery, and Toby hasn't either. Besides, the thing's done now. Nobody will be a penny the worse, and I shall be £5,000 richer. I suppose you know that if I did not meet Clairette's cheque to-day, something very unpleasant would happen to me. Just as unpleasant as will happen to you if you don't pay your bets."

"Frankie!"

"Oh, yes, you're very innocent my dear, and very young. All the same, you'll have to pay £800, and unless I can help you I don't know where you'll get it from. And I shan't help you if you are not sensible. Promise me not to say a word of what has happened to any living soul, or I'll turn you over to Mrs. Blount's tender mercies. It's quite possible she may prosecute you, and you might be found guilty of trying to obtain money under false pretences. You know you hadn't a penny when you made the bets. Are you going to promise?"

She stood before me fair and smiling in her rich dress and jewels. What could I do? I was tired, worn out with fatigue and worry, haunted by fears of what might happen to me, weighed down by the thoughts of my debts.

"You are sure Toby won't get into trouble, Frankie?"

"He can't, except through you."

"You'll be able to pay the moneylender?"

"Am I a fool, Cynthia? Of course I shall pay. Come, be sensible and promise."

And too weary to combat further I yielded and gave my word.

I went upstairs and flung

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Confessions of Cynthia.

NEW SERIES OF STORIES.

myself exhausted on the bed. For the first time life looked grey to me. I had no joy in to-day, nor in the thought of to-morrow. Alas, alas, why had I made those bets, the bets that had tied my hands and set a seal upon my tongue? What should I do? How would it all end?

I slept that morning until lunch-time, when Frankie came to see how I was feeling. She had just returned from a drive, and looked deliciously cool in white *crêpe de Chine*, with a great bunch of lilies in her hands.

"Poor child," she said sweetly, "you do look fagged. Cheer up, Cynthia, things are going well with us to-day. I've been to Nathan, and he cashed up at once. Infamous interest he's charged, of course, but any way I've got the five thou. I've paid in two to the bank to meet Clairette's cheque, and distributed the rest between hungry tradesmen and bookmakers. Still I saved enough to buy you this," and she threw a little packet on the bed. I opened it and found a necklace of gold beads exquisitely chased.

"I'm glad you're pleased," she said, "I want you to wear it to-night. I've just seen Lord Chesterton, he brought a note from the Duchess—he's a special favourite of hers—asking you to the ball to-night. Isn't that good news? You'll look sweet, Cynthia, and utterly rout Mrs. Curtis Blount. I've spoken to Clairette about your frock, and as a special favour she will get it done and send it along this afternoon. It is white chiffon over silk, with *motifs* of lace. Aren't you glad?"

"It's nice of the Duchess, Frankie, but——"

"Oh, I won't listen to objections, you're coming, there's an end of it."

"But, Frankie, what about my bets?"

My cousin paused.

"You must see Fluffy," she said, "as soon as possible. By the bye, Cynthia, when you left the convent, did not the sisters hand you over a packet that your father left in their charge. What was in it—letters?"

"No, mining shares, and a few legal papers."

Frankie nodded.

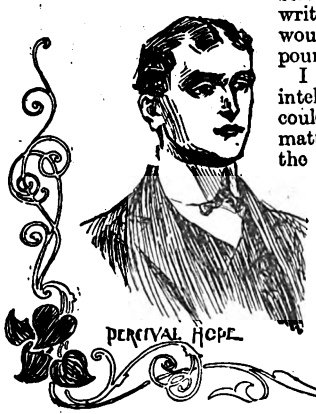
"You must take the shares to Fluffy and ask him to sell them for you."

"You really think they're worth money?"

"Maybe; anyway, Fluffy will tell you. Give me the papers and I'll send them to him at once by special messenger."

I was only too glad to do so. The mere thought that I might be able to pay that terrible eight hundred pounds was joy.

The messenger brought back an unexpected piece of news. Fluffy was leaving London for the Continent quite early the following morning, if possible he'd run up to Pont Street before he started. If not he'd write me. The shares he thought would sell for about a thousand pounds!



I was very delighted at the intelligence, though sorry I could not see him and get the matter settled that day. For the moment, however, I could not help thinking of the ball.

Frankie spared no pains nor expense with my frock. It was very lovely, all shimmering white, soft chiffon draperies caught here and there with bunches of white jasmine, costly lace, fine as a cobweb cunningly draped. I wore the gold beads at my throat, and in my hair was a spray o jasmine.

Frankie looked superb in a marvellous gown of jewelled lace over an underskirt of *eau de nil*; the pattern of the lace, water lilies with their broad flat leaves, was outlined with silk, filled in with pearls, brilliants and tiny emeralds. The jewels flashed at her every movement, opalescent, gleaming, like sunshine on a lake. It was the most magnificent, certainly the most costly gown worn at the ball.

Lady Gaveston, in mauve satin and Irish point, looked severe but unimpeachable. She condescended to express great approbation of my appearance, but warned me against "vanity" and other sins of the flesh.

"Percival Hope may be at the Duchess'," said Frankie to me in the brougham. "Be quite nice to him, Cynthia, just as if nothing had happened. By the bye, I'm going to ask Sir Gregory Stokes to help me about Jim—Ella's sweetheart. Sir Gregory is a general, you know, and a person of immense importance at the War Office. He can get the young man's discharge if he will."

"I'm sure I hope you'll persuade him, Frankie. I'm so sorry for Ella."

"So am I," said Frankie, with a little smile.

The scene at the Duchess of Warminster's was more wonderful than anything I could have imagined.

The great hall, with its marble staircase, brilliantly lit, glowed with colour. Masses of flowers, crimson, scarlet and gold, threw up the dazzling purity of the white marble, and up and down the broad, cool steps there came and went a procession, never ending, gorgeous beyond words. Stately women flashing with diamonds, brave in silk and satin, young girls fair and sweet as the lilies that they held. Princes from the Far East in garments rich in warmth and colour as the sun, purple and gold standing side by side with a grave, blackcoated Englishman, or a foreign diplomatist blazing with orders heavily jewelled.

Frankie made a sensation even in that assemblage. Something there was in the carriage of her head, in her slow, graceful movements, in the brilliance of her smile, that marked her out; she was distinctive and created an impression on the mind apart from that called up by other and perhaps more beautiful women.

The Duchess gave me a charming smile and said Lord Chesterton must take care of me. His Lordship immediately seized my programme and commandeered some half-dozen numbers. He waltzed to perfection. I never enjoyed myself so much.

We sat out in the conservatory for one dance, and I took the opportunity to explain that I was not wholly given over to betting. I didn't give Mrs. Blount away. I think it's mean of one woman to tell tales of another, but I fancy he gathered how matters stood.

"Promise me you won't bet any more—except for gloves," he said, taking my hand.

"Never," I answered fervently, and told him how worried I had been to get the eight hundred pounds.

"When I've sold the shares and got the money I don't know exactly how I am to pay the bookmakers. I suppose I'd better send it to Mrs. Blount?"

"I'll settle with them, if you like," he said.

"Thank you so much, Lord Chesterton. I shall have the money by to-morrow afternoon, if you wouldn't mind calling for it at Pont Street, I shall be very grateful."

He said something foolish but rather nice in reply, about the happiness it would give him to see me not only the next, but every day.

We didn't talk much after that, but sat and—thought.

Sir Gregory appeared at the beginning of the next dance, Frankie on his arm.

The distinguished general was entirely captivated. Rumour had it that Lady Gregory, though extremely virtuous, was somewhat acidulated; doubtless the contrast between Milady and Mrs. Norton depressed the gallant soldier, for he sighed heavily and looked sentimental.

I did not think it necessary to remain as a spectator of the interview, so suggested to Lord Chesterton that we should

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make a move. I can only surmise, therefore, as to what transpired between my cousin and the brave Sir Gregory. The conclusion of the matter, however, came under my notice. Frankie passed me on the staircase leaning on his arm.

"It is so good of you, Sir Gregory," she murmured. "You've taken such a weight off my mind. How glad my poor maid will be when I tell her that her sweetheart will get his discharge. How can I thank you?"

Sir Gregory did not reply in words. He gave a quick glance up and down the stairs; for the moment the coast was clear—I suppose I didn't count. Then, with a sudden movement he slipped his arm about my cousin's waist and kissed her!

When I and my partner regained the ballroom, Frankie was the centre of a group of admirers. It was during the first interval, and she was holding a sort of court.

I shall never forget her that evening.

Tall, stately, regal almost in her jewelled robe, she stood surrounded by men, clever, distinguished, notable throughout Europe.

It was the zenith of her triumph. I watched and almost held my breath. Suddenly she turned to a dark, clever-looking man at her right. He was a very celebrated person indeed, and remarkable as much for his dislike of woman as for his talents. It was, therefore, a distinct tribute to my cousin's fascinations that he should single her out for his attentions.

Fêted, flattered, and caressed she must indeed have felt triumphant. All thoughts of past unhappiness must, I thought, have left her; there could be no shadows in the past dark enough to cloud the present. Nothing could stop her now. Those years in Jamaica—a reference to which always called up a look of apprehension in Frankie's face—must seem to her a dream. There could be nothing in that far-off time that could touch her now—the guest of the most exclusive lady in England.

Suddenly her face grew white, a look curiously like fear crept into her eyes. She clutched my arm and her limbs trembled. I followed her gaze, travelling down the ball-room, radiant with light and life, resplendent with every sign of wealth and taste—and she the centre of it all. I followed her gaze right to the end of the vast room, and there in a doorway stood two men—Percival Hope and another.

That other was a mean and sordid-looking man, yellow skinned, with a furtive expression in his eyes. He was strangely out of place by Percival's side, resting his hand on Percival's arm. What could so mean a creature have to do with the beautiful woman who turned sick and faint at sight of him?

The man was speaking now, pointing with a lean finger towards Frankie. He leant forward, and in a clear, piercing voice called out:

"Yes, it is she, I swear it."

And at the words and gesture my cousin quailed. She drew a deep, hard breath and seemed to gasp for air. Quickly the crowd round her dispersed, one ran for water, another for this remedy and that.

My cousin did not seem to heed them. She leant against me heavily.

"After all these years," she gasped, "to come *now, now*."

"What is it?" I inquired. "Oh, tell me what it is!"

"He is from Jamaica," she said in a low, hoarse voice, "and he knows all!"

(*A most exciting instalment is published next Tuesday.*)

POET: "Whatever does this mean? My publisher sends me a bill for a new waste-paper basket!"

MOTHER (to suitor): "No, I can never give you my daughter. I have quite made up my mind." Suitor: "Then I'm doubly disappointed. I vowed that I would have a lovely wife and a young looking mother-in-law." Mother: "Well—or—you may call again. I may change my mind."

Your Editor Chats.

THE editor of a popular fiction paper like SHORT STORIES has opportunities of coming in contact with very queer specimens of humanity, either personally, or through the post. Scarcely a week elapses but that I receive a call from some extraordinary individual who is under the impression that he, or she, is a sort of Charles Dickens or Charlotte Brontë, who has never yet had opportunities of getting their true merit appreciated.

A WOULD-BE NOVELIST.

I am one of the first to encourage young and promising writers of fiction, and to give such advice as lies in my power to bring out their best points, but I like modesty even in a story-writer. I am, therefore, highly amused when I get a letter from a youth from which I make the following extract:

"Of course, I don't suppose you will be able to fully appreciate the merits of my story, because, you see, your standard of merit is so infinitely below that of my own. I sometimes look over your paper, SHORT STORIES, and I think it is very good of its kind, but I think that you ought to insert more fiction of the nature of the inclosed."

"The inclosed," my dear readers, was entitled "Julius Cæsar," and was the story of the life of Julius Cæsar obviously written in the form of an essay after the writer had read Shakespeare's play!

A GENEROUS OFFER.

Another young writer, this time a girl, in inclosing me a story which would occupy a whole issue of SHORT STORIES, all about nothing at all (and very badly written at that), tells me that I can have this story for nothing if I will send her six copies of the paper in which it appears, for which she is willing to pay. I am sorry to say I was unable to accept her generous offer.

But, seriously, I know that there must be amongst the readers of SHORT STORIES a large number of girls and young men who are quite capable of turning out a good story, and next week I shall have a chat with you about the best method of getting to work.

WOULD YOU WIN A SILVER PENCIL-CASE?

This week I am offering one of our now famous solid silver pencil-cases to the reader who sends me the longest list of words of six letters and upwards which also form a word when spelt backwards, thus "drawer" when spelt backwards is "reward." Lists must be written on the backs of postcards only, which must be marked "Reverse," addressed to the Competition Editor, SHORT STORIES, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C. The competition closes after the first post on Tuesday morning, August 12th. Ten consolation gifts of rolled gold charms and rolled gold hearts will be sent to those competitors whose lists come next in order of merit.

RESULT OF THE "THREE WORDS" COMPETITION.

The first prize of a handsome barbaric guard for this competition goes to J. Jones, 5, Worcester Place, Swansea, while the ten consolation gifts of rolled gold hearts and rolled gold charms go to the following: Miss B. Gush, Cruwys Morchard, Tiverton, Devon; F. Beadnell, 282, Stanhope Road, Tyne Dock, South Shields; A. Isted, 3, Caxton Villas, Gordon Hill, Enfield; J. Ramsden, Wallwark Terrace, The Hague, Stalybridge; D. Ferguson, 13, Anfield Row, Dundee; Miss M. H. Ingles, Westberry Stores, Westberry Avenue, Wood Green; J. R. Morris, 27, Richmond Road, Oxford; C. J. Long, 49, Walsingham Road, Colchester; A. Reoch, 123, Victoria Road, Dundee; J. Gluck, 23, Southwold Road, Upper Clapton, N.E.

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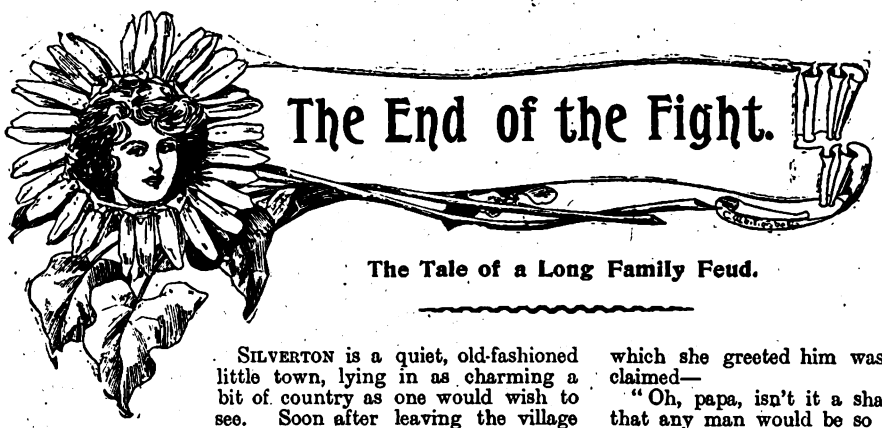

The End of the Fight.

The Tale of a Long Family Feud.

Silverton is a quiet, old-fashioned little town, lying in as charming a bit of country as one would wish to see. Soon after leaving the village the road towards the south passes an old stone house, which has been standing there for ages, and still looks strong enough to be the future home of generations yet unborn.

About and beyond it lie broad fields of grain, growing yellow under the August sunshine, and acres of corn rustling in the summer breeze.

And all this is the property of one fortunate man. Standing upon the broad balcony of the old stone house, he can look towards the east and towards the west, and call it his own almost as far as he can see.

But some years ago the farm had two owners, and Richard Dean, who lived in the stone house, and John Marshall, who owned the land opposite to it on the other side of the road, were no friends. There had been some ancient quarrel about landmarks, the families had nursed their enmity, and transmitted it from father to son along with the family acres.

There had been Deans and Marshalls in Silverton almost from the time when the town first had a name; but they were from widely different walks in life. The first of the Deans was a wealthy Londoner, who, in travelling through the country, was charmed with the natural beauty of the place, bought a large tract of land there, and built the stone house of this story.

The first of the Marshalls came into Silverton with all his worldly goods in the bundle which he carried under his arm, and the bundle was not heavy. He came as ordinary farm hand to one of the farmers in the neighbourhood. After a year's service he married the farmer's daughter, who, being an only child, in process of time dutifully inherited her father's acres, and handed them over to her lucky lord.

Since those days there had been some great changes. None of the Deans had ever added to their original inheritance, and one of the family had so crippled his resources by extravagance that it became necessary for him to sell a portion of his estate.

The Marshalls, from father to son, had ever been a frugal set, and the grandfather of John Marshall was, by this time, able to buy the land his fast-living neighbour was forced to part with. It was from a dispute as to landmarks, arising from this sale, that the quarrel which we have mentioned sprung. The case was carried to law; the Deans came off victorious, and the Marshalls never forgave it.

Moreover, it was rumoured, that when Richard Dean of this story married the beautiful daughter of the old Silverton clergyman, it touched John Marshall very nearly; so that between the old wound to the pocket and the wound to the affections, the family quarrel seemed in no way likely to die out.

It reached its climax when the two farmers, who belonged to opposite parties in politics, became rival Parliamentary candidates. John Marshall was beaten, and choosing to consider his defeat as a direct personal injury inflicted by his neighbour, vowed that he would be even with him. And Richard Dean, when he came home at the close of his session, found that this had been no idle threat.

Across the road, directly in front of his house, loomed up before him the frame of a huge barn. Workmen were busy plying their noisy hammers, loose timbers were scattered about, great heaps of boards lay piled up here and there ready for use, and all the dirt and rubbish of building defaced the once beautiful meadow.

Mr. Dean stood aghast, and could scarcely believe his eyes. His pretty daughter tripped out upon the balcony to meet him; but almost before the kiss with which she greeted him was off her pouting lips, she exclaimed—

"Oh, papa, isn't it a shame? Could you have believed that any man would be so mean? Is there nothing to be done? Must we have that horrid barn always before our eyes?"

Yes, the barn was there, and stayed. Mr. Dean found himself powerless. In the eye of the law the barn could not be made to appear a nuisance, whatever it might be to the dwellers in the stone house. So there was nothing to be done but to pocket their wrath, and, if possible, to possess their souls in patience, while the monster grew day by day, until at last it stood complete in its ugliness, cutting off the view of the beautiful hills and the pretty pond which nestled at their feet, hiding the big knoll, where a group of gigantic trees kept watch and ward over the meadows below them, and shutting out even the sunset.

The acme of ugliness was reached, and the disappointed farmer's revenge must have been fully satisfied when the building had been painted the brightest, tawdriest yellow that ever disgraced a paint-pot, and "Marshall's barn" had become a byword in the neighbourhood.

"'What can't be cured must be endured,'" Mr. Dean remarked to his daughter, by way of saying something both original and comforting.

But Miss Alice had no idea of sitting down patiently to endure, when, though a cure was not to be hoped for, matters might at least be mended. The mountain would not move for Mahomet, and the barn was not likely to be more accommodating; but something might, perhaps, be done in the way of hiding it. And Alice was to be seen daily on the lawn, busily at work with her own hands, and superintending the labours of others. Hitherto the balcony had been left entirely open, with nothing to intercept the beautiful view; but now creepers began to climb there, seeming to vie with each other in hastening upward with their delicate, leafy wall, and hanging baskets with tall plants and long streamers of luxuriant ivy did what they could in the common cause. Here and there screens of lattice-work were set up, where, one of these days, roses would bloom, and a hawthorn hedge was planted, and coaxed with every cunning device for speedy growth.

All this did very well while summer lasted; but when the autumn winds and frost had laid bare every tree and shrub, stripped the leaves from the creepers, and carried destruction among the flower-baskets, then the barn stood forth again in its nakedness, a great yellow blot upon the landscape. In fact, as they looked out of the balcony windows of the stone house, it seemed to be the only thing that was seen.

Mr. Dean tried to take the infliction philosophically, since there was no remedy for it, and succeeded in putting it out of his mind about as well as people generally do when a thing is constantly in sight. But Alice, who was a lady of some spirit, was at no pains either to lessen or conceal her indignation.

It was during the winter which followed the building of the barn that young Marshall, as he was called, returned from Germany. John Marshall had bestowed upon his only son

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every opportunity for that extended intelligence and culture which those of his name had hitherto considered of little value compared with the accumulation of land and money. "There is money enough," he said, "and John shall have what he wants, provided he does not squander it."

Sole heir to the Marshall farm, which had grown to be the largest in the county, good-looking, frank, and jovial, and with an ease and grace of manner conferred by three years of foreign travel, he speedily became the lion of Silverton. At the village parties and social gatherings all united to welcome and do him honour, with one exception. A haughty bow was the only acknowledgment that Alice Dean would vouchsafe his presence. She could not be brought to include herself in any conversation in which he took part, and her cool withdrawal from a group which he chanced to join would often place their mutual friends in embarrassing positions. Her father, having noticed this on one occasion when they had been out together, remonstrated with her on their return home, mildly suggesting that she should endeavour to keep her angry feelings a little more out of sight.

"This young man is not to blame for his father's conduct, you know," he continued.

"Of course not," said Alice, "but he's his father's son. No," she added, after a moment's silence, "it's of no use trying. I can never be civil to a Marshall, with that hideous yellow barn staring me in the face,"

Five minutes later, Mr. Dean, who had taken up and was looking over his newspaper, laid it down in a hurry, as Alice remarked, in a slow, deliberate way, as though she had at last made up her mind—

"Papa, that barn will be the ruin of my temper. I am going to set fire to it!"

Mr. Dean glanced about the room, half afraid that they were not alone, before he replied—

"My child, that may be a pleasant little joke of yours, but it is lucky that there was no one to hear it but myself."

"It's no joke at all, papa. I am quite serious. I have been thinking about it for some time, and I mean to do it."

Mr. Dean took off his eyeglasses, and looked attentively at his daughter.

"Upon my word, I believe the child has some such intention," he said to himself. To her he said—

"It is your opinion, then, that you have a right to make away with your neighbour's property whenever your pleasure is not consulted in its situation?"

"It is my opinion," said Alice, with the confident logic of eighteen years, "that my neighbour has no right to set up an abominable nuisance under my very nose. And if he can't be made to remove it, I think I should be justified in getting rid of it in the easiest way possible."

"And you think also, upon mature consideration," said Mr. Dean, "that you would prefer the view of four walls of a prison for the next ten or fifteen years, to that of your neighbour's barn?"

"Is that the punishment for arson?"

"It is."

"Oh, but I should not be caught. I have several plans, any one of which is quite safe."

"But, unfortunately, you have a witness of your intentions," said Mr. Dean quite seriously.

"No one but you, and, of course, you wouldn't testify against me."

"Indeed, I should," returned Mr. Dean, with the air of a stern, impartial judge.

"Oh, papa, I won't believe it!"

And Alice took a seat upon her father's knee.

"Yes," said the inexorable father, "I mean it. If you burn Mr. Marshall's barn, I shall tell all I know about the matter."

"And send me to prison?"

"To be sure. I would be sorry, of course, as it would deprive me of a valuable housekeeper. Nevertheless, I should feel bound to do it."

And Mr. Dean, looking into the large blue eyes which gazed at his with such a serious expression, seemed half in earnest.

"Come, come, Alice," he exclaimed, at length. "It is high time for us to put a stop to such talk as this; and, what is more, you must promise me not to harbour such dangerous notions in that busy brain of yours."

"I can't promise. It is impossible to control one's thoughts," returned Alice, with a shake of the head that was comically serious.

"Very well," said Mr. Dean; "then I must keep you where you will be in no danger of doing mischief."

Here the pretty incendiary burst into her usual merry laugh, kissed her father, bade him good-night, and went to her room, coming back to say:

"I won't burn the barn to-night, papa, so you can rest in peace."

It was late in July, and the day had been very warm; one of those sultry days which come unexpectedly, and, taking us unawares, half prostrate us with their sudden heat. Clouds had been threatening all the evening, great masses which seemed to gather blackness as they rolled westward, and at midnight low growls of thunder began to break the stillness, and the big drops of rain to patter noiselessly against the window-pane.

Alice awoke, and lay watching the vivid flashes which now and then lighted up her room and left it in blacker darkness than before, when suddenly there came a sharp, deafening crash, then peal after peal of thunder, which seemed to shake the old house to its very foundations, and to shiver and vibrate through its every inch of mortar and stone.

Alice buried her head among the bedclothes, and lay quaking with fear and half-benumbed by the shock. When she at last ventured to uncover her head and look out from her retreat, the room was all aglow, every object in it as plainly seen as at noonday. It could not be the lightning, for it remained steady and uninterrupted, each moment growing brighter and brighter. Jumping from the bed, she rushed to the window, and saw a sight which chained her to the spot, forgetful of everything but what was before her.

The barn was in flames!

The lightning had struck it and set fire to its contents. Tons upon tons of hay were burning fiercely. Their dry masses, kindled into a huge red mountain of roaring, leaping flames, shone luridly upon the black sky, and glared over the country for miles around.

In the weird, fitful beauty of the scene, Alice was for the time totally unmindful that it was of any direct, personal interest to her; but when it suddenly occurred to her what it was, she flew to her father's room, half wild with excitement and delight.

Mr. Dean's room was on the opposite side of the house, and he had seen no signs of the fire. Being a sound sleeper, the thunder had only partially disturbed him, so that he was no more than half awake, when Alice came bouncing to his bedside, exclaiming:

"Oh, papa, papa! The barn is burning! But I didn't do it!"

"Alice, are you crazy?" said Mr. Dean, as by the dim light of the night-light he saw her whirling about the room, performing a rapturous *pas seul*, and looking, in her long white gown, like a very frisky goat.

There was no more sleep that night for the family in the stone house; and when morning broke, cloudless and beautiful after the storm, there lay the untarnished landscape spread out before them in all its old familiar beauty, and Marshall's barn a heap of ruins at their feet.

For one short week Mr. Dean and his daughter rejoiced over this unlooked-for deliverance. They blessed the storm, and congratulated themselves morning, noon, and night, as they gazed upon the unbroken prospect which had never seemed half so charming before. Then there began to be a stir among the few charred and blackened timbers which the fire had spared—fresh ones were deposited beside them, load after load of building materials arrived, and, to their utter dismay, they learnt that the barn was to be rebuilt. Mr. Dean remonstrated to no purpose, and friendly neigh-

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bours vainly tried their persuasions on the obstinate old man. Young Marshall, who was deeply mortified and grieved at his father's course, exerted all the eloquence which he possessed to prevent the carrying out of this malicious design; but the only reply which he received was: "See here, my boy, you come and go as you choose, and I interfere with none of your plans. You act your pleasure, and I shall act mine."

So the work went on with all possible speed, and the raising day was at hand. A crowd had gathered, as was usual on such occasions in the country. The huge frame was being slowly hoisted to its place, with shouts and cheers and heave-aways, when some part of the structure suddenly gave way, and timber after timber came tumbling to the ground. Two or three men received ugly knocks and hard bruises, but all escaped without serious injury, with one exception. John Marshall lay upon the ground under a heavy timber, with a broken arm, and a stream of blood flowing from a wound in his head, cut by a sharp stone, upon which he had struck in falling.

He was taken up insensible, and laid upon the grass; water was dashed in his face to revive him, and his head bound up in handkerchiefs to stop the flow of blood. A doctor was quickly brought to the spot, sewed up the wound, and bandaged the disabled arm.

"What is to be done with him?" he asked, with a grave face, as he concluded the operation. "To move him any distance in his present condition would surely prove fatal."

"Bring him into my house, and we will do the best we can for him," said Mr. Dean, who came out on hearing of the accident.

So the unconscious man was carried in and placed upon a bed; and there he lay for many a long day, prostrate and helpless in the house of him whom he had hated and injured. His son had been sent for, but the messenger was long in finding him. When he arrived the crowd had dispersed, and Mr. Dean was standing by the bedside of his father, while Alice was bathing the invalid's head, and striving to keep it cool with applications of ice.

"Mr. Dean," said the young man, after gazing silently for some minutes at his father, who was still in a state of stupor, "I should in any case be extremely sorry for such an intrusion as this; but, under the circumstances, I feel that it is truly unpardonable. I will have my poor father removed to-night, if it is possible."

"You must not think of such a thing," Mr. Dean replied warmly. "The doctor has expressly forbidden it. You must take care of your father here, and in doing so I trust you will spare yourself all uneasiness as to intrusion."

"Good Heavens! Are we to thrust ourselves upon you in this way?" exclaimed young Marshall, half-beside himself with anxiety for his father's safety, and mortification at the embarrassing position in which he found himself. "I beg pardon, sir, but your generosity makes me feel more painfully than ever that all claim to it has been forfeited. I can only assure you that even you yourself cannot have regretted the cause of trouble more than I have done."

"I believe you!" said Mr. Dean cordially, much affected by his impulsive expression of feeling. He extended his hand, which Marshall received gratefully, while Alice, who had melted at the first signal of distress, wished from the bottom of her heart that she had treated the young man with more consideration. Her blue eyes were swimming when he said to her: "Pray let me relieve you, Miss Dean; I fear you have tired yourself already."

Weeks had passed before John Marshall became fully conscious of his situation. Fever set in, and he grew delirious; and when at last the delirium passed away, he fell into a stupor, which seemed almost more hopeless than his former state. He had been lying for a long time with scarcely a sign of life about him, except the feeble fluttering of his pulse, when his son, who had watched over him night and day, saw him slowly open his eyes and gaze with a look of faint wonder about the room. He was too weak to speak; but when days had elapsed, and he had gained sufficient strength, he asked no questions. The barn, or rather its skeleton, which remained as it had been left on the day of the accident, was in plain sight from a window near his bed; and he would lie hour after hour gazing at it, silently closing his eyes at any attempt at conversation, and scarcely giving an answer to the few questions which were put to him.

Young Marshall was sitting one day sadly wondering what were the thoughts over which he seemed brooding, when the sick man turned slowly in his bed, and, in a quiet way, as though it were no uncommon request that he was about to make, said to his son:

"John, I should like to have you see that everything belonging to that barn over there is carried off, and the place cleared up. Do it as soon as possible—will you?"

"Certainly, father, if you wish it," his son remarked, not knowing whether to be most astonished or rejoiced.

"Perhaps you can attend to it now," said Mr. Marshall. "I do not need you. I think I shall go to sleep." And he closed his eyes as if he wished nothing more to be said.

Young Marshall was not slow in executing his father's wishes, and two days had not passed before all traces of the barn had disappeared. A few days more, and Mr. Marshall signified his intention of going home, firmly resisting all persuasions to the contrary.

"I shall leave here to-day," he said to his son. "And when I am ready to go, John, I should like to see Mr. Dean and his daughter. Ask them to meet me on the balcony."

So, leaning upon his son, a weak, broken-down man, he tottered across the threshold over which he had been carried two months before. Sinking into an arm-chair, which Mr. Dean made ready for him, while Alice softly arranged the pillows about him, he said, in a voice shaken with weakness and emotion:

"Richard Dean, I never thought I should have to thank you for anything; but I have been brought to it. You and I were never the best of friends, and a year ago I swore to do you harm as long as I lived. But the Almighty set his face against me. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord, and He kept his word. He has repaid me for all I have done. This thing has made an old man of me, and there's no telling now how long I shall last. I want to make my peace with you, Richard, and your family, and to live as friends for the rest of my days, if you will let bygones be bygones."

"With all my heart," said Mr. Dean, grasping in both his own the thin white hand held out to him. "We shall have you a hale, hearty old man yet, and we shall begin anew; and from this day henceforth Marshalls and Deans shall dwell together in unity."

"That's just what Alice has promised me," said young Marshall, twining his arm about the young blue-eyed girl by his side, all tears and smiles and blushes, while the two fathers gazed—one with astonishment, which soon changed to gladness, and the other with a satisfied look in his eyes, which had long seen what was going on between the young people.

Meanwhile the sun went down upon a group the like of which was never seen in Silvertown.

The lovers have long been happily married, and an orchard of apple trees is now growing where once stood "Marshall's barn."

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POST THIS COPY TO A FRIEND!

THE GREAT "PASS-IT-ALONG" SCHEME.

First Award, £10. Second Award, £5. Third Award, £2. Six Awards of 10s. each.

(A)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMPETITOR WHO SENDS THIS COPY.

When you have carefully read these rules, put an ink line round the instructions in the next column, write your name and address in the space at the foot of this page*, and in the next column; wrap up this copy of SHORT STORIES in a wrapper, fix a penny stamp on it, and post it to a friend of yours whom you think will help you. Then wait until the copy is returned to you.

All you need do is to send out your copy or copies of SHORT STORIES and wait until they come back to you with the names filled in.

The first prize will be awarded to the person whose copies of SHORT STORIES contain the greatest number of names of people to whom the copies have been sent, provided that the wrappers which carried the copies of SHORT STORIES through the post to each person accompany the list.

It is not necessary for you to know the people whose names you will find on your list when your copy comes back; they will, of course, be the friends of your friends.

There is no absolute necessity to write a letter to your friend explaining the scheme, but if you did so it would carry more weight.

HOW TO SEND IN.

Keep the wrappers as they are sent to you, and when this copy comes back send all the wrappers, together with this copy, to the Editor of "Short Stories," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "PASS-IT-ALONG," to arrive not later than Thursday, August 21st.

NOTE.—Competitors may send out at the same time any number of copies of this issue.

The Editor's decision is final, and readers may enter only on this understanding.

(B)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE WHO RECEIVE THIS COPY BY POST.

This copy of SHORT STORIES has been sent to you by a friend who is interested in this competition and who wants to win one of the prizes offered. When you have read this announcement write your name down in the space provided, and then forward this copy *at once* in a penny wrapper to a friend of yours. If you have no friend to whom you can send it, return the copy of the paper, *together with the wrapper in which you received it*, to the original sender.

If the original sender of this paper (whose name and address is written at the foot of this page) wins the first prize, *you* will also receive a prize. The paper must be returned to the original sender on or before Saturday, August 16th.

You must at once return the wrapper in which this copy reaches you to _____

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IMPORTANT.

Fill in your name at once and post it on the day this is received. If you keep it longer it will lessen the chance of the original sender securing the first prize, as the paper will not be able to get into so many hands within the time limit.

If you receive this copy on Saturday, August 16th, fill up your name and post it at once to the sender, whose name appears at the foot of this page.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO COMPETITORS IN SECOND COMPETITION.

The condition under which every signer of the coupons of the 1st and 2nd winners will receive a money prize is altered to read as follows:

"If the original sender of this paper (whose name and address is written at the foot of this page) wins the first prize, you will receive a pretty gift.

The line on right side of coupon will also be altered accordingly. The competition closes on Thursday, August 7th.

This offer will be repeated in SHORT STORIES for August 23rd (the next number but one), when another £20 will be offered in awards.

Those to whom this copy is sent sign here.

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Those who sign here will get a prize each if this wins first award.

*Name and Address of Competitor.....

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The Retort Crushing.

Lord Tuffnutt: "You have nothing to grumble at whatever; you were a rich American girl, I an impoverished English nobleman, with a proud title. You bought me with your wealth. I was what you would simply call in shopping, a bargain!" Lady Tuffnutt: "Pardon me! Not a bargain—a remnant."

Same Thing.

She: "Did you ever play football?" He (watching the game): "No; but I once got caught in a drove of stampeded oxen."

Might Have Been Said Differently.

She: "You say that my consenting to marry you has made you very happy?" He: "Yes. You see what a simple thing it takes to make me happy."

Fruitful Soil.

"I've noticed one thing about widow's weeds," said his reverence. "What's that?" asked his worship. "They rarely interfere with the growth of orange blossoms on the same soil."

Didn't Appreciate Music.

"I'm sorry you don't like the new nurse," she said to her husband. "She is so good about singing to baby and keeping him quiet." "Yes," was the calm reply, "but I'd rather hear the baby cry!"

Still Worse.

Penelope: "I suppose he broke your heart eventually?" Perdita: "Far worse" Penelope: "You don't mean to say he broke the engagement?" Perdita: "No. He played nap with papa and broke him."

Very Precious.

What more precious offering can be laid upon the altar of a man's heart than the first love of a pure, earnest, and affectionate girl, with an undivided interest in eight corner plots and fourteen three-storey houses?

His Expectations.

Angelina: "What did you tell papa about your prospects?" Edwin: "I said had expectations from my uncle." Angelina: "Why, Edwin, you told me you had no relatives at all." Edwin: "Oh, yes, but I'm going to pawn my watch this evening."

Poor Human Nature.

"Women dress very ridiculously," he said, as he watched his wife finishing her toilet. "It is the fashion, John," she said, pleasantly. "Fashion be hanged!" said he. "I would be superior to fashion if I were a woman, and wear nothing not useful." Five minutes later he asked her to sew a button on the back of his coat.

All Over.

Lady Belle: "I should think that he would propose soon?" Miss Grahame: "Oh, no; it's all over! He never really meant anything." Lady Belle: "Why, have you quarrelled?" Miss Grahame: "No, but yesterday he gave me a box—such a lot—of stationery!" Lady Belle: "But presents are always promising." Miss Grahame: "But my initials are on it; and such a lot! Oh, no! It's all over between us!"

Self Condemned.

Teacher (to scholar): "What are you laughing at? Not at me?" Scholar: "Oh, no, sir!" Teacher: "Then what else is there in the room to laugh at?"

Before and After.

"What's this card in your pocket, John?" asked his wife. "That? Oh, before I went to lunch that was a bill of fare. Now it is my table of contents."

So He Ought.

Figg: "What a peculiar man Dunder is. He has a sovereign contempt for anybody who doesn't know as much as he does." Fogg: "I should think he would."

Nurses' Elysium.

First Nurse-girl: "So you've got a new place?" Second Nurse-girl: "Yes." "Do you like it?" "Like it? Why, it is right in front of a police-station!"

Unselfish.

Waiter (to farmer visiting London who has been dining in a restaurant): "Anything, sir, for the waiter, sir?" Farmer (looking at his plate): "Oh, yes. Take all there's left; I've finished."

Too Large-Hearted.

Brother: "And you rejected him?" Sister: "I did." "He has the reputation of being a large-hearted man." "That's the trouble with him; he is too large-hearted. He can love half-a-dozen women at the same time."

Photographic.

Dolley: "Well, old fellow, I asked Miss Amy last night to marry me, and she declined." Goslin: "Did she deliberate as though hesitating to pain you?" "No, she produced her negative by the instantaneous process."

Gets Ready the Evidence.

A judge of much experience says: "I never had a breach of promise case before me in which the mother of the girl didn't know more about it than her daughter. She always suspects the fellow is a rascal, and gets ready for him."

A Pleasing Gift.

He: "Have you decided what to give your old aunt for a birthday present?" She: "No; but now I come to think of it, the poor old maid has had very little pleasure all her life; you might just write her an anonymous love-letter."

An Anchor to Windward.

Agnes: "What is troubling you so, love?" George: "I was thinking that if you declined me when I proposed to-night whether I should accept the heiress who is so anxious to marry me." Agnes: "Why, George, you know I love you."

What is Milk?

They were in the country for the summer, and the little daughter had been shown all the farming processes. Two or three nights ago she pushed away her bowl, declaring that she did not care to feed any longer upon milk. "But, my dear," said mother, "why not?" "Because," said the precocious child, with a conscious air of superiority, "I know all about it. Milk is only chewed grass."

A Sure Sign.

Anxious Mother: "My dear, I'm afraid William is getting into bad company. He is out late every night." Observing Father: "Oh, he's all right. He goes to see some girl or other. Shouldn't wonder if he'd announce his engagement soon." "He hasn't said a word about any young lady." "No; but he's keeping company with one all the same. His right wrist is covered with pin scratches."

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THE GIRL AT NUMBER NINE.

A Pathetic Narrative of a Lovers' Quarrel.

SHE was neither picturesque nor romantic; and in the suburban parish where she lived there were probably a hundred girls prettier than she. But a bright, unselfish nature will make even a plain face attractive; and there were times when you would have said that little Nellie Graham was more than comely.

Each week-day morning, punctually at a quarter to eight, you might see her setting off for a two-mile walk to the Board School in Hirst Street, where, as head teacher, she received a salary which enabled her to provide for the wants of the household.

Of a sunny disposition she always endeavoured to look on the bright side of things. But the dark side would persist in showing itself, especially when, as it often happened, her father—a confirmed beer-drinker—with foul oaths would demand money from her; while her mother—a confirmed invalid—would signal to her from the horse-hair couch to obey him.

At length, however, the time came when even her darkest days had a gleam of sunshine. Love, entering her life, had glorified it.

Her sweetheart's name was Marston. He was a draughtsman at Cranston's big works; and, with a salary of £140 per annum, had dreams of future greatness.

To most people he was an ordinary young man, with a fair amount of good looks; but to Nellie he was a hero, and well-nigh as handsome as Apollo Belvedere.

* * * * *

"First love is a pretty romance,
But not half so sweet as 'tis reckoned;
And when one awakes from the trance,
There's a vast deal of love in the second."

Such was Tom Marston's belief. He was three-and-twenty, when a certain bright-eyed, golden-haired damsel jilted him. Possibly she had a good reason for so doing. At all events, Tom considered himself ill-used, and for a time was an avowed cynic. And then he met Nellie Graham.

Twelve months had now elapsed since the day of their engagement; and so far he saw no reason to doubt his sweetheart's fidelity.

His was not a big nature; he was not of the stuff of which heroes are made; but probably the strongest affection of which he was capable was given to Nellie Graham.

But the course of true love, hitherto running smoothly, received a sudden check. In this wise. Having been informed by his chief that his salary would shortly be substantially increased, Tom on leaving the office went straight to town and there invested eighteen-and-sixpence in a present for his sweetheart, to be given to her upon her birthday. And that same evening, well pleased with himself and the world, he set off for 9, Ventnor Road. Nellie was not at home, and the news momentarily damped his spirits. Would she be long away? Mrs. Graham could not say; and so Tom sat down, and chatting with the old lady, waited eagerly for the sound of his sweetheart's footstep in the hallway. But he waited in vain, and at length he took his departure.

By this time his high spirits had completely evaporated. "I wonder where she has gone?" he said to himself. "She might have told her mother. Bother it! she has spoilt the whole evening."

The twilight was deepening; but Tom's eyes were keen, and presently he saw Nellie's trim little figure on the opposite pavement. She was walking quickly, her gaze straight in front of her, and not until she heard his voice was she aware of her sweetheart's presence.

His greeting was anything but lover-like—nine women out of ten would assuredly have resented it. "Where have you been?" he said, a note of irritation in his voice.

"I—I have been," she began falteringly, and then stopped, her head averted, her eyes upon the ground.

Instantly the demon of jealousy awoke within him. "You've been walking with someone," he exclaimed hoarsely. "Who was it? Some man, I suppose!"

With that she raised her head, and looking straight into his eyes: "Yes," she said firmly, almost, it seemed to him defiantly, "it was a man, and I have been walking with him for an hour or more."

For a moment he was dumfounded. Then, "Oh, indeed!" he said, striving to control his voice. "I—we'll talk about it later on—perhaps. Good evening!" And off he swung, chin in air, twirling his cane between his fingers.

* * * * *

That evening, and the day following, Tom sulked like a spoilt child. Nellie must be taught a lesson! His wounded self-esteem demanded as much. But it was far from his thoughts to allow this parting to be final. For hers was the stronger nature (in his heart of hearts he knew it); she was his wise little counsellor, and without her he would assuredly drift on life's voyage, like a barque that has lost its steering gear.

He did not doubt he had a rival. Probably the fellow was good-looking and glib-tongued; and so Nellie, woman-like, was flattered by his attentions. But her heart—ah, *that* belonged entirely to him, Tom Marston! And he did not intend to lose it! But Nellie, he repeated, must be taught a lesson. She would be expecting him to call to-day or to-morrow or the day following; and then she would write, begging him to come and see her.

But as the days went by (the longest four he had ever known) without bringing the looked-for letter, Tom became decidedly unhappy. To stay in his room was unbearable; to seek his friends in his present frame of mind was not to be thought of; and so, eager for distraction, he walked into the city, and turning into a music-hall, booked a seat in the stalls.

The curtain rose; and as "turn" succeeded "turn," it is probable that in all that vast audience the one implacably severe critic was Tom Marston. Nothing pleased him. The comic songs lacked humour, the sentimental possessed a distinct tendency to pathos, the acrobatic feats were devoid of originality; even Stella May, the "star" of the evening, radiant, outshining all her predecessors, failed to awaken his interest

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On the following day, his pride was perilously near capitulation. Yes, he would see Nellie—perhaps this very evening—and if her explanation of her conduct should prove satisfactory, all might yet be well!

He had changed his collar, and was adjusting a neat brand-new necktie, when he heard the whirring of the electric bell. The postman! His heart beat faster at the thought; and, full of eager expectancy, he hurried to the front door.

"*Chronicle*, sir?"

With a sense of keen disappointment Tom took the local weekly newspaper from the newsboy, and re-entering his sitting-room, sat down, and mechanically opened the sheet.

For a moment or two he glanced indifferently across the columns, and then, suddenly, his eye caught the following paragraph.

"Heroism of a Handsworth Lady."

"Yesterday evening a horse, standing between the shafts of a trap in Claremont Avenue, took fright at a passing steam-roller, and suddenly bolted. A little boy who happened to be playing in the road at the time was in imminent danger of being run over, when a young lady (Miss Ellen Graham of Ventnor Road) seeing his peril, ran into the roadway and rescued him. Miss Graham, we regret to state, was knocked over, the wheel passing over her body, and now lies at her home in a precarious condition."

In a flash a numbness fell upon his brain. This, however, lasted but a moment, and was followed by a curious sense of unreality; and for a space he sat staring at the paragraph, his face the colour of cigar ash. "Miss Ellen Graham." It was a mistake! It could not be *his* Nellie, his little girl! She, who was so healthy and strong when he last saw her, to be suddenly struck down! To be lying on a bed of pain! The troubled current of his thoughts came to an abrupt standstill. Snatching his cap from the table he rushed from the house; and never before did he cover a mile so quickly as the one which lay between his lodgings and Ventnor Road.

The door was opened by a tall, good-looking man of thirty or thereabouts, whose deeply-tanned complexion seemed indicative of a recent residence in a tropical climate.

Straightway Tom panted out the question nearest his heart. The reply to which ("Better, much better") acted upon him like news of a reprieve upon a man awaiting execution.

"You are Tom Marston, I suppose? . . . I thought so. I am Ned Graham—Nell's brother. Will you come inside?"

* * * * *

Ten minutes later Tom was standing by the bedside. They were alone.

"I knew you would come," she whispered, her eyes lighting up with a smile of gladness.

A hard lump suddenly sprang into Tom's throat. It came to him that the shadow of death was on her face, and with a broken cry he sank down by the bedside. "Nell! Nell!" he cried, "can you ever forgive me? My God! what a heartless brute——"

"Hush, dear," she said soothingly; and, stretching out her hand she laid it caressingly upon his head. "It was my fault—mine. I could have explained; but I didn't. I let you go, and I made you unhappy. My brother Ned," she continued, her voice growing stronger, "wrote me a letter begging me to meet him——"

"'Twas he you were with that evening. Oh, what a fool, what a blind fool——"

"Hush, Tom! you mustn't talk like that. Besides" (with a faint smile and a look of mock severity) "it's very rude to interrupt. Ned, you see, had a dreadful quarrel with father some years ago, and ran away to Africa. But now it's all right again between them. And father has taken the pledge; and Tom says he is going to take care of mother. It seems almost too good to be true." She paused; then suddenly, "Sir," she said, "do you know that you haven't kissed me yet?"

"I was waiting to be forgiven," he said humbly, almost reverently, as he bent over the pillow.

"There was nothing to forgive, dear," she said softly. "Besides, sweethearts often have tiffs, you know; and we've only had one! And we have been engaged twelve months—twelve months this very day, Tom. Did you remember?"

"I—I had forgotten," he stammered.

"We've been very happy," she went on, dreamily, as if speaking to herself. "We couldn't, of course, expect to have *all* the sunshine; and 'twas only a very little cloud that came between us."

"Nell, dear," he said, "with God's help I'll try to control my wretched temper. And nothing shall ever come between us again."

"Except one thing, Tom. I know you love me, dear; and if I don't get well, if I should die, I want you to be brave——"

"Nell, Nell!" he cried, with a horrible sinking at his heart, "you mustn't talk about dying. What should I do without you?" He paused. A middle-aged woman in the garb of a nurse had entered the room, and in obedience to her signal he turned to Nellie. "And now, dear," he said, with forced cheerfulness, "I must be going. I'm afraid I have wearied you."

She shook her head smilingly.

"I will come again in the morning," he went on. "We won't talk very much, but I'll just sit here beside you, and hold your hand, like this. D'ye see?" And bending over the pillow, he kissed her very tenderly.

"Good-bye, dearest," she said, her pale face illumined by a smile of absolute content.

"Not good-bye, sweetheart, but good-night." He strove to speak cheerily, but the effort was a failure. And then he went out into the darkness.

Next day his seat in the Drawing Office was vacant. For Number 9, Ventnor Road, was a house of mourning. And a mile beyond the suburb, Tom, like a stricken animal, crept beneath the friendly shades of a spinney; and there, casting himself upon the ground, wrestled with his grief, the greatest his life had ever known.

W. T. Crosbie.

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OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

In the meanwhile Scarsdale manages to pass through several letters to Esther to which he receives replies full of hope and affection. On account of an assault upon a brutal warder, however, he is to be removed to Wrackam Convict Prison, an establishment famous for its hard discipline.

A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump. It is while returning from this concert that Revelle proposes to Esther but is refused.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther.

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned." Mr. Crump next takes a walk on the common, and discovers some sand-bags.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

The rumour proves to be true. Alec had indeed managed to escape from the prison, and taking a boat had pulled down the river, after purloining some sailors' clothes from an empty barge. Just when he is thoroughly exhausted, however, he is run down by a sailing barge. His boat is smashed, but Alec is rescued and taken on board. The barge proves to be the *Mary Ann*, bound for Gurlston Bay. Arrived at its destination, it is hardly moored to the pier before Esther, who is taking a walk, arrives at the pier to watch the unloading.

ON BOARD THE BARGE.

TORTURING doubts and fears were scurrying fast through Esther's brain as, her chin resting on her hands, she stared at the name white-lettered on the stern of the barge. Catching sight of the pensive, graceful figure, Revelle was conscious of a thrill, and a quickening of the heart-beat. He felt annoyed with himself. He must watch himself, see that his heart—if indeed he possessed such a thing—did not obtain the mastery over his brain.

"Miss Mansfield!"

Esther started at the sound of the soft voice beside her, soft in tone, but jarring harshly on her thoughts. Crushing back a shiver, she glanced up. Revelle's hand was outstretched, his cap raised. His dark eyes were filled with a look of sympathy and respectful admiration; but, only a second before, they had glinted most unpleasantly. A newspaper lay at Esther's feet. He had been able to read the big-typed headlines staring up at him. She knew of Scarsdale's escape! At every twist and turn that fellow seemed to rise up and stand in his way! He seemed to be everlastingly figuring in the papers now. If only that warder's aim had been more true!

With an effort Esther took the outstretched hand; but she could not trust herself to look him in the face. Her eyes shifted away to the barge moored up alongside the jetty, and fastened on the name, *Mary Ann*.

"I'm awfully glad to have found you," said Revelle, placing a hand on the back of the seat, and bending over her. "Awfully glad to think that you're well enough to get out again. I was—er—dreadfully distressed to hear that you had been ill. I had no idea till I got down here. I'm afraid that ghastly affair at Warham—that poor creature's sad end—must have upset you frightfully."

Never so much as a falter in his voice, nor a twitch of a muscle.

"Single again!"

Never so much as a flicker of remorse, nor even of fear;

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. *You can begin to-day.*

only the exultant feeling of relief at being quit for ever of a burden. Fear! Why any fear? What chance was there, humanly speaking, that the truth could ever out?

"Please don't talk about that," whispered Esther.

As delicately as possible, avoiding all detail, Crump, in one of his letters, had told Esther of the verdict of the coroner's jury on Alice Vance, and of her interment. The little man had followed her to the grave, and after dusk, not wishing to call attention to himself, had placed a wreath upon the newly turned earth. In his letter he had not breathed a word of his suspicions, nor of his discoveries. In Esther's mind there was no suspicion of foul play—so far as the poor creature's end was concerned; but she had not forgotten that strange scene in the drawing-room of her home, when Vance, pointing at the man who was now bending over her, had cried—"That man is my husband!" The words had been subsequently denied; but the mystery of it all had haunted Esther. Was it possible that the words had been true, and the denial an untruth? Was it possible that this man who was still bending over—so horribly close—was morally guilty of the poor creature's loss of reason and sad end?

"I'm awfully sorry," murmured Revelle apologetically. "It was brutal—thoughtless of me."

The hatches covering the *Mary Ann's* capacious hold, had been whipped off, and the process of unloading started upon.

"They're picturesque things, these barges, with their tanned sails, aren't they?" added Revelle, abruptly changing the subject.

"Yes," answered Esther mechanically.

Where was he, the man she loved? A picture of him in an open boat, wounded, and dressed as she had seen him that day at Roxeter Junction, rose up, blotting out the immediate scene before her, for the moment making her forget the man at her side.

Revelle realised that her thoughts were wandering. He bit his lips. His rival had come between them as effectually as if he had been present. He was far too much of a diplomatist to make any reference to the convict's escape; but where was the fellow? Confusion overtake him!

The vision of the wounded felon in an open boat melted away, and reality, in the shape of the barge, shaped itself again before Esther's eyes. She could distinguish the features of the men on the deck as they toiled to the creaking music of crane and pulley-block. One man, sun-bronzed and bearded like the pard, who occasionally shouted out a command in a stentorian voice, was evidently the skipper. His red cap of stockinette gave a piratical touch to his appearance.

The light of the slanting afternoon sun swept the deck.

"If," said Revelle, "I were an artist, there would be the subject for a picture ready to hand—splendid effect of light and shade—chiaroscuro, don't you know, and that fellow in the pirate cap a magnificent study of character. I do so envy a fellow who can paint! I should so awfully like—er—to have a picture of you, not that it could do you justice, but, well, I should like to have it!"

Esther did not seem to hear. The piratical-looking skipper had ceased to bellow out commands, and was moving towards the cabin in the stern.

"How are you feeling, mate?" he shouted down the hatchway.

"Better," came back the answer, in a muffled, rather indistinct voice. What followed was so indistinct that it did not reach Esther and the man beside her.

But for a moment Esther had held her breath. A flush of colour had brightened her pale face. Only one word had reached her; but something in the tone of that muffled voice had recalled—the flush faded from her cheeks; she was breathing again. It was impossible. It was the work of her cruel imagination. The wish had been father to the thought.

The skipper went forward again.

"How long do you think of staying here, Miss Mansfield?" asked Revelle.

"We have not quite made up our minds. Mr. Walters has been kind enough to ask us to stay as long as possible."

Revelle sat down on the seat beside her, and leant forward a little, his face turned towards her and away from the barge.

A man was passing up slowly from the cabin. His head and shoulders appeared above the hatchway; then he stopped, and, shading his eyes from the light, glanced round.

The sunlight caught his face, unshaved, haggard, the hair about his temples streaked with grey.

Alec Scarsdale's face!

Esther had seen. The blood seemed to fade away from her very lips. Her dark eyes dilated, their expression indescribable! Scarcely conscious of what she was doing, she half-rose to her feet. A wild longing was upon her to call him by his name, to stretch out her arms to him.

Oh, God! But he was looking towards her now! But he had come up from the darkness of the cabin into the light. He only saw two blurred figures on the pier.

Revelle had seen the sudden change sweep across Esther's face. Swift as thought, he turned his head!

As he did so, the man also turned, and, leaning forward on the hatchway, watched those who were busily engaged in unloading. His back was presented to Revelle.

Revelle's movement had recalled Esther, awakened her to the danger! With a low cry, she sank back into the seat, her eyes half-closed, her face turned away from the barge. It was a desperate, magnificent piece of acting—for the sake of the man she loved. And she had succeeded—distracted Revelle's attention from the barge—and the man!

"Miss Mansfield!" he cried in a low voice. "You're ill! Let me——"

"I—I am all right again now!" she whispered strainedly. "It was only momentary. A sudden wave of faintness. Perhaps my father was right. I oughtn't to have gone so far to-day!"

She must keep his attention away from that barge, the man upon it! The thought that she was fighting for her lover's freedom gave her strength, and stimulated her faculties. A faint smile played round her lips—a smile that deceived the man beside her.

"I'm really quite ashamed of myself," she went on. "But perhaps I ought to be going back. Would you mind if I took your arm?"

Crump would have been prouder than ever of her, could he have seen her, heard her now! She rose up, and took Revelle's proffered arm. She dared not glance at the barge lest he should follow the direction of her eyes. With the faintest pressure of her hands, she led him between two of the glass shelters to the far side of the pier. The deck of the barge was no longer visible to them. Her touch thrilled Revelle. She pointed away across the bay to the white cliffs and the undulating downs beyond.

"That," she said, "would make another subject for a picture, wouldn't it?"

"Yes. You're awfully plucky, Miss Mansfield!"

She gave a little laugh.

"Not really. Perhaps I looked a great deal worse than I felt. It was just momentary, though I don't mind confessing that I'm very grateful to you for your arm!"

She was playing the man's own game, acting, and was beating him at it!

"But you're trembling!" he whispered a little unsteadily.

"Well, of course, I'm still a little weak. To-day's the first time that I've been out of the house you know!"

Every step was taking them farther away from the barge, and with every step Esther felt the stifling grip at her heart relax a little. As they passed off the pier, she withdrew her hand from Revelle's arm. She crushed under an almost irresistible desire to glance back. When, Revelle still escorting her, she reached the house, though she longed for the

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privacy of her own room, she sat down on the lawn, and talked to Revelle with a feverish vivacity of manner. She dreaded lest he should leave her, return perhaps to the pier. The strain upon her was frightful. To appear collected, to talk rationally, to conjure up an occasional smile to her lips—God alone knew how hard it was!

When Mr. Walters, accompanied by her father and the other men, returned, Revelle was still seated beside her on the lawn. John Mansfield noted the fact with inward approval.

"Revelle," said Mr. Walters, "you must dine with us to-night!"

"It's awfully good of you. Miss Mansfield, if you'll excuse me running away—I—er—must get away back and dress!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Walters. "We're not so punctilious here as all that. Mrs. Walters, I know, will excuse you. Miss Mansfield, would you be horribly shocked if Mr. Revelle dines with us in his present attire?"

"Of course not," answered Esther, with a little laugh.

She dreaded the idea of this man—this man whom she loathed beyond expression—being out of her sight for a moment.

"Well, 'pon my word, I hardly like to. Ah, here's Mrs. Walters!"

Revelle made his way to the lady in question. He was a little puzzled in his mind. Had John Mansfield unconsciously exaggerated when he described the meeting between Esther and Scarsdale at Roxeter Junction? When he had spoken to her first on the pier, she had been abstracted and sad in her manner; then the sudden faintness; now she seemed almost feverishly vivacious—hardly the same person! He felt quite certain, remembering the tell-tale paper beside her, that she knew of Scarsdale's escape. He was at a loss to explain these changing moods. For all his cleverness, he had not nearly plumbed the depths of Esther's character. He realised her charm, her simplicity, her womanliness in a measure; but not her strength!

Mrs. Walters insisted that he should dine with them as he stood. Then the ladies disappeared to dress. The gentlemen lingered still on the lawn. One of them took an evening paper from his pocket, and led Revelle on one side.

"I say, it looks as if it were all up with that fellow Scarsdale. The boat that was missing off St. Helen's Island was found ashore at low tide in the Thames, one side of her completely stove in. Of course, the idea is that he was run into in the dark!"

Revelle took the paper, read through the account. His eyes brightened a little, his lips smiled under his moustache.

"Not a word about this at dinner," he said in a low voice. "I think, between ourselves, that Miss Mansfield has quite got over her infatuation for the fellow, but any mention of this would be awfully painful!"

"Quite so. But if it's true, I, for one, am deuced sorry for the chap. After that plucky act of his he deserved to get clear; but, at the same time, that stove-in boat isn't absolutely conclusive evidence."

Revelle shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Heaven knows, I don't wish the fellow any harm, but—well, I knew him!"

Then he joined his host. He had implied that the world would be well quit of Alexander Scarsdale.

In her bedroom Esther was upon her knees. It was a brief interval between the acts. In a few minutes she would be the actress again, playing her heart-breaking part. Her heart told her that her eyes had not played her false. He was free, near her: but for how long?

Oh, to be with him, if only for a few moments! To feel his loving arms about her, to be able to whisper to him again of her undying love.

"Alec!" she choked out, "My beloved Alec! If you would only come to me—no, no! Not that! Your freedom is most precious now. Pray God, you keep it!"

The dinner-gong started to boom out. Esther sprang to her feet, pencilled a few hurried sentences on a piece of paper, addressed the envelope to "Mr. Penworthy."

(*Continued on next page.*)

A Useful Wireless Message.

Now that the Marconi system of wireless telegraphy has been brought so prominently before the public, the minds of many readers have been turned on this subject. No doubt many messages fraught with the utmost importance will be conveyed over enormous areas of space by this principle. It would be difficult to imagine a message more important, and which resulted in more gratifying consequences, than the one which reached Miss Bessie Denbury, who lives with her parents at Washford, Somerset. In consequence of this message she underwent a course of Bile Beans, and was restored to perfect health. Speaking to a *Somerset County Express* reporter Miss Denbury said: "For over three years I was dreadfully disfigured with pimples and skin blotches all over the face and body. My face was completely disfigured. The flesh was lumpy and discoloured. The pimples enlarged, and burst like gatherings, causing such fearful pain that I have fainted away. Often I have been unable to hold myself up, so weak and sickly did I become. I had only a poor appetite, and an utterly wretched feeling overwhelmed me. I tried various measures which were equally unavailing; and the case had apparently grown hopeless, when I tried Bile Beans. It was not very long before I noticed a remarkable improvement in my appearance. I also began to eat and sleep well, and take exercise, and I am now perfectly cured. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are a certain cure for pimples, skin eruptions, and all blood impurities, congestion of liver, headache, dizziness, "summer fag," biliousness, indigestion, anæmia, wasting affections, and female irregularities. Obtainable from all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., for one and three halfpence, or two and nine.

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Our Thrilling Serial. You can begin ... to-day.

"Mrs. Walters," she said as she entered the drawing-room, "I'm so sorry to be late."

There was no trace of the past storm of emotion on her pale, sweet face. Revelle moved across to her, and held out his arm.

"I am to have the pleasure!" he said, in his smoothest tone.

It was after dinner, after the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the drawing-room, that Mr. Walters approached Esther and asked her if she would sing. She made her way quietly to the piano, and glanced through the music upon it. Her father stepped up to her.

"Nothing sad, Esther," he said.

"No, father."

"Oh, but," ejaculated a sentimental young lady who had been wasting a number of rather languishing glances upon Revelle, "*do* sing something sad, please, Miss Mansfield. You know the—er—sweetest songs oft tell of saddest thoughts, or something to that effect. Don't you think so, Mr. Revelle?"

"'Pon my word, I—er—don't know that I can quite agree with you, Miss Bullivant."

He moved across to the piano and glanced at the song in Esther's hand. "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes!" was printed across the title-page.

"I wish you would," he said in a low voice, "er—sing that one."

Esther sat down at the piano, Revelle stood beside her, in readiness to turn over.

Again John Mansfield's eyes spoke silent approval. He, too, was at a loss to account for the sudden change in Esther, but the fact that it was for the better was sufficient.

Esther was playing through the opening bars. Mr. Walters tapped the banker on the shoulder.

"I say, Mansfield," he said in a whisper, "what a good-looking pair they make! Are they——?"

"Well, it hasn't quite come to that yet, but——"

Walters nodded his head, implying that he understood the situation.

"Rather hot in here, isn't it?" he added. He moved quickly across to one of the windows and flung it open.

"'Drink to me only with thine eyes——'"

The words floated out across the lawn, melodiously breaking the stillness of the night, and reaching the ears of a man who was staggering up the white road beyond the grounds.

He stopped dead.

"My God!" he panted out hoarsely. "Her song—*her voice!*"

The moonlight fell upon a haggard, old-young face, unshaved, emaciated, the hair about the temples grey.

Alec Scarsdale!

He stood for a moment swaying like a drunkard, glaring round him with staring, hungry eyes.

"'Or leave a kiss within the cup——'"

Her song, her voice! It had galvanised into life a hundred memories that scampered pell-mell through his reeling brain.

A hoarse, low cry burst from his lips; then he staggered across the road to the gate that gave access to the grounds.

A few moments later, he was creeping through shrubs to where light was shining from an open window, the transparent curtains waving softly in the night breeze.

Crouching, creeping, he reached the window.

He peered round. He could see Esther at the piano. Her back was turned to the window.

Then a convulsive spasm swept him from head to foot. He had recognised the man standing beside, and bending over her, from where he was, seeming so close.

Seaton Revelle!

Was what assistant-warder Belton had taunted him with in the prison cell, true?

For a moment he doubted; his belief in the woman he loved failed him. His white lips crinkled up like a dog's. There was nothing to live for now, but revenge!

But, thank God, it was only momentary. Only for a moment had he wronged the woman who had suffered and was suffering such agony for his sake. But the picture that he had pictured in his cell was before his eyes. His fingers were opening and shutting. He hungered to twine them round the vile hound's throat. He took a forward step—then a chorused murmur stayed him.

The song was at an end.

"Oh, thank you *so* much!"—"Charming!"—"Ben Jonson wrote the words, did he not?"—"Yes, Ben, not Samuel, don't you know. He was the fellow who wrote the dictionary; took snuff, drank an awful lot of tea, and used to say rude, smart things. A fellow called Boswell, don't you know, a bit of a prig, has written all about him!"

Every word of the small talk reached the listener outside. He had himself under control again. It was well!

Before Esther could rise, Mr. Walters had approached her, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Esther," he said genuinely, "that was a great treat. Now, I'm not going to worry you. If you feel too tired, you must say so; but if you would just give us one more we should all be so delighted."

Esther half turned round on the seat.

"Is there any particular song that you would like, Mr. Walters? I might perhaps know it."

Then suddenly her eyes dilated, her lips parted. She seemed turned to stone!

"Ah, but you *are* tired! You're feeling faint!"

She drew her hand sharply across her eyes, then gave a little laugh.

"No, no! Will—will you suggest some song? I—I might know it."

She turned round again to the piano. Her fingers wandered listlessly over the keys. A few chords, then, from the chords, the refrain of a song took shape.

"True—true till death!"

"That's 'True till death" you're playing, isn't it, Miss Mansfield?" questioned Miss Bullivant.

The notes had reached the haggard-faced man who crouched outside. For a moment, that moment when Esther had seemed turned to stone, their eyes had met!

And now, God be thanked, he knew that it was a lie!

Mr. Walters was busily turning over the pile of music, searching for a song.

John Mansfield moved up to the piano.

Esther looked up at him.

"Father," she said unaffectedly, "what does this remind you of?"

She played a few bars, then sang softly, just a little tremor in her beautiful voice, but not so softly that the words did not reach him for whom they were meant.

"*Her father he has locked the door,*
Her mother holds the key,
But neither bolts nor bars shall keep
My own true love from me!"

John Mansfield patted her on the shoulder.

"Why, Esther," he said smiling, "that was the song you used to sing as a tiny mite in the nursery!"

AN INTERRUPTED MEETING.

At the end of the song, Miss Bullivant, who had come to the conclusion that Mr. Revelle was the most interesting man present, had—to use a colloquialism—made a dead set at him, and had manœuvred him away from the piano and Esther. The attention that he had been paying the latter throughout the evening had perturbed her considerably.

"It's so hot in here, Mr. Revelle!" she said, fanning herself

(*Continued on page* 191.)

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MYSTERIES OF THE EAR.

In a late number of the "Journal for the Deaf," there is a series of popular articles describing the anatomy and physiology of the ear, and the various ways of becoming deaf. This publication which is devoted entirely to the interests of those who are afflicted by deafness, or by any diseases of the ear, nose, or throat, can be obtained free by post by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, Regent's Park Road, Primrose Hill, London, N.W. The "Journal" also describes a Method of Treating deafness by external application that has been repeatedly successful in curing ear diseases, and in restoring hearing in cases pronounced incurable by the usual aural treatment. Those who are interested in knowing how to apply this method will find that each "Journal" is accompanied by a Patient's Report Form, which enables anyone to receive full particulars as to the use of the treatment at home. Any advice by correspondence is absolutely free.

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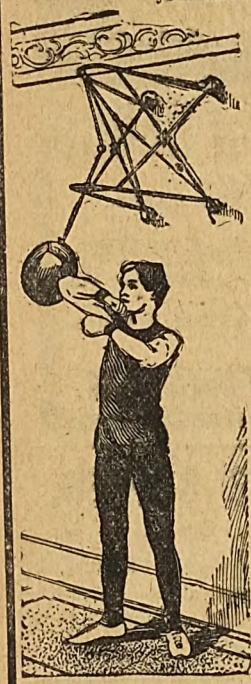

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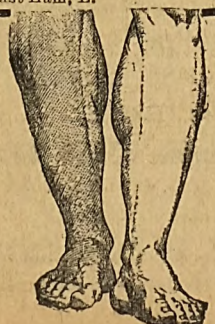

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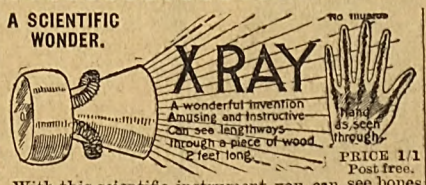

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a little petulantly. "Please take me into the garden. We shall be able to hear the song there, just as well!"

Mr. Walters had selected a song. Esther had caught Miss Bullivant's words. Revelle was moving towards the window.

"Mr. Revelle," said Esther, a little quickly, he must not go out into the garden! "Would you mind very much turning over for me again!"

"With pleasure."

Miss Bullivant bit her lips, and mentally designated Esther Mansfield a designing minx. Revelle was conscious of a decided thrill of satisfaction at being recalled to her side. There was no trace of sadness in the song that Esther sang. A colour had mounted to her cheeks; her eyes were flashing brightly. Not a soul within the room dreamt of the frightful tension on nerve and heart; but outside the man, who was crouching among the shrubs, knew! "But neither bolts not bars shall keep my own true love from me!" The words were ringing in his ears. Borne on the wings of music, her two messages had reached him, and he had understood. He would wait there. She would come to him that night!

The song over, Esther retired into a corner of the room away from the window, Revelle accompanying her. Though Miss Bullivant employed every device known to her to lure him from her side, she failed utterly.

"I say, old chap," whispered one of the men to his neighbour, "Revelle is making the running pretty fast with Esther Mansfield. Nobody else can get a look in!"

"Yes. He's a lucky dog. She's positively charming; but I don't think it's all on one side. The way she outmanœuvred Miss Bullivant just now was quite masterly. As a matter of fact there's a rumour afloat that they're engaged, and it does look very much like it; but I suppose it won't be announced for a while." The speaker dropped his voice to a low whisper: "You see, it seems only the other day that she was engaged to that poor chap Scarsdale."

Mrs. Walters cast a sweeping, inquiring glance round at the ladies; then rose to her feet. Good-night was said. The ladies retired to their bedrooms; the gentlemen to the smoking-room.

Once in her room, the mask fell from Esther's face. She stood for a moment, the flush faded from her face, panting quickly, as though the terrible strain had physically exhausted her. Then she went to the window and peered through the blinds. The light was still shining out from the drawing-room below. Straining her eyes, she tried to penetrate the darkness; but, though she could distinguish nothing, she felt that he understood, was waiting for her.

"Alec," she whispered, "are you there? I'm coming to you, my love, soon now!"

She left the window, and, having donned a hooded cloak, extinguished the light. Having opened her door ever such a little, she sat down close beside to listen. It seemed an eternity of time before the sounds that she longed for reached her ears—voices and footsteps ascending the stairs. The men were retiring to bed at last.

She still sat listening—heard the sounds of the servants locking up. Then an absolute silence prevailed.

Her heart was beating fiercely, her limbs trembling as she crept out of her room into the darkness of the corridor and groped her way to the top of the stairs.

The front door was locked. The key had been removed.

She paused for a moment, for all her beating heart and trembling limbs, her mind was unnaturally clear. She must get out through the drawing-room. She shut her eyes tightly for a second as if to assist her memory, and conjured up a picture of the ground-floor as she knew it by daylight. Only a woman, nerved and guided by love, yet neither the Marquis nor Benny Beard could have moved more silently and unerringly than she did. Only a faint click of the latch told of her passing into the drawing-room. A mental picture of the room was before her. She remembered the exact position of the furniture. Without so much as brushing against anything, she reached the shutters. She raised up the iron bar, opened them. The moonlight was streaming on to the lawn.

She opened the window—it creaked a little.

A rustling came from the shrubs that fringed the lawn. They parted. The moonlight fell upon a hungry, haggard face, unshaved, emaciated!

A swift-moving shadow flitted across the lawn.

Two low, whispered cries, simultaneous, and blending so that they seemed but one!

The moonlight was upon two figures locked in each other's arms, on the threshold of the open window; then they vanished into the darkness of the room. And for a time the silence was so great, the room might have been empty!

* * * * *

"I say, Revelle, old chap. Wake up! But don't make a noise! Something's up! There's someone in the house."

Revelle sat up abruptly in his bed. Gerald Phipps was at his side.

"What?"

"Couldn't sleep—look sharp, out you get and put some clothes on—went to open my window wider—saw somebody dart across the lawn—there's a strong moon on. It fairly staggered me. When I shoved my head out, drawing-room window below was open. No sign of anybody."

Revelle was already out of bed.

"Look here," he said in a low, sharp voice, "no need to wake anybody. We can see this job through by ourselves, Phipps! This isn't my first experience of this sort of business!"

"Right!" whispered Phipps excitedly.

"Put out that light!" said Revelle. "We shall work better without it."

He, too, was conscious of a strong sense of excitement.

"Come on. Keep close behind me. When in doubt, catch hold of me."

He led the way silently out of the room. If he brought this affair off successfully, he would earn quite a reputation for himself as a thief-taker. A shadowy smile played across his features. The irony of the situation had tickled his sense of humour. He, too, like Esther, seemed to have a picture of the surroundings photographed on his brain. He never hesitated; made no mistake. More than once his companion behind was obliged to reach out and catch hold for guidance. Revelle would have done better alone.

The existence of one more step than he had anticipated at the foot of the stairs suddenly precipitated Phipps to the ground with a thud, and drew from him a muttered exclamation.

Revelle left him to look after himself, and, despite the darkness, made a straight line for the drawing-room door.

* * * * *

In the darkness the escaped convict held the woman he loved in his trembling arms. For a while both had been silent, their hearts too full for words! But they were whispering now, incoherent quick words of love, undying hope, and mutual belief. The power to reason coldly, make plans for the future, had not yet returned to them. The passionate joy of being together overmastered all.

"You will never doubt me, Alec," whispered Esther, as she drew his unshaved face down to hers and kissed him, "whatever the world may say! I am yours—yours—yours for always. Oh, Alec, thank God for this moment!"

"Amen to that," he breathed out hoarsely.

Again a silence, heart beating against heart, lips pressed to lips, soul in unison with soul!

"Alec, when you—you go from me, where—will you go?"

"God knows—what's that?"

A faint thud, accompanied by a sharp though muffled expression had just reached him. Esther, too, had heard. Her face had turned the colour of death.

"Go!" she breathed out chokingly, "for God's sake, go!"

He hesitated, for the moment not thinking of himself, but of woman he loved. It meant her reputation com promised! It meant——

"If you love," she whispered in her agony, "go!"

Seaton Revelle's hand was on the handle of the door.

(Another splendid instalment next Tuesday.)

By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

A Fearsome Father.

"Laurie" is in business and dependent on his father for his financial support. He is also living at home, which is a great pecuniary saving to him. He has now fallen in love with their servant, but knows that if he told his parents he would be dismissed from home, and would lose his father's financial support—perhaps to the detriment of his whole career.

* * * *

Now, what advice does "Laurie" suppose would be given him in cold blood in such a matter as this? On the one side his whole chances of success in life, on the other a girl for whom he may entertain simply a passing passion, and probably poverty. Of course, "Laurie," if your father is, as you say, likely to cut you off if you continue this love affair, your duty is to wait until such time as your business position warrants you in making your own choice of a wife, when presumably your father would see that any objections to your marriage from him could not have any effect.

❦❦❦

"P. W.'s" Advice Taken.

"Veilchen" some time ago asked the advice of the Editor of *Pearson's Weekly* on the question of how to make the acquaintance of those whom you admire but do not know. She has since adopted the advice given by him, with results different from what she anticipated.

* * * *

I will not go far into details, as "Veilchen" wishes me not to give the whole of her story, but, briefly, it is as follows: For some time she noticed in her daily walks that a man looked admiringly at her. He was of lower social position than herself. After a time she grew to wish to know him, and gave him a hint to this effect. On receiving the hint, to her astonishment, the man seemed completely abashed, and avoided her whenever he saw her. "Veilchen" now feels that she has done a very foolish thing, and suffers continued regret for having done so.

* * * *

I am very sorry for you, "Veilchen." I do not think you did wrong in giving the hint, as you had some reason to suppose that the liking between yourself and this man was mutual and genuine. As to why he took the hint as he did is another matter. There were, no doubt, reasons beneath the surface. One is that possibly he was married, and, while content to look his admiration, would not dare to carry it further. Another is that he was afraid to know you because he might not be in a position to make any proposals of marriage, and desired to avoid going too far. Yet another possible solution is that his look was merely one of admiration for you—perhaps you are a very attractive-looking girl—which did not convey any suggestion of a desire to make your acquaintance. The world is only too full of men who dare not do more than look the things they feel. This being perhaps the case, I should not worry any more about the matter. You have evidently misinterpreted those looks he gave you, and I do not suppose he thought any the worse of you. I have yet to meet the man who did think worse of a girl for returning his admiration. I shall be glad to hear further from you.

❦❦❦

A Prospective Mother-in-Law.

What are you to do when the girl's mother will not let you alone for five minutes together? Thus "Perplexed," who is engaged to a girl, and whose engagement is sanctioned by the mother; yet that good lady always manages to be in the same room when "Perplexed" pays his visits.

* * * *

Evidently the mother requires a good deal of vigorous hinting. Try the following. When you hear her approaching, discontinue your embraces just as she opens the door. When she is in the room, sit perfectly silent. Directly she goes out prepare, as it were, to renew the fray. If, after a while, she does not get a little tired of this kind of thing, arrange always to meet the girl elsewhere—at a friend's house, or somewhere out of doors, near a country lane. If the mother follows her there also, I should advise you either to be prepared to take on board a mother-in-law of the most extreme character, to share with you your marital relations, or to break off the engagement.

❦❦❦

A Lenient Lover.

Before the war broke out, "Nemo" was engaged to one whom he thought was the dearest girl in the world. One morning recently he learnt that she had eloped the previous night with an admirer of three weeks' standing, who had more money than he. Since then the man has been imprisoned for bigamy, and the girl has written "Nemo" to ask him to take her back on the old footing. "Nemo" still loves her, but fears he can never again trust her.

* * * *

If your love is so constant that it endures after such unpardonable conduct on her part, I should certainly not counsel you to give her up. You evidently see qualities in her which are not evident from your story of her behaviour. Perhaps she was cajoled or deceived into eloping with the man in question, in which case her severe lesson must endure for life, and you would be safe in resuming the old relations. What her reasons were for her conduct you surely know, and will be the best judge as to her true character. If her elopement was of her own free will, and was carried out with the full knowledge that she was deceiving you, I can see little prospect that such a girl will make you a faithful wife.

❦❦❦

Wants to Educate his Sweetheart.

"Sincere" is engaged to a girl whose education has been neglected. He himself is well off, and would pay from £50 to £100 a year for two years or so, with a view to improving her. How can he proceed?

* * * *

I think, if there are no questions involved as to her willingness to accept "Sincere's" assistance, the best thing would be for the girl to go to one of the religious convent schools in Belgium, France, or Germany for a while. Lots of English girls go to these schools, and learn several languages, as well as music, and other useful accomplishments. Besides this, they get a good idea of the world through mixing with girls of various nationalities, and there would not be the same social prejudice abroad as might stand in the girl's way at an English school. If "Sincere" can do this, he should write to the British and Foreign Schools Society, Temple Chambers, London, E.C., where all information on such a point could be obtained.

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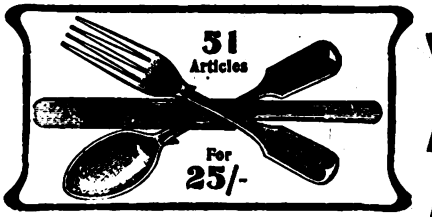

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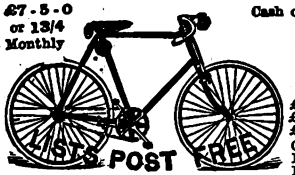

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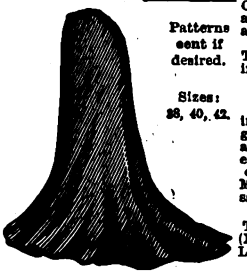

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Short Stories

No. 711. ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending August 16th, 1902.

"All's Right With the World."

By DAISY PENDER CUDLIP.

An Adventure at Sea.

A LAZY hot afternoon in August. Not a breath of wind stirring the leaves of the trees, or making the faintest ripple on the intense blue of the water that came lapping drowsily on to the little pebbly beach.

The little fishing village of Porthtowan, usually so brisk and lively, was following Nature's example and taking a siesta. No one seemed to be stirring, and there was absolutely no sound to break the intense stillness that usually prevails about three o'clock on the afternoon of an intensely hot day.

On the bench in front of a boat-house three ancient mariners sat, their pipes gone out, their arms folded and their eyes closed, half asleep, warming their old bones in the hot sunshine. On the beach a shock-headed boy was sprawling full length, one arm thrown across his face to shade him from the glare, while the other was stretched out carelessly, the palm of the hand turned up, with the fingers in the graceful curve that is only seen in the utter abandonment of repose.

Down the village street sauntered a man and a girl, her scarlet sunshade making a brilliant patch of colour and casting red reflections on to the white-washed walls of the cottages, as they slowly came towards the beach. Arrived there, they stood still for a moment, the girl gazing dreamily at the sea, while the man gazed intently at the girl, so much so, that involuntarily she turned and looked at him, but it was not the colour of her sunshade that was responsible for her glowing face just then.

"Shall we take the boat out, May?" he asked. Nodding her head in assent, as if afraid of breaking the spell of silence, she led the way to where the little brown dinghy was drawn up high and dry on the beach. The silence hitherto had been complete, but the spell was broken by the scraping noise of the boat running over the pebbles down to the water's edge. The shock-headed boy jumped up quickly and shook himself, the familiar sounds breaking suddenly in upon his dreams brought him back to the realities of life. The three ancient mariners woke up to find their pipes had gone out, and to go on with the yarns that had been interrupted by sleep an hour before.

A woman came to the door of the little inn and shook a duster, yawning as she did so, completely doing away with the impression she had meant to convey, namely, that she at any rate had not been taking a siesta. The sharp slap of the duster as she shook it had the undesired effect of waking up the baby next door, and roused by its lusty cries, the whole village machinery was once more set in motion.

Meanwhile the two who were responsible for this change had drifted away from the beach, the girl guiding the tiller with her little sunburnt hand, while the man pulled lazily at the oars. He was a striking looking man this Leonard Davis, tall, broad shouldered, with a figure well knit, giving an impression of strength with suppleness, while he carried his head erect as a soldier and as a gentleman should.

It has been said that "Man is fire and woman tow, and the Devil brings them together." Certainly if that is the case May Leslie was just the sort of woman who would be as tow to this man's fiery nature. Possessed of a strong vitality, she lived every moment of her life either suffering keenly or enjoying keenly. Her sensitive nature answered readily to all outside influences, either happy or otherwise. Therefore it was not in the least strange when this man crossed her path that she should be attracted by his strong personality, while he on the other hand was puzzled and fascinated by the many-sidedness of her character.

As yet no words of love had passed between them. They had seen a great deal of each other, and of course instinctively knew that they were drifting into those dangerously sweet paths, where the presence of each to the other makes the sweetness.

They had met some months before at a big dance, but it was not until Mrs. Leslie and her two girls settled down at this quiet little village, to live a life of the strictest economy, that they were thrown much together. But just above the village on the heights was a Fort where at this time two companies of the Royal Wessex Regiment were quartered, Leonard Davis being the captain of one of them. So it happened that instead of perpetually going into the neighbouring town, which was the garrison, he used to prefer going down to a

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certain quaint little cottage in Porthtowan where he was sure of a welcome from one pair of eyes at least. May's sister Nelly was many years younger, being only thirteen, and the most incorrigible tomboy. But the three of them were on the best of terms, and many a pleasant afternoon had they spent together.

On this particular afternoon he had come down from the Fort as usual to take the girls out for a row, but Nelly, for a wonder, was cross, and generally upset by the heat, and announced her intention of staying at home. Leonard Davis and May, however, did not press her to join them as she had meant them to do, but went without her, nothing loth at being alone together. The village of Porthtowan was in the corner of a very sheltered bay, the land on the right running out to a point thickly covered right down to the water's edge with luxuriant foliage.

It was here that those two guided the boat on this particular afternoon in August. They turned the bows of the boat into a long, narrow cove, and, shipping oars, drifted silently up to a tiny sandy beach, deliciously cool and shady after the glaring heat outside. Leonard jumped out of the boat and held out his hands to May, who, placing her two little brown hands on his, sprang lightly down by his side.

"Take care, the rocks are very slippery, you must let me guide you safely across them," he said, still retaining a firm hold of one of the hands so confidently resting in his, and so led her across the slippery ground to a comfortable seat on the rocks.

"How charmingly cool and pretty you look this afternoon," he said. "I like you in that white thing, awfully," touching the sleeve of her white boating dress as he spoke.

"Do you?" she answered laughing. "I'm glad my appearance pleases your lordship," and getting up she made him a mock curtesy, a thousand mischievous glances dancing in her eyes, as she turned them full upon him. It was a battery against which the man was not proof; he caught her hands and said:

"If you look at me like that I must kiss you, so be careful."

"You wouldn't dare!" she laughed back; and what evil spirit was it that prompted her still to look straight into his eyes with that merry, defiant look? that said as plainly as possible, "kiss me," while all the time her heart was thumping with the conviction that she should hate for him to kiss her, and yet—she hardly knew, her brain seemed in a whirl, and before she knew how it happened his arms were round her, straining her passionately to his heart, which she could feel beating violently. His face was close to hers, in another second their lips would have met, when a fierce angry light came into her eyes, and throwing back her head out of his reach, panting with anger she cried out, "How dare you!" Instantly he let her go, and she would have fallen had he not caught hold of her arm, for she was trembling violently.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a cold, cutting voice.

"How dare you!" May repeated, her eyes blazing and her breath coming in little short, uneven gasps, with the suddenness of her anger. For answer Leonard turned and looked steadily at her. The look of grave reproof puzzled her.

"What was your motive in trying to humbug me?" he said in a tone that roused all the girl's fighting instincts, and in a moment this yielding little bit of womanhood became hard and stubborn as the veriest mule.

"I don't know what you mean," she said; "and, moreover, I question your right to take that tone with me. It is for you to beg my pardon."

"I do most sincerely," he answered. "But," he continued, "you must acknowledge that it was your own fault, you led me on to do it."

An indignant denial was on her lips, but the words were checked just as she was about to utter them, as she caught sight of the look on his face. Instantly she saw that she had led him on, and that it was useless denying it when he saw through her so plainly; but, on the other hand, no power on earth should drag an acknowledgment of the same from her lips. She was angry with herself for her folly, but with the justice of her sex, she was ready to vent her anger on the man. She was angry with him for not divining at once why she was angry, forgetting that she herself hardly knew, so mixed were the workings of her mind.

She was a woman who must be proud of anything or anybody she cared for, the man who should win her love must be stronger than herself, and now she was angry that this man should have put himself in the position of begging her pardon, when all the time the fault had been on her side. The thing that hurt her pride in him most was that he should submit to it, but such was the contradictoriness of her character, she would fight against his getting the upper hand until the very last gasp, although she wished him to conquer her. She hated the idea of being conquered, but still more she would hate the man for not conquering her. So setting her teeth she maintained a dogged silence, drawing patterns on the sand with the point of her boot, and then angrily rubbing them out again, when she found her companion, to her annoyance, kept silence also.

At last, her patience exhausted, she turned her head sharply round and said: "Well?"

"I am waiting for your sense of justice to prompt you to say that you did not act quite fairly by me just now, May—and I'm not going to move from here until you do."

If only he had stopped at the first half of his sentence, he would have won a generous acknowledgment from her, but the fatal attempt to force her hand conveyed in the last words, checked the generous impulse, and roused all the pride and stubbornness in her.

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to wait for some time."

"Very well, I assure you it's a matter of the smallest consequence. I have made a mistake in my first impressions of you, but luckily in time not to be humbugged by you any more. Please do not trouble yourself about it in the very least, it's not worth troubling about." The cool deliberate way in which he spoke cut her heart like a knife at each word. The nonchalance of his manner was far more galling both to her pride and her love—yes, she acknowledged the latter now that he seemed to be drifting away from her—was far more galling than any outburst of anger, or assumed superiority.

"You don't understand me," she said, and her voice sounded harsh and unnatural to herself.

"Understand you!" he replied with a mocking laugh, "I wonder if you understand yourself? It's more than I do. But as I said before it really doesn't signify," and he coolly set about lighting a cigarette. The manner and tone of his words made her wince and her lips quivered for a moment, the tears being very near the surface, but she controlled herself with an effort, glad that her momentary weakness had escaped his observation. But he had noticed it, and his assumed nonchalance gave way under the conviction that perhaps after all he was wronging her in thinking her a humbug.

He loved her desperately, and, until his doubts of a few moments ago, had been ready to stake his oath on her sincerity. But the horrible doubt that she was merely a coquette trifling with him, galled him. Much as he loved her, if she was only amusing herself at his expense she should not have the satisfaction of seeing how he suffered, so he assumed an air of indifference, which, however, gave way momentarily at the sight of the evident distress in the girl's face. He clenched his hand fiercely until the knuckles stood out hard and white like polished ivory. She saw it, and her instinct told her that his nonchalance was assumed, he really did care for her. If he had not cared, he would not have taken the trouble to be angry at her supposed defection. Impulsively she put out her hand and touched his coat sleeve, he started violently at the mere touch of her fingers, sent a responsive thrill through his whole being, but still he kept his head averted.

"Leonard, you are misunderstanding me, cruelly, you think I am a common flirt and a humbug. I am not, I am not, why won't you believe me?"

"Because, having led me on to make a fool of myself once, you can't expect me to be as ready to do so again. How am I to know you are not humbugging me even now for all your

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apparent sincerity," he answered, and looked at her in a way that would have cowed a less plucky woman. She met his look steadily, her head proudly thrown back, giving an unmistakable air of dignity to the little figure.

"You must know perfectly well," she answered quietly, "that I am not humbugging you, as you call it, and only the suspicious part of your nature won't let you acknowledge it."

"I wonder if I can believe what you say?" he replied. "You must confess you were rather to blame just now; you didn't act quite fairly by me. It was not exactly riding straight, was it?" He asked the question almost imploringly; but getting no response he went on rather sadly, "Never mind, if you didn't see of yourself that it was not quite generous, I cannot be the one to show you."

He had touched the right chord at last, he had appealed to her generosity and reason, and she responded instantly.

"I see it all, Leonard," she answered, turning her face impulsively towards him. "It was not generous of me; in fact, it was horribly mean. Will you forgive me?" The proud little head drooped, and she blushed furiously as she spoke.

"Forgive you, my darling!" drawing her gently towards him. "Why, there is nothing now for *me* to forgive, rather will you forgive me, for mistrusting you? I was a brute to do it. Can you forgive me for being such a brute to you?"

"Of course I can," she answered, smiling radiantly up at him. "But seriously, you'll never mistrust me again, will you? or I think it would kill me. You don't know how cruelly you hurt me just now."

"My darling, forgive me, how could I have been such a brute?" and taking her two hands in his he bent his head down and kissed them, as a subject might a sovereign. The action touched her—"It was my own fault," she said.

"Not a word more about that," he answered gently, "that is over and done with, and you must never speak of its having been your fault again. Do you understand me, little woman?"

"Thank you," she answered, "I *do* understand you," raising a pair of eyes glistening with love and gratitude to his face. She had sacrificed her pride in acknowledging herself in the wrong. This man had shown himself to be her master, and her love had conquered her pride when he had conquered her.

"May," he said, "you must know I love you, do you think you could love me well enough to be my wife?"

He had taken hold of her hands, and for answer she let herself be drawn gently towards him, and lifting her face with the light of a great joy in it, to his, their lips met in a long, passionate kiss. In that supreme moment Time seemed to stand still for both of them, May's heart was throbbing with a wild happiness that was almost a pain, so intense was her

"How dare you!" May repeated, her eyes blazing and her breath coming in little, short, uneven gasps, with the suddenness of her anger. For answer Leonard turned and looked steadily at her. The look of grave reproof puzzled her.

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love, that now could allow itself to find an outlet. But even the greatest moments of our lives have their ending.

With a sigh of happiness May drew herself away from him, but only to let her head rest caressingly on his shoulder while his arm was round her.

"Am I only dreaming, or is it real, that you have asked me to be your wife?" she said.

"Stern reality, little woman," he answered, "I shall ask your mother to give you to me soon, we've nothing to wait for, and I want my little wife."

"I'm just the very happiest and proudest girl in the whole world," she answered, "I'm so happy, that I hardly dare to realise it for fear it should escape me, as most of the things I do wish for escape me."

"You little fatalist, don't think I am going to let you go once having got you. I'm afraid you will just have to reconcile yourself to the idea of putting up with me for the rest of your natural life."

"Leonard, darling, I wonder if you realise how happy your love has made me?" and once more she held up her face readily and gladly for her lover to kiss.

Lost to everything but themselves they had disregarded time, and taken no notice of their surroundings. Had they not been so preoccupied they would have noticed that the tide had gone far out leaving the boat high and dry, held fast by a rock.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Leonard Davies when this fact suddenly revealed itself to him. "Just look at the boat. We're stuck here till next tide unless I can get her off. Do you know it's nearly half-past six," looking at his watch. "I'd no idea it was so late."

He ran down to where the boat was lying and tried to shove her off, but she was heavier than he had thought, and try as hard as he would nothing would move her, and the water line already about one hundred yards away, was still receding. The whole awkwardness of the situation flashed upon him.

"Give me a helping hand, little woman," he called out. "The boat has just got wedged a bit, but I can jerk her out if you help me, I think."

She came as requested, and together they tried to move the boat, the more they jerked, the tighter she seemed to get wedged. "What *are* we to do?" said the girl, turning pale as the idea of having to remain there struck her for the first time.

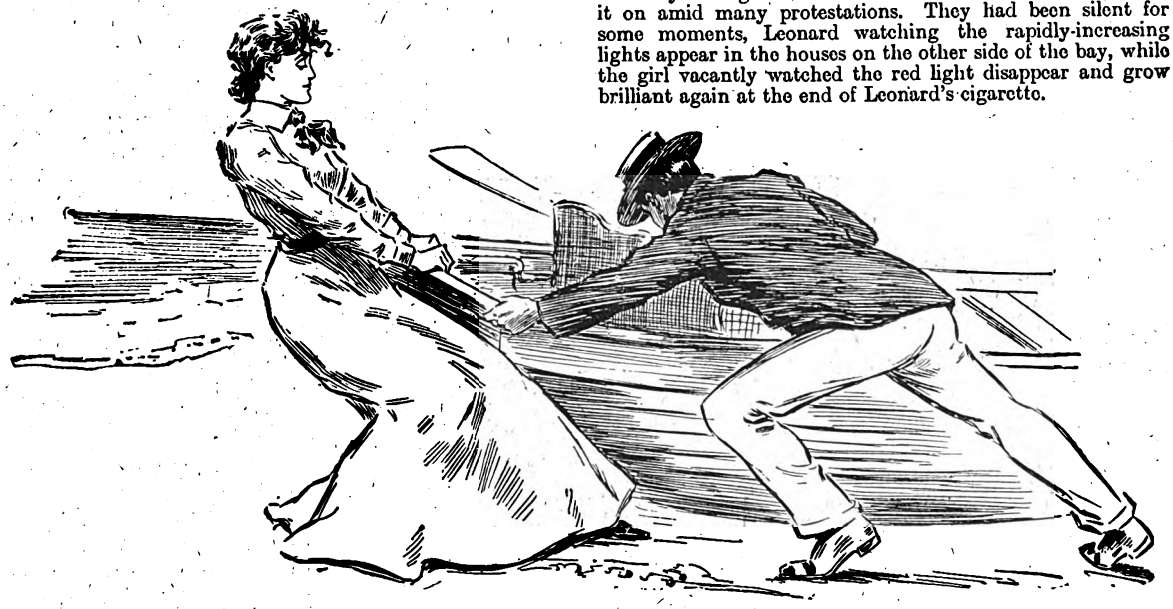
"I'm afraid there's nothing for it but to wait until the tide returns, I'll have one more try though to see if I can't move her, when I say three—just you give a lifting kind of a jerk, and perhaps we may manage to get her off."

But it was no use—nothing they tried had the least effect. At last, giving it up, they sat down and looked helplessly at each other. "I'm awfully sorry, darling, but I'm afraid we shall have to make the best of it and wait here for the next few hours."

"I don't mind one bit," she answered, nestling closer to his side, "I should have been afraid had I been stranded here alone, but with you I don't mind a bit."

So resigning themselves to the inevitable they prepared to wait—watching the gradually lengthening shadows, then the pink reflections on sea and sky cast by the setting sun—succeeded in its turn by the silver light of the moon, as she rose making a silver pathway on the calm water.

Although the day had been scorching, the evenings were chilly, and May shivered slightly, but tried to prevent showing she was cold. Her lover noticed it at once, however, and instantly taking off his own coat he insisted on her putting it on amid many protestations. They had been silent for some moments, Leonard watching the rapidly-increasing lights appear in the houses on the other side of the bay, while the girl vacantly watched the red light disappear and grow brilliant again at the end of Leonard's cigarette.



Together they tried to move the boat, but the more they jerked the tighter she seemed to get wedged.

"What time is it?" she asked at length, breaking in upon his thoughts. He looked at his watch—"Just ten minutes past nine, we can't have much longer to wait, the tide will be up in another hour or so," but in his heart of hearts he knew it would not be up sufficiently to float the boat until eleven o'clock at least.

He was torturing himself with bitter reproaches for his carelessness in having, unwittingly, placed his darling in a false position, and so given the reins to malicious tongues, who are ever ready to put the worst construction on anything. The girl, for her part, was far too happy in the consciousness that they two were apart, alone together in this the supreme moment of her life, that any other aspect of the situation did not present itself before her. It did occur to her that her mother might be anxious and wonder what had become of her, but she quickly consoled herself with the thought that her mother would guess something of the kind had happened, and cease to be nervous, knowing that Captain Davis was there to see no harm could come to her, for as she had often said, "Captain Davis was a man who could

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be trusted to look after a boat." Consequently the next two hours seemed to pass very rapidly, and it was with feelings not unmixed with regret that she learnt the boat was floated and they could go.

It was a lovely moonlight night, and once outside the Cove, everything stood out as clearly as in the day. The soft, mellow light seemed to Leonard's eyes to play lovingly round the face of the girl he loved, and reveal fresh beauties in the sweet, essentially womanly face. Her dark grey hazel eyes with the dove's ring round the iris, glowed with a deep liquid light, that transformed her whole face, and revealed the very depths of her soul. Her heart on her lips, and her soul in her eyes, how could he help loving her, and he was proud and happy in the thought that she was to be his alone, his to love and to protect.

(To be concluded next week.)

Firmness Which Failed.

A Forbidden Outing and its Sequel.

"You cannot go, and that settles it!" said Alfred Saylow, loudly.

If a bolt from the heavens had descended in the midst of the little group seated about the breakfast table it would hardly have created more consternation.

Julia Saylow, stout and impressive, put down her coffee cup with deliberation, and eyed her husband in open-mouthed wonder.

Violet and Mignonette pushed back their chairs as if a second outburst would precipitate immediate flight, and looked anxiously at their mother.

Only Willoughby, the nine-year-old scion of the house of Saylow, retained his composure to any extent. He was accustomed to violent surprises in his daily walk and recovered himself quickly.

"Why not?" he asked, boldly.

"Because you can't—that's why," returned his father, sharply. "You all hear me, don't you?"

It was quite evident that he had been heard, although no reply was forthcoming. The girls feebly played with their food; Julia's face underwent various changes of colour, which finally settled into an aggressive red; and the boy broke into a long whistle of bewilderment.

"Will, you may leave the table," said Mr. Saylow sternly.

Willoughby gazed thoughtfully at him for a moment, then seized a slice of toast and vanished. He had seen that in his father's eye which reminded him of an almost forgotten hour of sadness, closely associated with the tingling recollection of a strap. So he went.

"He meant it," he ruminated as he slipped away; "yes, I'm sure he meant it! What's got into him?"

Fortunately breakfast was nearly over when the surprising dictum had been announced; while digestive processes were undoubtedly impaired in the case of all except Willoughby, it was better than a disappointment on an empty stomach.

Saylow was not an imposing figure as he folded his napkin and rose to depart. A thin, undersized man, with much grey in the light brown hair and straggling beard. He stooped slightly from close attention at his desk, and there seemed an air of physical weakness about him, in strong contrast to his portly wife and bouncing daughters.

But his usually kind grey eyes, wrinkled at the corners with his perpetual smile of conciliation, were now quite fierce, as he stopped with his hand on the door knob and looked severely at Julia. "You heard me!" he said with emphasis.

When the sound of his quick little nervous steps was heard fading away in the passage, the feminine tongues were unloosed.

Violet spoke first. Plump, pretty, and independent, she tossed her head with a gathering bloom on her round cheeks.

"The idea!" she observed; "how entirely uncalled for!"

"I should think so," cried Mignonette, younger and even prettier than her sister.

The repression of Julia now burst forth. She was an affectionate wife, a devoted mother, and possessed of many virtues. Alas, the rod of authority was to her fingers as a clasp of gold to the miser, and she had waved it calmly and unflinchingly over the heads of her household for so many years that the fact of Alfred's imagining he could uplift his voice in opposition to her wishes seemed preposterous.

Surely, he had renounced all claim to such recognition long ago. Why, he was only her husband!

"My dear children," she began rapidly, but impressively, "I trust you observed that I controlled myself. I thought it better to say nothing in reply, nor to open an argument. There will be no argument—we shall go as I have planned. Vi, you will invite Edgar; Min, you may order the waggonette from the stable. We shall go. Tell Willoughby. We start at eleven."

Her daughters embraced her with pride. So that was all she cared for the paternal explosion. How foolish they were to have been so upset. But, then, they had never known him to speak so before. He was always so meek and complacent and did just what was expected of him.

"Of course we will go," cried Vi. "I knew we would all the time. Let's get the luncheon ready."

Trips to the lake, five miles from the town, had become weekly occurrences. Alfred had sat down to a lonely midday meal so frequently that he could scarcely remember the number. And these meals had been occasions of trying thought.

"It cannot go on," he had said to himself again and again. "I do not see what Julia is thinking of. It is too expensive. The bill from the stables is something enormous—and they get boats and men to row them and hire fishing tackle. I can't bear to say anything—they enjoy themselves, I suppose—but Julia should know better. She is so thrifty in some ways and so improvident in others. I do not understand it. I am so out of the habit of finding fault at home that I don't know what to say. I shall lose my self-control some day; I know I shall."

And he had. No one but he knew the volcano smouldering under that eruption—it was but the hiss of the puff of steam from the safety valve of the boiler of a surcharged mind, anxious and worried and shrinking—hating to give offence and having to.

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Saylow attended to his business that morning with a certain feeling of exalted emancipation. He had asserted himself. He had not intended to be so cross, but his voice had sounded different from what he meant it should. Still, they had said nothing, and it would be all right by dinner time, and he would exert himself to be very pleasant.

For the apparently meek little man was of a fierce temper at times, and some men knew it. But at home—oh! at home—anything but an angry word. So he had often seethed inwardly with a closed mouth.

"Going?" queried Willoughby, in great astonishment, when he was notified. "Why, father said we couldn't."

"Ma says we are, and she is the one," answered Vi. "He didn't mean anything. Hurry up, Will, and go over to Edgar's."

The boy shook his head dubiously. "I don't know about this," he said cautiously. "He did mean it. They say pa's awful in the office when he gets cross."

"Oh, come on," laughed his sister; "he is a dear, harmless old thing, and will be all right by to-night. Run along. We are going to fish to-day, you know. The wind is just right."

This was too much for Willoughby. He started for the house of Edgar Lovell immediately, and that young man welcomed him with the effusion due to a prospective brother-in-law of tender years and hardened remarks.

"Tell Mr. Saylow that we will be back about six o'clock," called Julia to her maid, as they drove away in style behind a pair of greys. "Give him a good lunch, Margaret."

"It is a lovely day. I almost wish they had gone," sighed Alfred as he walked into the house at noon. "I had to do it, though. I will try to make it up to them in some way—why, where is everybody? Hullo, Julia, where are you?"

"They're gone, sir. Mrs. Saylow said she expected to be back at about six. Your lunch is ready, sir," announced Margaret, appearing from the kitchen.

"Gone! Gone where?" gasped the man with a shrinking premonition of the reply.

"To the lake, sir. Didn't they tell you?"

"Oh—oh—yes! To the lake. Yes, I forgot," replied Alfred, instinctively hiding his feelings, while a great wave of anger surged through him. "Serve the luncheon now."

He flew upstairs to his room, closed the door and paced up and down with clenched fists and set lips. The mirror on the bureau reflected a white, strange face, unlike his own.

"I'll teach them a lesson they will never forget," he muttered. "It is high time. I will show them who is master in this establishment!"

He had never been so angry and he had never before known such a feeling of hardness. "I'll begin at once," he decided.

"Maggie," he said calmly to the girl as he sat down at the table, "this house is to be closed to-day. Here are your wages and a month extra. I want you to pack up and be gone by five o'clock. You shall have a splendid recommendation—you have been a good girl."

Margaret began to weep loudly with incoherent protests.

"Stop crying, now," said Saylow; "it cannot be helped. Do as I say and leave everything."

"But, Mr. Saylow——" snivelled Maggie.

"I'll attend to everything," he replied. "This is my affair, and you must be out by five o'clock. Don't try to talk to me. I will not listen. Go now and get ready."

With the firm belief that she was alone in the house with one demented, the domestic dried her eyes and departed for her little room to pack her small belongings with alacrity.

"That settles Maggie," thought the irate Saylow. "Now I will write her a testimonial, and also one to my dutiful wife, lock up everything as tight as a miser's fist and get out myself."

It was a very thoroughly closed domicile that Alfred Saylow contemplated from the pavement, when, at half-past four, he watched a wild-looking girl take her departure.

Margaret's fears had grown to frightful dimensions during the last two hours, as she heard the enraged man of the house tearing about and fumbling with locks. Now he stood glaring after her and jingling a big bunch of keys. Surely it was a fortunate escape.

A short but impressive note was lying on Julia's little writing desk for her edification, in view of the time when she should gain admittance. Her husband looked cautiously about, mentally noting such articles as might be used for battering rams. He was quite positive that his better half would not delay operations. All the afternoon he had worked in a frenzy of anger. Now he stopped, wondering at himself.

"It's done," he murmured. "Am I a fool or not?" A curious reaction possessed him. Thoughts of Julia, of the girls, of little Will—a strange medley of their loving ways and tender words and kindly acts, of the home-comings and home-goings of the past, of the trustful look of the slender-faced bride of the long ago, the babies' faces, the burdens and joys borne and shared, rushed through his brain.

He started irresolutely up the steps, his eyes full of tears. Then he shook himself together and walked rapidly away, hardening his soul.

A boy stopped him—a boy who was breathless and panting. "Here, sir!" he gasped, holding out a paper. "It's from the stable."

"Tell 'em I can't pay that bill to-day. I'm too busy to attend to it!" snapped Saylow.

"No, no," cried the lad; "'tain't no bill. It's about your folks. They're all drowned in the lake."

Saylow clutched the note, glanced at it, and ran, making little moaning sounds like a tortured, dying animal. Five minutes later he was galloping like the wind through the dust on the road to the lake. People yelled at him.

"It's a madman!" they shouted. "Get out of the way!" Then the pounding hoof and the savage lash of the whip were by and out of hearing of their shocked ears.

"Thank God and that doctor, Mr. Saylow!" exclaimed the proprietor of the boathouse; "we thought your wife and one of the girls were gone. The young man kep' the other girl up and the little feller swam ashore. Lucky they was close in, and lucky the doctor knowed how to bring folks to. They're all right now, I think. All in bed up at the hotel."

Alfred leant against him, white and trembling. The rough man covered his eyes. The other was praying aloud, a strange, incoherent mixture of heartfelt words. Presently he stopped with a long breath. "They must stay at the hotel to-night," he said. "I'll go there now, if you'll lend me your arm. Send their waggonette home, Bob. I'll ride back. I think Mr. Lovell had better stay too, to look after them. Our girl had to go away suddenly, and they'll be more comfortable here. I'll drive out in the morning and get them, and I'll send out everything they need this evening. I have some business I must attend to and I may not be able to come myself."

Saylow sat by Julia's bed for a long time, holding her hand in happy silence. She was very weak, and glad to stay.

Alfred, a carpenter and a locksmith were busily engaged from seven o'clock until nine. Maggie was recovered immediately and silence purchased with the extra month's wages, but she has been known to say that Mr. Saylow is a queer man.

"Yes," said Julia, as she went up the steps the next day on her husband's arm, "we were very comfortable at the hotel, but after all, Alfred dear, there is nothing like the comforts of one's own home. Why, what's that litter in the corner?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Saylow, meekly. "I had a man in to mend some of the doors. They squeaked, you know, and the locks needed mending."

"Yes, they did," replied his wife. "I'm glad it's done."

E. Walker.

TO THOSE WHO WRITE.

A Prize of One Guinea will be paid every week by the Editor for the best short story sent in by any of his readers. Contributions should not be less than 1,500 words in length, and not more than 3,000. The Editor reserves to himself the right to publish any contribution submitted. Stamped addressed envelopes must be inclosed for the return of the stories, but, while every care will be taken, the Editor does not hold himself responsible for possible loss of MSS.

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A Rank Outsider.

Telling of Two British Officers and a Girl.

"Who's the new man, Dolly?"

"That's a hard question."

"Why?"

"Well, the individual referred to seems to me to be just—the new man, who, as far as this regimental community is concerned, will never attain into the 'old man.'"

"Ah! what's the matter with him?"

"Matter! Nothing that I am aware of."

"Well, what's his name?"

"Jones—Absalom Jones."

"Great Scott! Why, that settles it!"

"Settles what?"

"His social status; his position in the regiment—everything!"

"What has his name to do with his position as an officer in His Majesty's Two-hundredth Foot?"

"What has his name to do with it? Could any man answering to the name of Jones—Absalom Jones—ever be anything else but a rank outsider?"

"Oh! I don't know!" replied Lieutenant Adolphus Trevor, suddenly assuming the argumentative. "I haven't the faintest idea as to the blue-bloodness or otherwise, of the worthy sub's. forbears, but I have heard that, in spite of his name, he is a rattling good fellow."

"That remains to be seen," returned Captain Rayne. "He's beastly rich, has no manners worth mentioning, and dresses like a counter-jumper."

"Well, I'm open to bet you anything you like, that, in less than a month, you will not only have changed your opinion, but will be our friend Absalom's most devoted."

Captain Arthur Rayne was in the way of being the "big dog" of the Two-hundredth's mess; when he barked every other curled and scented military canine barked in unison. But with one exception—Dolly Trevor—who took the keenest delight on any and every occasion of pinching the "big dog's" tail.

Now it was a curious fact that the gallant Captain himself was, from an ancestral point of view, a social mystery. True, his service dated well back into the conveniently dim past; not one of his present comrades of the Two-hundreth having witnessed his joining; but there were officers in more than one out-of-the-way station abroad who could recollect the talk and circumstance attending Arthur Rayne's regimental initiation.

One thing there was about him, however, in these latter days, which puzzled everybody—from subaltern to colonel. Whence did he derive the means to keep up a more than ordinarily extravagant mode of living? Four-in-hand, fine stable, Scotch shooting, up-river places—these were not maintained out of the rent-roll of a Spanish castle or estate; there must be some more tangible source of income than that to warrant expenditure more appropriate to a millionaire than to a holder of His Majesty's commission.

But though the majority wondered, they accepted his invitations; it was Trevor, and Trevor only, who doubted and declined. This piqued the Captain, who left no stone unturned to conciliate this rebel to his rule.

But though courteous and tactful, Trevor would not be "commandeered," and the two men, therefore, though outwardly civil, were mutually conscious each of the other's distrust and suspicion.

This was the state of affairs when Rayne tackled Trevor on the subject of the new recurit to the mess, and though he ailed to obtain much in the shape of satisfactory information he gleaned sufficient to almost make him believe in his mind that the cultivation of the new-comer might be attended with profit to himself.

"I needn't introduce the brute about," he argued with himself; "that wouldn't be in the running at all; introduce him, that is, except to a select few!" and the Captain smiled in a way which, had the Lieutenant seen at the moment, would inevitably have confirmed the latter gentleman in his opinion with regard to Captain Rayne's moral position.

"Anyway, I'll consult Kit about it, and, there being no time like the present, I'll run down to Molesey as soon as parade's over."

The Two-hundredth were stationed at Hounslow, convenient alike for towns and for up-river trips.

It was a hot day in July, and the parade ground was like a sandy Sahara.

Just before the commencement of the morning's duties the Colonel was seen issuing from his quarters in company with a young officer, a stranger. The pair were in close, pleasant conversation, continued until they reached the group surrounding the "colour."

"Gentlemen!" said the Colonel, "let me present you to a new comrade—Lieutenant Jones."

"Charmed to welcome you amongst us!" said Captain Rayne, as spokesman. "Not on duty to-day, I see."

"No," put in the Colonel, "Mr. Jones will simply watch the parade this morning, and come on duty to-morrow."

There could not be a greater contrast than that between this tall, fair, boyish-faced young fellow and Captain Arthur Rayne, whose dark, almost saturnine features insensibly reminded one of Velasquez's portrait of Philip II. of Spain.

It must be admitted that Absalom Jones created, on the whole, a good impression among his new messmates; while Trevor, already predisposed in his favour, at once made advances of a friendly nature.

Now, this was altogether opposed to the Captain's ideas of what ought to be, and of that which he intended, all being well, should be. He did not desire that Absalom Jones should be popular; did not wish even that friendship, in the ordinary sense of the word, should exist as between the new man and himself. Hence it was that, parade over, he at once changed into "mufti" and looked up the trains on the Thames Valley line.

"If anyone can arrange details in a little matter of this sort, it's Kit! I don't think I'm a fool by any means, but Kit is a born genius—a Circe and a Delilah in wonderful combination. What's this she says in the note I received this morning? 'Father has asked me to tell you that if you will go down to your place at Shiplake on Friday, he will meet you there, and bring a *friend* with him. His friend is young Abner Jones—Jones, the big contractor's eldest son. A younger brother, Absalom, is, I see, just gazetted to your regiment. They have both of them pots of money, so you can make a safe book if you hedge judiciously. Wire me as to what you intend doing about Friday. Love, Kit.'"

He was in the act of folding up this letter, when his servant brought in a card.

"Ladies to see you, sir."

He glanced at the pasteboard.

"Mrs. and Miss Seymour."

"Carriage from town, Hobbs?"

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"Yes, sir; and Miss Seymour told me to say as she wished to see you particular, sir."

"Oh, very well; say that I'll be done in a moment. Confounded nuisance!" he said viciously, as Hobbs left on his errand. "To think that she should come down just at the wrong moment! Wonder what's up? If they want me to go back with them, I must make some sort of an excuse. I can't let this Jones chance slip, engagement or no engagement!"

Daphne Seymour was a girl that any man might have been proud to prospectively own. Her name fitted her like the daintiest of gloves, for there was an old-world atmosphere and freshness about her that was perfectly delicious.

People often wondered at her acceptance of Arthur Rayne, and prophesied anything but happiness when they should marry.

Just as Rayne came to the carriage side, Absalom Jones strode across the square in their direction, and, with an earnest glance at Daphne, passed up the steps into the quarters.

"Who is that, Arthur?" asked Daphne eagerly.

"That!—Oh, only the fellow who joined this morning. He is something of a cad, I hear; a tradesman's son; plenty of money, but a 'rank outsider.'"

"Oh, I shouldn't have thought so!" said Daphne. "Why, he looked just like a living picture of a Saxon warrior of Alfred's time!"

"Do you think so?" said Rayne, with an ill-concealed sneer. "Sorry I can't agree with you."

"But, Arthur!" said Mrs. Seymour, "we have come to fetch you back with us. Daphne wants you to take her to the Opera to-night."

Worrying to get away, Rayne, after hurriedly expressing his regret that he could not accompany the ladies back to Cadogan Square, only waited for the carriage to be well out of sight, to take a cab for the station.

Meanwhile, Hobbs was busy putting his master's rooms to right.

"Hullo! what's this?" he exclaimed, as his eye fell upon a half-folded note upon the floor of the bedroom.

No man, folks say, is a hero to his valet, and the reason of it is, perhaps, that the servant has so many chances of illicitly acquiring information, and is not too scrupulous in availing himself of them.

Hobbs' present action was a case in point.

"'The Paddock, Molesey.' Why, that's where old Ransome, the bookie, lives; who is a trifle more than a bookie, if all's true as is said about him. '!Kit'—that's handsome Kitty, his daughter. Blest if I didn't think he had some game on down that way; and him with such a lovely sweetheart, too! If I'd a girl like Miss Seymour I'd let the rest of the sex go hang!"

It may be supposed that Hobbs sometimes "had a bit on" himself, he seemed to be so well up in betting matters. He made no scruple about reading the letter; the result being a long, low whistle of surprise and disgust.

"I ain't a saint, by a long way; but afore I'd pluck a pigeon or rather, a pair on 'em, just to give a she cat like Kitty Ransome the biggest part of the feathers, I'd drown myself, and drowning's too good for *my* man while there's a noose of honest rope, and one as can use it, knocking about."

The room door was open, and Hobbs, unusually excited, was talking louder than prudence suggested.

"Hobbs!"

"Sir."

The soldier-servant came smartly to attention as Lieutenant Trevor paused in the corridor, opposite the Captain's bedroom.

"What's that you are muttering to yourself about 'pigeons,' and the hangman's noose? And what is that you have in your hand?"

"It's a letter, sir, the Captain dropped, and——"

"Which you have read?"

"Well, sir——"

"No! I don't want to see Captain Rayne's letters! Lay it down!"

"Excuse me, sir, but unless you do read it, or get the Colonel to read it, or let me tell you what is in it, there'll be mischief, and that before the week's out."

"Well, stay where you are, while I call the Colonel."

As fortune would have it, Colonel Mildmay that moment passed along the corridor.

"Colonel," said Trevor, "something very awkward has happened. Hobbs, come here!"

Hobbs marched obediently into the corridor, and stood at attention.

"Now, Hobbs!" said Trevor, "in the ordinary case a gentleman's letters are sacred—a fact you don't seem quite to comprehend—and we should order you not only to replace the letter where you found it, but punish you severely for breach of trust; but certain circumstances connected with the interests of an officer of the regiment render exceptional action necessary. Hand the Colonel the letter you picked up—and read."

Making a pace forward, Hobbs placed the letter in Colonel Mildmay's hands.

"Now," said the latter to Trevor, after a careful perusal of it, "now the secret of Captain Rayne's extravagance in living is out; and without a doubt I am warranted in placing this letter, together with the whole facts of the case, in the hands of the War Office."

"I am afraid, Colonel, that there is nothing better to be done."

"Where is your master now?" asked the Colonel of Hobbs.

"Gone to Molesey, sir.'

"Ah! he has asked for leave over Sunday."

"What are you going to do about Jones, sir?" said Trevor.

"I hardly know. Perhaps you are not aware that his father, the man who built that wonderful railway in Morocco, and I are the oldest and closest of friends. He is a singular man—witness his naming of his sons—but a strong man, mentally and morally. His son Absalom takes after him, and you can understand, therefore, Trevor, why it is that I wish the boy to be comfortable with us."

"Certainly I do."

The old veteran then expressed his more than regret at ever having introduced Arthur Rayne to the Seymours; Daphne being an especial pet of his, and his godchild.

The Colonel and Trevor were now in the former's quarters, Hobbs having been for the time dismissed, as under suspension.

"Lieutenant Jones to see you, sir."

"Ask him in, Sergeant."

"What's the matter?" said the Colonel.

"It's a queer thing to ask, sir, after just joining, but I have strong reasons for asking for a couple of days' leave."

"Well, truth to say, I'm not surprised; for I suppose you have heard something?"

"Yes, sir; Hobbs, Captain Rayne's servant, sent for me, and has told me that which necessitates my presence at once at——"

"Molesey?"

"How did you know that, Colonel?"

Then everything came out, and after a consultation with his two friends, and with a particular injunction from the Colonel to be careful and judicious, Absalom Jones was on his way to rescue his weak-minded elder brother, and to square accounts with Arthur Rayne.

That one glance which he had had of Daphne had served to imprint on his mind something he could not, even had he so desired, shake off. That she should be "engaged" to the man of whom he was now about to demand a reckoning was, beyond measure, inexplicable; inasmuch as the mating of light with darkness is always a matter for better men's wonder.

Arrived at Molesey, and having enlisted the services of one of "Taggs" people to pilot him to the "Paddock," Sam Ransome's place, he found himself to be only just in time.

At the gate stood a brougham and pair, into which was being assisted an "old" young man of thirty or thereabouts.

A tall, handsome girl and Captain Rayne were on either side of the other. Coming down the path was old Sam Ransome him-

(*Concluded at foot of next page.*)

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self, as well known on every English racecourse as the King on his throne.

Stalwart and determined, Absalom Jones just stepped to the carriage door, and with a simple "Pardon me!" drew the trembling figure's arm through his own. Raising his hat to Kit Ransome, Absalom turned to Arthur Rayne.

"It was my intention, sir," he said gravely, "to demand an explanation of you, concerning your share in this business. I see, however, that my brother's condition is such that an instant removal to his home is necessary, so that the explanation is only deferred until an early future opportunity."

Within the hour, the brothers were safe under the paternal roof in Pont Street.

* * * * * * *

That which came to be styled the "Rayne affair" was more than the usual proverbial nine days' wonder, by reason, perhaps, of the popularity of one of the actors in it.

Absalom Jones more than justified his friend, Colonel Milward's estimate and appreciation of him, for, the Rayne despotism at an end, his genial, happy disposition set him on a pinnacle, from which he has never since descended.

Arthur Rayne deemed it advisable to visit the Continent, whither the War Secretary's request for his immediate resignation in due course followed him.

* * * * * * *

Colonel Milward was not satisfied until he had brought his godchild Daphne and the son of his friend together. His object was evident, although Mrs. Seymour expressed herself as being somewhat suspicious of the Colonel's introductions.

A year after the above events to the day, Absalom Jones wedded Daphne Seymour.

At the breakfast Trevor and the Colonel were next each other. It was a quiet corner, and no one heard the former whisper to the latter—

"That fellow Rayne once dubbed our bridegroom 'a rank outsider'; it's curious, Colonel, isn't it, that that too clever gentleman should unconsciously have been suggesting his own social epitaph."

"Very curious," echoed the Colonel.

Ralph Enderby.

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Left by the Express.

A Station-master's Story.

There was dead silence in the cottage of Will Haynes, the station-master. The station was a small one on a loop line, which had been opened for traffic rather more than four years, in the hope that the loop would develop into something important; but the cutting of the line had not worked the slightest effect in the development of the surrounding country, and the cottage and large garden were just a clearing in the edge of the wood, and as far from neighbouring cottages as it was when Mary Bird became Mrs. Haynes, and began life as the station-master's wife.

It was Sunday evening and an off-time for Haynes. After one o'clock no train stopped at that station, and only two trains passed through it. Haynes was seated on a stout wooden chair, which he had tilted, till the back rested against the wall next to the door-post. He was very comfortable, for it was a warm evening, and he was drowsy. Mary sat on the doorstep, her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands. Her back was towards the room, so Haynes could not see her face even when he turned his head.

"Your flowers look well, Mary," he remarked. He had said that twice already since dinner, but he wanted to make her talk and could think of nothing better to say.

"Pretty well," rejoined Mary wearily.

Silence again. Will Haynes was uneasy about this silence, so he made another attempt.

"The 'sturtiums are getting on, ain't they?"

"Yes."

"The peas is all right too, don't you think so?" ventured John again.

There was no answer, so John slowly let the front legs of his chair drop till they touched the floor, and then half-turned towards her.

"You feel a bit lonely?" he asked, with more tenderness than usual.

It had dawned upon him before that evening that Mary was not happy. She had been taught the trade of a tailoress as she phrased it, and while stitching away as a merry-hearted girl, she had conceived ambitious ideals, and had hoped for their realisation; but time went by and the realisation was as far off as ever. When Will Haynes came along and took a fancy to the bright-eyed, merry-speaking girl, and told her that he was to be the station-master of the little country station as soon as it was opened, telling her of the cottage and the garden and of his prospects, she resolved to accept his offer.

The little cottage appeared like a small paradise at first, and she was happy; but the aspect gradually changed. It was very lonely; her ideals faded one after another; and Will was a reserved man, saying little and outwardly cold. She maintained her merry ways at the beginning of their married life, but she fancied that Will did not care for them, and she ceased in her efforts to amuse. In point of fact, Will was much amused, but he made the common mistake of many husbands, and showed no gratitude, no warmth. Mary interpreted it wrongly, and became cold in turn and still less happy.

"You feel lonely at times?" queried Will once more, as she did not reply.

"There they come!" said Mary, with a quick jerk of her head in the direction where a curl of smoke was rendered visible in the growing darkness by the flame that accompanied it. "All enjoying themselves."

"The up-express," observed Will Haynes casually.

The headlight of the swiftly-running train was visible, and presently it dashed along the line at the end of the garden, the lights from its windows illuminating the night for a brief space.

"There they go!" cried Mary bitterly. "It's nice to be able to travel there and everywhere! I hate the people in those trains, when I see them pass; they can go about and see all kinds of sights and people, while we stick here and see nothing, day in, day out, in this forsaken place, alone nearly all the time, and nothing to do. I believe it's killing me!"

It was a struggle between rage and tears, and the former conquered for the time.

"It *is* a bit lonely," admitted Will, rather sadly. "Mary, why don't you go and sit with Blake's wife sometimes? That would be company."

"I don't like her, Will. Then the children make a noise, and she's always so taken up with the children."

"How many have they got now?" asked Will with a strange intonation in his voice.

"That last made four. They have a lot, and others——"

Mary was about to say that many other people had none, but she stopped. Will sighed, and Mary echoed the sigh unconsciously.

"Isn't there something you could do to make the time less tiring?" inquired Will helplessly.

"I could get some wool and knit things for the winter, but we can't spare the money, and we've got enough things for another three winters!" returned Mary angrily. "When I say as I've nothing to do, of course I can *make* work. I *have* to, or I should eat my heart out. I look at the trains and I see the happy people, and it hurts me so that I have to turn to and do some housework. I scrub the kitchen floor in the morning, and I often scrub it again in the afternoon. When those feelings come over me, I have to do something or I'd go mad, stark, staring mad! So I get the soap and water and scrubbing brush, and I work on that kitchen floor to relieve 'em!"

During the next few weeks his wife's fits of depression increased in frequency, for whenever he went in to the midday meal, he smelt fresh soap and the kitchen floor was damp; and in the evening it was the same smell, the same dampness, and he knew that the floor had been scrubbed at least twice that day. His own inability to create an interest for Mary served to irritate him still more, and he would go out as soon as he had finished eating, declaring that it was enough to drive him out of his home. He failed to understand that he would do more to bring happiness into the home by the exercise of patience.

It was Sunday evening once more; an autumn Sunday, with the night falling at an earlier hour. Will Haynes was standing moodily near the kitchen door, outside this time, while Mary was seated on the step. Both were staring blankly into the twilight. There had been angry words at tea-time.

"I'm going to watch the down-express pass," said Will suddenly.

He moved away. He did not wish to see the express pass; it was only an excuse to get away. Mary might be in a better mood when he returned.

He walked along the line for nearly a mile until he saw the train coming. The signal was against it, and it slowed down and stopped. This was rather a surprise for Will Haynes, but he supposed that the company was running

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an excursion on the main line where the loop joined further on, and excursions are always late. It was rather strange that expresses should be run on that loop at all, Will Haynes had thought when he first took up his duties, but he learnt that the line served as a connection with the system of another company, and it was considered policy to run them.

These thoughts were passing through Will's mind when he observed, in the dim light, a figure on the line near the bank. He saw the figure approach the train, and then he noticed that a carriage door was open. The figure climbed on to the foot-board and entered the carriage, shutting the door just as the train began to move. In half-a-dozen seconds the express was running past him with steadily-increasing speed.

Will was curious and made his way to the spot where he had noticed the dark form. There was something by the side of the line; it proved to be a large hamper. More curious than ever, Will cut the twine that secured the lid and began to examine its contents. He drew back with a suppressed cry, then emitted a whistle, and sat down to think it over.

"Yes, that will do it, if I work the thing all right," he said softly.

He took up the hamper in his strong arms and carried it to the cottage. Placing it on the floor, which, fortunately, had not been scrubbed since the morning, he called Mary, and, without answering her question, opened the lid and pulled aside a light cloth. In the hamper lay a baby, just beginning to wriggle and cry.

"Somebody's left it on the line," said Will simply, "so I thought I'd bring it here."

"I don't want other people's brats!" declared Mary harshly.

Will was nonplussed, but he contrived to hide the fact, and played his part very well.

"All right!" he said coolly. "I'll go and see the policeman in the village, and tell him. He must find somewhere for it to go. But I can't take the child with me, so I'm afraid I'll have to leave it here till I come back. S'pose you don't mind attending to it till then?"

Mary's face remained hard in expression, and Will glided out before she could reply. The baby began to whimper again, and then to cry lustily.

"Poor thing," murmured Mary softly. "It's hungry and cramped."

She took it up and soothed it by rocking it in her arms. She contrived to give it some milk and water, feeding it with little drops in a tea-spoon. Then it dropped into a slumber of peace and innocence, and Mary sat with it in her arms and waited.

It was nearly ten o'clock before Will returned, and he found Mary still sitting with the baby asleep in her arms. She held up her head with a warning expression on her face as he entered rather noisily with his heavy boots.

"S-s-sh! You'll wake her, Will!"

"Why didn't you put her in the bed?" inquired Will in a stage whisper. "Been holding her all this time?"

"I couldn't turn the clothes down without disturbing her," replied Mary in the same tone, "and she's so comfortable and easy-like here that I was afraid to venture. You can do it now."

Will moved across the kitchen to go to the bedroom, but he made so much noise that Mary stopped him.

"Hadn't you better take your boots off?" she demanded. "You'll wake her, sure enough!"

Will removed his heavy boots and together they stepped lightly into the bedroom, where he turned down the clothes, and she tenderly deposited her human burden.

"She looks all right there, don't she?" asked Will.

"Almost a pity she's got to go. I've had a talk with the village policeman, and he said at first as how he didn't think that she was found in this parish. We had an argyment about it, that's what made me so late. But it's all settled now, and he says she'll have to be taken to the infirmary or the workhouse, and that's ten miles off if it's an inch. Anyhow, she goes to-morrow."

Out of the corner of his eye Will watched the effect of his words. He saw Mary's face go white and her lips quiver. She gave one long look at the pretty bundle of humanity in the bed, and the next instant she was sobbing with her head on Will's shoulder.

"Must she go away, Will? Oh, can't we keep her?"

Will passed his arm round his wife; an irritating cough prevented him from speaking for nearly a minute, but he got the better of it at length.

"Yes, I should say so. She won't cost much to keep for a time, and I may get a lift up. I daresay the policeman won't be much upset at not having to take her to the workhouse."

"But, Will, I s'pose we *may* keep her?" inquired Mary, with sudden fear. "There isn't anything in the basket to say we mustn't?"

They looked in the hamper and overhauled its remaining contents, consisting of baby clothing. There was no note, no trace of identity.

"There's nothing agen it," said Will, "so we'll keep her."

"I can look after her," said Mary confidently. "I'll take care she doesn't get on the line."

"Ah, that reminds me!" exclaimed Will. "I must rig up a gate at the end of the garden to keep her off the line. I'll do it to-morrow!" he added quite seriously, as though he fancied that the baby would be running out on the line before they were aware of it if he were not quick about the task.

"What shall we call her?" inquired Mary, when they had returned to the kitchen. "I think it would be a good idea to give her a name that would remind us how she came. Suppose we call her Express, eh?"

Mary looked at him as if she had had an inspiration. Will shook his head doubtfully.

"Don't seem to be a very handy sort of name," he explained. "And we might mix it up with the trains. Never heard a girl called that, have you?"

"That wouldn't matter!" exclaimed Mary. "I don't see why such a darling as that should be bound to have a name that any other girl can have. Well," she continued, after a pause, "suppose we call her Pressie now? That's nice and handy, and it will remind us just the same."

So it was settled. They crept to the door of the bedroom and listened. No sound. They crept back again. Will put on a pair of light boots which he called his slippers, and together they went out into the garden. Their hands came together by some mysterious influence, and they stood drinking in the balmy air.

They looked up at the stars, they talked of their prospects—of what they would do for Pressie as she grew up, and how she would look when she was grown up. Everything was so different, so bright; life was so well worth living.

"Oh, I'm so glad she has come; I'm so happy, Will!" laughed Mary.

"I say, you haven't left the bedroom window too wide open, have you?" asked Will in sudden alarm. "We don't want her to catch cold. And you mustn't scrub the kitchen floor so much, you know, or she'll——"

"I shan't want to, you silly man!" laughed Mary.

It was so pleasant to hear her laugh! The whole world was changed for her; she had tasted the sweets of motherhood.

Will Payne.

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A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCESHIP.

A Seaside Meeting, a Parting, and a Reunion.

"Then you do not think it very dreadful of me, talking to you without an introduction?"

"Not I. Why should I? It would be impossible to look upon anyone as dreadful in whose delightful company I felt such pleasure."

Then there was a laugh upon both sides, and a mock bow on the part of the first speaker in acknowledgment of the compliment. It was the seaside, and these two were feeling the delightful sensation of freedom from everyday formalities met with in the ordinary humdrum life of a large city—hence this meeting. He was a young man of about twenty-seven. She was a girl of about twenty-two, very pretty and full of fun. It was a case of mutual attraction. He longed to know her, she wished to know him. As no one came forward to introduce them—well, there they were on their holidays, what could it matter if they dispensed with that form just for once; the chances were they would never meet again. That was what she thought—he hoped otherwise.

"You cannot think," she said, "what a bore it is coming away with only an aunt—and an old maid at that—to look after you."

"I can quite understand," he answered; "almost as bad as going on your honeymoon in company of your mother-in-law, as well as your bride. They must both be in the way."

She laughed.

"Auntie will be frightfully distressed when she knows I have spoken to you,."

"Then don't tell her."

"Oh! but I told her I was going to speak to you, and the poor old soul preached at me for over an hour."

"Poor little girl."

"Thank you. She has all sorts of notions, you know; she says a fellow has no respect for a girl who will allow him to talk to her without proper introduction; do tell me that's not true."

"My dear girl, that's all nonsense, in one sense at least; it depends on the girl. Let me try to explain. Now, there are plenty of girls, empty headed things, who come away for a holiday with the one intention of speaking to any fellow who will speak to them; anything is good enough so long as it is a man. Now, those girls I have no respect for from the start. Then, there are girls like yourself. You did not come away with the intention of speaking to anyone you did not know; at least, that is what I think. You found it intolerably dull, and I flatter myself that I don't look as though I was satisfied with anything. You saw, I daresay, that I wanted to know you; what happened? I venture to hope something like this—'Old aunt a bore, no one here I know or care about, somebody there seems as though he would like to know me—perhaps pleasant company,' and—well—here we are."

"Yes, you are quite right; that was exactly how I looked at it."

"I knew it, therefore, how could I look upon you with disrespect? I should be sorry to think that after you leave me you would be at once with another; but I know you will not do so, therefore it is all right."

"Hadn't we better know each other's names? It would be more convenient, don't you think so?"

"Certainly. Gilbert Somers is mine; but stay, I have a card. And yours?"

"Kitty Dunstan. I like Gilbert awfully—and, oh! you come from London, so do I." She blushed, and seemed rather disturbed. He did not notice, however.

"Do you? How jolly; we may meet again at home. I'm awfully glad."

"But London is such a big place, we may not after all, you know."

"Don't be unkind. You would like to meet, would you not?"

"Oh, yes, I hope we shall; but really we ought to change the subject; we must have been talking nonsense for the last hour."

"I like this kind of nonsense, one gets tired of being serious in town; but what shall we talk about?"

"Anything you like—the place, the people. Do you like it, and what kind of people do you like best?"

"If I answered that, we should be getting personal once more. Try again."

"Then how goes the enemy?"

"The time you mean? Half-past twelve."

"Then I must fly, lunch at one, you know, and auntie gets so wild if I keep her waiting. No, you must not come with me."

"We meet this afternoon in Devonshire Park, don't we?"

"If I can get rid of auntie—three o'clock—*au revoir*. And she put out a little gloved hand.

"*Au revoir*," he said, giving it an affectionate little squeeze.

Gilbert remained seated for some time after she had left him, considering himself a lucky fellow. He was not as a rule impulsive, but there was something in the girl that attracted him from the first moment he saw her; and now—although they had known each other for so short a time, he knew that he was head over ears in love for the first time in his life. He felt very happy—Eastbourne had never seemed so pleasant—and he walked back to his hotel in a very contented frame of mind.

Gilbert Somers was a lucky fellow, blest in no small measure by the world's goods. He was wealthy, good looking, and easy tempered; a very charming companion, and yet he had remained single. He was not easily satisfied; he liked girls' society immensely, but he was careful in his choice. Kitty Dunstan appealed to him as no other girl had done. She was so fresh, with a most winning and charming manner, and a lady evidently brought up in the best society. He laughed often at his good luck, and felt in the best of tempers.

The weather was kind enough to assist his enjoyment, and they sat in one of the most secluded seats in one of the delightful paths of Devonshire Park, the world was a delightful place to these two. While the band discoursed sweet music from the music garden they talked more nonsense.

"Auntie wanted me to go for a drive this afternoon," she said. "I was terribly afraid I should have to go."

"How did you get out of it?"

"I told her I was in love with the first violin, and that he was going to play a solo for my especial benefit, so that I was bound to come. That was not a lie—the latter part, I mean. Auntie hates music, so I knew she wouldn't come with me. I shock her dreadfully, I'm afraid."

"A capital excuse. I shall have to ask that first violin to dine with me, if he is going to do many good turns like this. How did you know him?"

She laughed.

"Oh, another of my informal acquaintances; he fell over my parasol the other afternoon, and apologised profusely, so I told him he must do penance. He was very humble. I told him he must play one of my favourite pieces, and he is going to oblige this afternoon."

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"How nice. I wish I could do something for you."

"Oh, I can easily give you something to do, if you wish it."

"Please do."

"Talk auntie round to more modern views; she is such a Puritan, you can't think. If you could do that, I should be everlastingly grateful."

He sighed.

"The twelve labours of Hercules rolled into one," he answered. "I am afraid my powers of persuasion are not very good. If you will give me the opportunity I will try."

"How brave of you. Well, you shall try. We shall be on the Parade this evening. I will introduce you."

"And I will try to acquit myself well for your sake."

"Thank you, Gilbert," she answered.

"How nice of you, Kitty, to use that name. I had no notion it could be made so pretty. Don't call me anything else any more."

She held up a warning finger.

"We are talking nonsense again; let us talk of the people. Oh! there is my first violin; let us go and listen. I am sure he will be sorry if he does not see me."

Gilbert was introduced to Miss Dunstan's aunt, Miss Selby, in the evening, and tried to make himself agreeable.

He was left alone with her shortly after, Kitty going into the town for something.

"I do hope, Mr. Somers, my niece has not shocked you, for I'm sure I do not know what to do sometimes, she seems to have no idea of propriety."

Gilbert laughed to himself at Miss Selby's idea of propriety, whilst he promptly did his best to allay her fears.

"I should not mind so much," continued she, "but I do think that when a girl is engaged she should behave with more caution."

Gilbert started. His heart sank; he felt as though he had received a blow from an invisible hand. "Engaged! engaged!—Kitty, I mean, Miss Dunstan—engaged?"

"Yes. A good match for him, too. Kitty has money, he has not; but if she loves him, that is the great thing. You did not know, then? Engaged, oh, yes."

Poor Gilbert, it was a blow to him. He did not wait for Kitty. With more haste than was perhaps in accordance with politeness, he bade Miss Selby good-night, and walked moodily down the Parade in the depths of melancholy.

He felt hardly against the girl at first. Was she playing with him, was she as innocent as she looked; did she take pleasure in tampering with men's affections? No, she could not mean to delude him. Perhaps it was his own fault; he should have taken it as it was meant—a chance acquaintanceship, and nothing more. It was done now. He allowed himself to fall in love, and it was not easy to climb out.

He walked to his hotel, and sat down to write to Kitty.

"My dear Miss Dunstan," he wrote, "I am the unhappy recipient of a piece of news this evening that seems at once to have altered the whole course of my life. This, you may guess, is the knowledge of your engagement. For your sake, my dear girl, I cannot feel sorry, and from the bottom of my heart I wish you every happiness. It is, perhaps, wrong of me, under the circumstances, to say that during the brief time we have been acquainted, you have become more and more to me, and I feel it very sorely that we must end our friendship.

"I say we must end it, not that I blame you; but you seem now to have become so much a part of my life that I think it better that we should not meet again. As our lives must now lie in different ways, your presence would only make me long for that which I see now can never be.

"Forgive me if I pain you in any way by this letter. I shall remember the last few days as amongst the happiest of my life, and I can never forget you. With every wish for your future happiness, Believe me, yours sincerely,

"Gilbert Somers."

Kitty was angry with her aunt for telling Gilbert about her engagement, but, on the receipt of his letter, she saw where she had made the mistake, and she broke down utterly. She never thought, in her careless way, that there was a possibility of Gilbert falling in love with her; she only felt the pleasure of his company; she had not meant to be unkind. Now she saw what she had done, and shed bitter tears of repentance. Out of a pleasant little comedy had come a tragedy that she had never dreamt of. With trembling hand and in true penitence she wrote back—

"My Dear Mr. Somers,—I hardly know how to write an answer to your letter. I did not know what I was doing; I should not have spoken. I little foresaw this. You ask me for my forgiveness. It is I that should ask yours. My aunt was right in a way, and a way I did not think of. There is only one thing I beg of you; do not think I meant to trifle with you; I never thought you would care for me beyond a seaside acquaintance. I see I have much to learn, but why should I have to learn my lesson at your expense? Why should you suffer that I might be taught? In *you* I have nothing to forgive. In *me* you have everything. Try and forget me. Let me go out of your life; and, oh, forgive me if you can. Thank you for your wishes for my happiness. At present it seems in the distance. Good-bye.—Yours sincerely and repentant, "Kitty Dunstan."

Another letter passed between them, and then it seemed as though they had passed out of each other's lives for good.

Gilbert returned to town, but his spirit for the time appeared crushed. He took no interest in anything. It was the first time he had been in love, and it took too great a hold upon him to be thrown off at once.

He had no business to go back to, to take him out of himself, which was bad; and he kept to his own society, and brooded over his trouble, which was worse.

He was for a time, in his own estimation, the most miserable man in London. He was getting over the worst, and was beginning to mix with his fellow-creatures again. And one evening, in the beginning of November, found him indulging in a dinner at the "Trocadero."

He was sitting at a table with a friend he had not seen for a considerable time, and they were discussing the most expensive menu and old times. A couple of bottles of champagne in ice by the table proved that the world was favourably inclined towards them. Gilbert had not much affection for his friend, Jack Wilson, but was enjoying his dinner, and the conversation, as an accompaniment, went well.

"By-the-bye," said Wilson, in the course of conversation, "did I tell you I was engaged, Gilbert?"

"No, my dear chap. Let me congratulate you."

"Thanks, awfully. It's rather a lucky thing for me; there's plenty of money flying round in her quarter."

"Lucky man. I suppose you are awfully fond of her, Jack?"

"Oh, well, I suppose I am in a way; she is good enough to like me; never was given to be sentimental myself, you know, but as there was money at the end of it, I went in and won."

Gilbert looked serious. He did not like this kind of thing. He hated the idea of marriage for money; but he felt he must take an interest now for his friend's sake.

"And who is the girl, may I ask?"

"Kitty Dunstan. I don't know whether you know her? What's the matter, old man! You're not ill, are you?"

Gilbert had turned white, and had dropped his spoon and fork upon his plate, which caused a little jump from several diners at neighbouring tables.

"No, the room's very warm, and these sweets are rather rich. I'll have some wine to pull me up." He drank two glasses straight off and seemed better. "Kitty Dunstan," he said, "yes I have met her. Look here"—he said, suddenly rising—"don't you

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hurry. I'm going to the door to get some fresh air; it's too hot in here. Come when you're finished."

Gilbert was in a worse position now than before. He would have borne up, believing that she was going to be happy, but how could he remain silent and let the girl he loved better than his life marry a man who cared practically nothing for her, only for what she would bring him.

It was terrible, yet what could he do!

He dare not tell her himself; he couldn't, it was unbearable. He at last decided it was impossible for him to do anything. He would go abroad, travel anywhere, and try to forget.

He did not see Wilson again. He dare not trust himself, and a month or two went by whilst he made arrangements for his tour.

It was about the middle of January, and Gilbert was sitting alone in his dismantled room the evening prior to his departure.

A servant entered, with a card upon a silver tray. He took it absently, but paled, and caught his breath as he read the name of Miss Dunstan.

Why, oh, why, did she come?

To see her would bring back memories he was doing his best to forget. But he could not send her away, and so he asked for her to be shown in.

He rose as she entered, and noticed that she was prettier than ever, though pale; and she looked as if she had been crying.

"Gilbert," she said, "you will forgive me for coming. You are going away, I know, and I wanted to see you before you went. I am in trouble, and I wanted sympathy."

"My dear little girl, what on earth is the matter? And why do you come to me—not that I wouldn't do anything for you—I shall always be ready to help you—but is there not someone else you ought to go to?"

"No! No! Gilbert." And her voice trembled. "He does not love me—not myself; it is only my money, and I am miserable."

Gilbert felt as though a load had been lifted from him. He felt happier, in spite of her trouble, than he had been for months past.

"Kitty, you know it. I am very sorry for you. I have known it some time, that is why I am going away. I could not bear to see you married to him."

"You have known it! Oh, then, why did you not tell me? You would have let me marry him, and you knew he did not love me. Oh, how could you!" And she burst into tears.

"Kitty, listen," he said, sitting down beside her and taking her hand. "How was it possible for me to tell you? I hardly think you would have believed me. Your aunt, everyone would have thought I was doing it for the sake of breaking off your engagement for my own ends. No, I couldn't have told you; do you not see that, Kitty?"

"Yes! Yes! Of course you could not. I heard it from his own lips. I was at a dance and was sitting out with my partner, when I heard Jack's voice from behind a screen. He was talking to another fellow, and about me. I could not help but listen. It was very hard for me. He said love was not a part of his nature—money was more in his line. Then his friend laughed and said he was a lucky fellow. Jack laughed too, and said 'yes, I rather think I am!' It came to an end that night. I shall never speak to him again."

"Thank God!" was Gilbert's muttered ejaculation. Aloud he said "Poor little girl, I am so sorry for you."

"I knew you would be, that was why I came. I wanted your sympathy. Auntie wouldn't give me any. She said I was foolish to give him up. Oh! I hated her then, and then I came to say good-bye." She looked up at Gilbert, and her voice trembled: "You are going away?"

"Why am I going away?" he exclaimed. "Kitty, it depends on you. Will you send me away? Ours was a chance acquaintance, cannot it ripen into something deeper? Kitty, you know I love you. I thought never to be able to tell you that again. Must I go?"

"I think you must go," she said. Then looked up at him and smiled. "But not to-morrow—wait awhile—and we needn't take auntie with us, unless you like."

Baxter Thompson.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have just secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his prophecies for this week's birthdays.

August 12.—An unfortunate anniversary; go carefully in business. Some sickness in the family circle.

Those in love will have crosses and opposition, especially if born in the early morning, or from six to nine p.m.

The day is rather favourable to buy and sell from eight a.m. to five p.m. Deal with professional persons in the afternoon.

A child born to-day will be ambitious, generous, and cheerful. It will experience much sorrow, and be subject to accidents.

August 13.—Those whose birthdays fall to-day will have a year of change. Some grief in the family circle.

Girls will have many annoyances in love and domestic affairs; will need to be cautious with strangers as some deceit is shown.

The day is good for asking favours, seeking work, travelling, and introductions. Not good for love affairs and marriage.

A child born to-day will be fortunate and make its way in life.

August 14.—Men born on this day should not speculate; with care business will succeed.

A quiet time with love affairs. Girls receive good news from absent lovers.

A child born to-day should keep in employ. The mind will be active, witty, and ingenious. Fond of travel and literature.

August 15.—Not a fortunate year for business to those who celebrate their birthdays to-day. Farmers, builders, and landlords need care in their dealings.

Girls born from eight to nine p.m. will meet with deceit and trouble in love affairs. Many curious experiences.

The day is evil for letter writing, asking favours, removing, or for letting property. Defer travelling, and avoid law.

A child born to-day will be secretive, cunning, and difficult to know. Rather fortunate if born about noon.

August 16.—An unsettled birthday; the year will bring change and anxiety. Guard against quarrels and mishaps. Insure against fires.

Those in love, both sexes, will have trouble and disappointment.

A child born to-day will be suspicious, untidy, hot-tempered, and subject to mishaps. If a girl she will have an unhappy marriage.

August 17.—A quiet year; things proceed as usual. Some discord with friends or professional persons.

Girls need extra care with the opposite sex; some deceit and attentions from married men.

A child born to-day will have a quiet life. Will be clever and artistic, but abrupt and hold some strange beliefs.

August 18.—A good year for business for those whose birthdays come on this day. Friends will be useful.

Girls should seek introductions and new friends. Those who were born in the early morning will have chances of marriage.

A child born here will rise in life. Will be generous, affectionate, ingenious, and inventive. Will make friends easily.

Asturel.

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A PRESCRIPTION FOR TWO.

Which Brought Happiness to Both Doctor and Patient.

Doctor Gilman rapped briskly on the front door, and drew the collar of his fur coat higher to shut out the sharp north wind. Inside the house there was a moment's confusion, and then Mrs. Green, assisted by six little Greens, opened the door.

"Why, doctor!" she cried in surprise. The little Greens lined up, and held their mouths open.

"The governess, I hear, is ill." Doctor Gilman announced the fact deliberately. He stepped into the hall, holding his medicine case in one hand, while, with the other, he made an opening in the line of little Greens.

Mrs. Green closed the door and protested. "The governess *is* here, but she isn't ill. That is, no more'n usual. She's always ailing," in a disparaging voice. "Did she send for you?"

The doctor ignored her question. He threw off his fur coat, picked up his medicine case again, and asked calmly, "Where is she?"

"In the sitting room," replied Mrs. Green, her arms akimbo. Instantly six small voices cried, "In here," and the noisy troop made a dash for a weary-looking figure lying on the couch near the fire-place.

Doctor Gilman paid no attention to the figure on the couch. He blocked the entrance against Mrs. Green, and said firmly, "Come children, I'm here to visit the sick only."

The Greens, unused to obeying, looked sulky.

"Hurry up," came the doctor's strong, cheerful voice, and as they filed slowly past him, casting longing glances behind, he added. "Now don't let me see one of you back here again until my visit ends." His glance included both mother and children.

Then he closed the door, drew a chair in front of the couch, and sat down.

"I have come to prescribe for you, Miss Eggy," he said, looking for the first time at the girl on the couch.

At his abrupt entrance, Becky Eggy had sat up. She leant an elbow against the back of the couch, and rested her throbbing head on her hand. She was perplexed at this unasked call from Doctor Gilman.

Life was always offering perplexities to Becky Eggy. The first had been her queer little name, and the last and greatest was what to do with her queer little self.

At least, Becky Eggy thought she must be a queer little self because everything she loved had been taken away, and so many things she did not love had been substituted, while she stood by, powerless to shape her life. In the midst of such great perplexities, Doctor Gilman's visit was the least.

"I am not ill, doctor," she replied in a wondering tone.

Doctor Gilman smiled inscrutably at the fire, and held his palms up to the warmth. Then he turned suddenly, and looked keenly at Becky Eggy. She fidgeted nervously with her black dress with one transparent hand. What was going to happen? Had he come to tell her she must give up her little school? Poor little Becky Eggy! What would become of her then?

All her faults swept in order before her; she could not make the big boys mind. How was that possible, when she had not strength enough even to shake the little ones? Her head ached so badly she often had to rest it on the desk; perhaps he had heard how, only a few days before, she was so tired she had insisted that six times eight are fifty-four. Sitting there before Dr. Gilman, she felt painfully ignorant and weak.

She looked at the doctor's hand lying on his knee. Once, when she had been so ill that even she was obliged to admit the fact, he had taken her head between his hands and pressed the ache out and she had slept.

As if in response to the memory, the doctor leant forward and laid his hand a moment, in his most professional manner, on her hot forehead. Then he leant back in his chair and said in a most unprofessional tone, "Tired little Becky Eggy!"

She rested her head against the high back of the couch, and hastily closed her eyes, but not until the doctor saw the gathering tears. He scanned the thin face and the shabby black dress with a curious expression on his face. Then he said abruptly, "So you are not ill?"

Becky shook her head. She could not trust herself to speak after the sympathy in the doctor's voice as he said, "Tired little Becky Eggy."

But his voice was not sympathetic now. It was brusque. "People who are well usually have a little colour in their faces and plumpness in their cheeks."

"It's walking so far in the snow and cold," said Becky faintly.

"You are not strong enough to walk. You ought to ride."

Becky attempted to smile. "But the 'ought' doesn't provide the horses."

"It does in this case," still more abruptly.

Becky's eyes opened widely now in spite of the tears. Doctor Gilman was incomprehensible. She made no reply, and he seemed to expect none. "Your school worries you, does it not? The big boys are a tiresome lot."

Becky gasped. It was the school after all. She dropped her eyes and a pitiful expression came into her face. Her voice faltered.

"I'll try to do better, doctor. You see, I am not strong enough to punish them. Perhaps, if I tried harder, I could manage all right—I'll try——" There was a choke in her voice.

Doctor Gilman looked at the thin hands moving nervously on the black skirt, and at Becky's strained, anxious face. She did not look equal to the emergency of managing even the smallest Green!

The doctor's lips smiled, but not his eyes. They filled as they looked into Becky's and her perplexity increased. His abrupt tone vanished, and his next words were very gentle:

"Will you take my prescription?"

She glanced down at the medicine chest on the floor, and said submissively, "Are you going to give me a tonic?"

Doctor Gilman laughed a little and pushed the medicine case away with his foot. "I brought that with me as a bulwark against the Greens."

Becky responded with a smile, and went on more cheerfully "I am willing to take everything you advise, doctor."

Doctor Gilman suddenly sat up very straight. "I prescribe a home——" He was looking at the fire now, but he saw Becky's lip quiver and her hands touch her black dress, "and care and—love."

"No, no," she whispered, "you know, perhaps you do not know—they are all gone. There is no one left except me."

Doctor Gilman looked at her with a smile which made his rugged face beautiful. "But it's my home I'm prescribing, dear little Becky Eggy, and my care, and my love. If they could bring you happiness——" The doctor did not finish the sentence, but looked wistfully at Becky.

She gazed at the fire now. Its warmth seemed to have settled, suddenly, around her heart. She had felt so useless a few moments before, so shorn of all womanly power and dignity. Now, her soul suddenly expanded in the knowledge of a satisfying love.

She looked up shyly, and said hesitatingly, "if your home and your—love—would bring me happiness, would I be the only one benefited by your prescription?"

"Dear little girl," said Doctor Gilman. He bent and kissed her face, soft in a new pink glow. "It's useless to confess that I have been prescribing for myself all the while."

A. Lee.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

THE MAN FROM JAMAICA.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The Society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation. The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room, Cynthia however stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope. While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard. On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Mrs. Norton that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. Mrs. Norton asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind. Mrs. Norton and Cynthia go to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, entices Cynthia to bet heavily, by which she loses £800. Mrs. Norton has also lost heavily, and to pay her own and Cynthia's debts, she prevails upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000. That same night at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, Mrs. Norton comes face to face with a man from Jamaica who knows all about her past life.

FOR a moment I thought Frankie was going to faint, the next, however, her power of will came into play. She dropped my arm, drew herself up, forced a smile to her lips, and with a self-command wonderful to witness, gaily disclaimed any feeling of ill-health or fatigue.

"I've been waltzing too much," she said to her agitated and concerned admirers, "and am just a little giddy. Indeed, it's nothing else, and you mustn't trouble any more about me. I'll rest the next dance, if you don't mind"—she smiled sweetly at her partner—"and Cynthia will take care of me."

She passed quickly from the room. Percival Hope and his companion remained behind.

Going swiftly down the corridor Frankie made her way to a seat well screened by flowers and ferns from observation.

"Cynthia," she said abruptly, "you've got to do something for me. Yes, it's in connection with that man. I must see him alone; speak to him if only for five minutes."

"Shall I tell him to come to you, Frankie?"

She drew me back impetuously.

"No, no, that would never do. Percival Hope doesn't mean to let him out of sight if he can help it, but you will have to make him."

"How?"

"You must go to Percival and talk to him, smile, laugh, jest, make love to him—do anything to get him out of the way, if only for five minutes. You can do it if you like, Cynthia. If I know anything of men, Hope won't need much persuasion to flirt with you. Your face always attracted him, and to-night you're looking at your best."

"Frankie, I can't! I don't know what to say."

She took me by the arm.

"You've *got* to," she said fiercely. "Listen, if I don't see that man to-night, alone, the game's up. I'm done for—

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ruined—and you with me. I tell you he knows things about me in Jamaica, things that will smash me utterly if they get about. Hope brought him here to-night to identify me, and is going to buy his knowledge to ruin me. But give me the chance of seeing, of speaking to him by myself and I'll defeat Hope yet. In five minutes, five minutes I can turn him round my finger. Don't I know—haven't I won every man I wanted to all my life? Only one I couldn't make a fool of, and he——" She paused—"he is in your hands. Go, go quickly. Get Hope out of the way and leave the rest to me. You won't fail me Cynthia? Promise."

"I'll do my best," I stammered, "but——"

"If you fail," she said quickly, "I shall kill myself. Now you know what to expect."

She pushed me from her as she spoke, and, too frightened to protest I went towards the ballroom. How I wished the corridor was twice, no, twenty times as long! How I longed to be anywhere in the wide world but there.

I have never experienced such mental confusion and discomfort as I suffered in the next few minutes. I was weighed down by the thought of what I had to do, even while I rebelled at having to go through it.

What could be more humiliating! I was to induce, if needs be, force, Percival Hope into conversation with me; he, whom at our last meeting I had dismissed with such indignant scorn.

As I approached the ballroom the band struck up a waltz. A young fellow came towards me quickly.

"Our dance, I think, Miss Hamilton," he said pleasantly. "I've been searching for you everywhere."

I felt myself turn crimson. It was impossible for me to dance with him. And yet what excuse could I make?

In my distress I fell back upon the truth, or rather part of it.

"If you don't mind I'd rather not dance this number, I want to stand here and watch instead."

"It's cooler on the stairs or in the conservatory," he suggested.

"I'm not tired," I explained, "but I want to stay here."

He looked surprised but made no further protest. Side by side we stood—just in the doorway. Amidst the crowd of dancers Percival Hope's great height made him conspicuous. He was standing by the window talking to Mary Vernon.

I stared hard at him but he either did not or would not see me. Once indeed he flashed a look in my direction, but when I smiled in answer, he deliberately turned his head. I bit my lips, colouring with mortification.

My companion regarded me, I thought, with suppressed amusement. More than one man glanced at me curiously—I fancy I must have looked distressed—and Chesterton, who was dancing with Mrs. Blount, positively frowned as he passed by. The situation was intolerable. I could not remain longer where I was, gaped at by people who should have known better. Time was passing, at any moment Percival might leave, and with him the man from Jamaica. And then——

An inspiration seized me. "I want to speak to Miss Vernon," I said to my partner, "can you pilot me across the room? She's sitting over there next to that tall man by the window."

"Do you mean Hope," said the youth. "Yes, I'll take you with pleasure."

Mary greeted me very nicely, she smiled and made room for me on the window seat. Percival bowed gravely and became interested in the ceiling.

"Aren't you going to speak to me, Mr. Hope?" I said at last. "I've been expecting you all the evening; indeed, I've kept a dance for you—but if you're going to be cross!" I showed him my programme as I spoke, with one vacant number. "Aren't you grateful?"

He looked at me with such a puzzled air, but I smiled quite steadily and motioned him to sit beside me, moving my skirts with a little gesture I had learnt from Frankie.

"Do you think my frock is pretty?" I went on, "or do you like me best in pink? You remember my pink dress surely—you sent me some roses to match."

"I remember quite well," he said slowly. "What a sweet, shy convent girl I thought you. I think, Miss Cynthia, all things considered, I liked you best in pink."

"Is that why you did not send me any flowers to-day?" I asked.

He gazed at me very earnestly.

"Would you have worn them?" he said anxiously.

"I wore your roses."

"But things were different then."

"Is it so much more difficult to like me now?" I whispered.

For a moment he made no reply. I glanced at him quickly, but what I saw in his face made me turn my head, my cheeks hot with shame. Mary Vernon, a surprised look in her eyes, had walked away. My late partner had also disappeared. Percival and I were left together.

I took a swift glance up and down the room. The man from Jamaica had drifted some distance from where we sat and was standing disconsolately alone. Through the doorway at the far end I caught a glimpse of Frankie. She was leaning on Sir Gregory's arm, and was walking towards—yes, towards the man from Jamaica.

At all costs I must keep Percival from seeing her, from stopping her. I leant back, the window curtains shading me from the room.

Percival leant towards me.

"It is—difficult, Cynthia," he said at last.

"Do you wish so much to dislike me?" I asked.

"I desire more to love you," he replied, and moved closer, resting his arm behind me on the lounge.

"And yet you think me frivolous, shallow?" said I, fencing desperately.

"I am not in the mood to discuss your faults. I like better to look at your face. Look at me, Cynthia."

He took my hands and turned me gently towards him. I forced myself to meet his eyes, and read therein that which for the moment made me forget all things, save that we two were together; forget that I was holding him by trickery, keeping him by stratagem, playing with him and with his love—for what? I remembered then, remembered that I was fighting for time, that my cousin might save herself—she had said it—from disgrace, and at the cost of honour, self-respect, love, ay, *his* love, I must play the game to the end, fight it to a finish.

"I have not thought you cared for me much," I said.

He sighed impatiently. "Things have been against us," he said, "and are still. I had not meant to speak to you while you were with your cousin, but Fate has willed it otherwise. You have thought me harsh and cruel in the past, Cynthia, you may have occasion to do so again, but I would ask you to trust me, to believe that I act for the best, so far as I can see it, and always in sympathy and tenderness to you. Indeed, my thoughts are much for you, and all my love. Will you have me, Cynthia?"

I have no words to paint the tenderness, the gentleness in his voice, no words could tell the sorrow in my heart, that I could not freely give to him the trust, the confidence that he invited, that I could not gladly, proudly accept his love.

"I am impatient, dear, I want your answer," he took my hand. I let it lie unresisting in his clasp, and for a moment we sat silent.

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CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

New Series of Stories.

My cousin had reached the man from Jamaica, and was speaking to him; he flushed at her approach, and glanced round apprehensively for Percival. Thank Heaven, the curtains sheltered him from view; thank Heaven, his face was turned to me so that he could not see the man's imploring look. My cousin smiled, the man grew quieter, more composed, gradually yielded to her fascination, and—yes, followed her from the room.

My eyes fixed on the clock, I sat wound up to bear what might ensue in the next five minutes. Never did the seconds tick so slowly. Five minutes—it was an age, eternity.

"I am waiting for your answer, Cynthia."

"A minute longer," I said, trembling, "a minute." The time was up and I was free to speak.

"I couldn't marry a man who tried to make Frankie unhappy," I said slowly. "If you would think and act differently towards her——" I paused, anxiously watching his face. "Promise me that from this evening you will let her be and *then*," I laid my hand upon his arm. "Poor Frankie," I said softly, "haven't you any pity?"

For a while he made no answer; he was, I think, softened by what I said, for his eyes were quite tender. It may be that he would have given the promise that I asked, and so have altered both our lives. But on the instant, as he was about to speak, he caught a glimpse of Frankie gazing eagerly in our direction. He looked from her to me, then with a flash of comprehension, glanced quickly round the room searching, I felt it, for the man from Jamaica!

Wrath on his face he turned upon me. Instinctively I shrank from him towards my cousin.

He pulled me back quite roughly into the shadow of the curtains.

"So you've been fooling me," he said, in a hard, grating voice, "leading me on, idiot that I am, from one crass stupidity to another. A dupe, is that it? A dupe to your innocent face and childish ways, a fool who has plucked out his heart for you to kick at. Oh, you have played your part to admiration. You have hood-winked me to the top of your bent. Do you think I don't see through it all, understand the whole mean business from beginning to end? Your cousin wanted to get hold of Casellis, the man that I brought here to-night, and you, as her decoy, were told off to befool me. You have succeeded to perfection! I congratulate you on your ready wit, your aptitude for learning how to cheat is wonderful. No, you shall *not* go yet. I have still more to say. Had you asked me honestly, fairly to let your cousin speak to Casellis, I would not have refused you. I say it, I mean it. What have you gained by your deceit? I loved you, Cynthia, truly, deeply, as a man can. You were to me something apart, far different from, above all other women. My thoughts of you were moments of exquisite tenderness, you were sweet and fresh to me as a Spring morning. And now," he broke off and pointed to my cousin. "*Now*," he said, "I realise that you and she are hideously alike."

He flashed a last look of indignation, then turned away. I sank limp and inert on to the window-seat. My limbs seemed to have grown powerless, and I felt stunned. I watched the dancers in a dull, unapprehending fashion, and wondered they could be so happy and light-hearted. I did not seem to feel anger at Percival's injustice, nor resentment at Frankie's selfishness. I was dazed with pain and misery, and could not analyse my sensations. Only I longed greatly for a quiet place where I could suffer alone.

A peremptory signal from Frankie roused me.

I got up and wearily made my way towards her.

"You're looking tired," she said, "come with me and have something to eat. I've secured chicken and champagne for you."

She drew me into an ante-room, put me in a chair, and forced me to eat.

"You've done awfully well, Cynthia, and I'm very grateful to you. I've talked Casellis over, and he's consented to give Percival the slip if I pay him a thousand pounds. But he'll only wait until twelve o'clock to-morrow. If he doesn't have the money then he'll go to Hope and give me away, lock, stock, and barrel. Never mind what he knows—it's quite enough to do for me—that's all you need trouble over. Now there's only one way I can get the money, the few hundreds I have left of what Nathan advanced I want for present expenses. Sir John has lent me all he can, not another penny can be squeezed from him. There's only Fluffy left, and he, as you know, is starting for Paris early in the morning. I dare not leave it till then, at all costs I must get the cheque to-night."

I looked at her despairingly.

"It isn't possible, Frankie. It's past midnight."

"I know, but Fluffy never turns in till quite late. I would go to him myself but my absence would be commented on. I've made a great hit to-night, Cynthia, and I want to follow it up. It would be a great mistake to leave so early in the evening. Now *your* going won't matter."

"Why, Frankie, you don't mean to send *me* to Fluffy's?" I asked piteously.

She glanced at me, uncertain whether to frighten or cajole. I think my face must have startled her, I felt very white and tired—for with one of her swift changes she grew gentle and caressing.

"I was her dear little Cynthia, if only I would do this one thing for her she would be for ever grateful. If I refused what could she do? She had no one else to turn to," this and much more in the same strain with kisses and endearments.

"I'm not asking you to do anything wrong, Cynthia. It's a little unconventional certainly, but you're not usually so particular. Besides, you can settle with Fluffy about your shares at the same time. The bets oughtn't to go unpaid after to-morrow. If you see Fluffy to-night, the matter will be settled and done with."

At that I felt a little bit relieved. It would be something to lose one's anxiety, at any rate.

"You'll go, Cynthia?"

"I suppose so," I sighed. "Goodness knows where it will all end, Frankie. I feel frightened somehow."

"Nonsense. You're overstrained, that's all. A drive in a hansom will freshen you up. Come, you're not going to be silly? Would you like Ella to go with you?"

"No thank you," I said weakly, drying my eyes, "I'll get through somehow by myself. Have you written what you want to Fluffy?"

"Yes, here's the note. You know his address? Drive to the Temple and tell the cab to wait for you. I've brought your cloak, so you can slip downstairs, send for a hansom and get away without anyone knowing. They're nearly all at supper. Ready? That's right, give me a kiss. Bring me back good news. Mind I *must* have that cheque."

She watched me down the corridor, then flitted away, a brilliant figure in her gorgeous dress.

The staircase and the great hall were comparatively deserted, but a stream of men came out of the smoke-room as I passed by; Lord Chesterton and Percival Hope among them.

His lordship hurried after me.

"I'm tired," I explained, "and want to get away. No, you mustn't come with me on any account, but if you'd tell them to fetch me a hansom I should be grateful."

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He went forward to give the instructions; for a minute Percival stood quite close to me. His face was troubled, as he met my eyes, its expression deepened into regret, almost, I thought, self-reproach. I looked weary and forlorn in my white draperies, and the sight seemed to hurt him.

He followed Chesterton, who put me in the cab. His lordship waved adieu from the top of the steps, Percival remained on the pavement.

I put up the trap and corrected the address that Chesterton had given.

"Not Pont Street," said I sharply, "drive to the Temple."

Percival must have heard what I said, for he gave a start at the words, and made a step forward as though to stop me. If that was his intention he was too late. We had already started. Once or twice during that midnight drive I fancied I was being followed. The jingle of a hansom close behind kept time with us, hastening or slackening speed. It gave me an eerie feeling, but as we approached the Strand and neared my journey's end, the sensation was lost in a whirl of conflicting emotions. Would Fluffy be there, would he send my cousin the cheque? Also would he give me the money for my shares? If not, Frankie declared that she must bid a long farewell to Society and the smart set. And I—I shivered in my cloak. What would become of me?

The cab drew up at the Temple gates, close shut as any prison. Telling the driver to wait, I summoned up my courage and knocked at the grim portals. The porter could not tell me for certain if Mr. Thomson was in, but he thought so.

Fluffy rented his flat from a barrister friend at present in South Africa. They were nice rooms, and suited Fluffy, being near the City, and not so very far from the West End. Frankie and I had lunched with him several times, and I had been there with messages more than once. But then it had been daylight, now the place looked quite different. Strange, lonely, remote, it seemed far from the bright town, far from the present time.

I hastened nervously through the deserted courts, glancing timidly behind me, for I fancied I heard footsteps following; the moon cast fantastic shadows on the flagstones, touching the grey walls of the old buildings with a beautiful, soft light. It was very still, and very strange.

Fluffy's flat was half way up a tall block of buildings. The entry was dark, I stumbled once or twice, and half thought I heard the footsteps hurrying towards me. Fear gave me strength. I flew up the old staircase, nor paused until I found myself at Fluffy's door.

I knocked loudly, startling the echoes of the grim place. I had not long to wait. Quiet, self-possessed, Fluffy himself stood before me.

Now Mr. Thomson was invariably nice to me, but I thought it strange, on this occasion he did not seem at all pleased that I had come. He frowned when I said Frankie had sent me to him, and muttered something about "shameful."

However, he soon regained his good-humour, took me into the sitting-room, and put me into a comfortable chair. He then read Frankie's note, asked one or two incisive questions, and sat down to write.

"You'll send Frankie what she wants?" I said wistfully. "She's afraid this man will ruin her if he doesn't have the money. Don't think me curious, Mr. Thomson, indeed, I don't want to pry into my cousin's affairs, but has she any real cause to fear this person? I was too confused to ask Frankie when she sent me here, but surely her fears are exaggerated?"

"I share your views, Miss Cynthia. Mrs. Norton has nothing really to fear from this Casellis—what could he know to harm her? What, indeed, is there for him or anyone to know? But your cousin is a beautiful woman and attractive to men, about such people are ever ready to talk, not always kindly. In Jamaica, as elsewhere, she excited envy as well as admiration. There may have been some little gossip concerning your cousin and certain of her admirers. This gossip Casellis might retail. As for its effect on people who know your cousin——" He shrugged his shoulders—"Society's a strange thing, full of caprices as a Creole. I have known a bit of gossip ruin a woman's reputation before now."

"Surely it would be better to threaten Casellis than pay him? Don't you think so, Mr. Thomson?"

Fluffy smiled amiably.

"I think we must leave that for Mrs. Norton to decide," he said, and commenced looking through some papers.

For a minute there was silence, the silence of night, deep, profound.

The next and the stillness was broken.

There came a knocking, violent and prolonged, upon the outer door.

Fluffy started to his feet, his face white and distressed. His eyes sought mine, then glanced hurriedly round the room. He was more perturbed than I had ever seen him.

"Too bad," he muttered under his breath, "and such a child!"

Then, for the knocking was continuous, with a last look, protesting and apologetic, he went quickly from the room.

I heard the opening of the door, a voice, quick and angry, hurried footsteps down the hall. The *portière* was roughly flung aside, a figure, a man's figure strode into the room.

With a scream I started to my feet.

Percival Hope stood there before me!

(*Another exciting instalment appears next Tuesday.*)

Hard to Please.

PAPA: "My daughter tells me, sir, that you kissed her forcibly last night. What have you to say for yourself?" Harry: "I'm sure nobody regrets the occurrence more than I do." Papa and Daughter (together): "Sir!"

Some Alteration Necessary.

"HURRY to the door, Mary, and let Mr. Smith in. He has rung twice." "That isn't Mr. Smith, it is the other young gentleman." "Well, wait a minute, then. I must change these photographs on the mantelpiece."

To Create an Impression.

BROTHER CLAUDE: "Waiting to see Ethel?" Young Somerby: "Yes; I sent up my card some time ago." "Well, she isn't in." "Why am I kept waiting, then?" "I heard mamma say she expected the new minister every minute, and you look so well with the rest of the things in the parlour she wanted to keep you."

An Able Partner.

"TOM, I hear that you are engaged to Miss Spider." "Yes." "But do you intend to marry her?" "Why not?" "Is it possible that you have not heard?" "Heard what?" "That she has, at different times, sued five men for breaches of promise?" "Yes, I heard that." "And still you intend to marry her?" "Of course. She won all the suits, and as I am a lawyer I cannot help but admire her skill. She will make me an able partner, old boy, and business is so slow with me that I cannot afford to let such an opportunity slip through my fingers."

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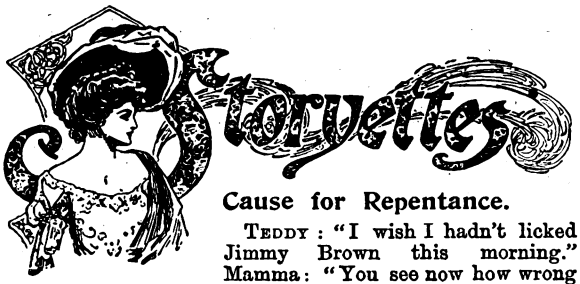

Cause for Repentance.

Teddy: "I wish I hadn't licked Jimmy Brown this morning." Mamma: "You see now how wrong it was, don't you, dear?" Teddy: "Yes, 'cause I didn't know till noon that he was going to give a party."

Not to be Declined.

"A kiss, I'm told," said pretty Susie Brown, "is both a common and a proper noun." "That's true," her lover said, "but you will find it is a noun not easily declined."

Married Bliss.

Mr. Nuwed: "Good gracious, dear, what on earth have you been doing with my meerschaum pipe?" Mrs. Nuwed: "Why, darling, I saw it all stained brown, so I gave it a good scouring with Bristol brick; but it doesn't seem to have done much good."

Practice v. Sentiment.

A sentimental poet writes: "How can I meet my darling?" After some deliberation over the question we have come to the conclusion that he can meet her by approaching her from an opposite direction.

Solving the Problem.

George: "Women are still pushing their way into all the industries." Jack: "That's so. I have just been discharged to make way for a woman." "You have? Well, well! What are you going to do now?" "I am trying to marry the woman."

Heroism.

Sharpe: "I saved a girl's life this morning." Wooden: "Why, how was that?" Sharpe: "Well, I was smoking on the hotel verandah that cigar you gave me, and she said, 'Pardon me, sir, but that cigar is killing me.' So I threw it away and smoked one of my own."

Curiosity.

She: "Women haven't a bit more curiosity than men, I'm certain." He: "No, but it is manifested in different lines. For instance, a woman might own a sewing-machine without finding out how it is made, but she wouldn't have a seamstress in the house a day without knowing all about her."

A Suitable Profession.

"I don't believe in opposing the preferences of a son in the matter of choosing a profession," said an indulgent father. "Nor I," said another father. "Has your son chosen his profession?" "Well, in a way." "What is it?" "Why, he was stage-struck, and insisted that he was 'born for the boards,' as he expressed it; and so I apprenticed him to a carpenter!"

Philanthropic Travellers.

Little Ethel: "Read me some of that pretty story, won't you, mamma?" Mamma: "Very well. Where were we? Oh! here is the place: 'When the half-frozen travellers had reached the shore they climbed up the bank, and, skirting the woods——'" Little Ethel: "What did they do that for, mamma?" Mamma: "Why, it was winter, you know, dear, and the wind blew fiercely, so they——" Little Ethel: "Oh, I know. The limbs of the poor little trees were bare, so the travellers skirted them. Wasn't it nice of the kind travellers?"

Nearly the Same.

Little Girl: "Did you ever dream of being in Heaven?" Little Boy: "No, not 'xactly; but I dreamt that I was right in the middle of a big apple dumpling."

Squeezing Business.

"Seems to me, Maud, that young Mr. Hankinson stayed pretty late last night. Did he have any pressing business?" Maud (blushingly): "Not till just before he went away, mamma."

Love at First Sight.

She: "Here come the bride and bridegroom. Do you suppose it was a case of love at first sight?" He: "Oh, yes. He caught a glimpse of the conterfoil of her father's cheque book."

Has to be Muscular.

She: "Why is it they speak of a man as a 'strong' candidate? He doesn't have to lift anything, does he?" He: "Er—not exactly; but his friends all expect him to carry the day."

Rough on Father.

Perdita: "If you continue much longer to play cards with my father I won't marry you." Jack Dashing: "If your father continues to play cards much longer with me I won't need to marry you."

Unhealthy Kissing.

Mr. Huggins: "What do you think of the latest medical dictum that kissing is unhealthy?" Mr. Hunker: "It is quite true. Mr. Munn happened to catch me kissing his daughter, and I was laid up a whole week."

He Paid for It.

Stranger: "You are the only gentleman in the room." Guest: "In what way, sir?" Stranger: "When I tripped in the dance, and went sprawling on the floor, tearing my fair partner's dress, you were the only one in the room who did not laugh." Guest: "The lady is my wife, and I paid for the dress."

But She Didn't Jump.

"Is it true, Miss Gertie," he said, "that there are just two things a woman will jump at—a conclusion and a mouse?" "No," she answered. "There is a third, Mr. Philip." After thinking the matter over for a few minutes he tremblingly made her an offer, but she didn't jump at it. He was not the right man.

Great Business Ability.

Father: "I hope you are doing well in the financial world, my boy?" Son: "Yes, father; I made three thousand last year, but if I have good luck this year I shall make a cool fifty thousand." "You have great business ability, Jack. It is a legitimate speculation, I suppose?" "Oh, yes; Miss Hendrick is going to answer me to-night."

Misunderstood.

Passenger (angrily): "Why didn't you stop the car for me?" Conductor: "How was I to know you wanted to get on?" Passenger: "Didn't you see me swinging my arms, and jumping up and down and waving my umbrella?" Conductor: "Of course. Could anyone help seeing you? The whole street was looking at you." Passenger: "Then why didn't you stop?" Conductor: "I thought you were dancing to that organ."

A Case for Pity.

She was not young, but she had money. "Dearest," he began, but she stopped him. "I anticipate what you are about to say, Mr. Simkins," she said, "and I would spare your feelings, for it can never be. I esteem you highly, and will be a sister to——" "I have four sisters already," he interrupted bitterly; "four grown-up sisters—and life is a hideous burden. But, oh, Clara," he went on passionately, "if you cannot be my wife, will you not give me a mother's protecting love? I am an orphan."

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LOVE'S SILENT WORK.

A Pretty Little Romance of a City Office.

Miss Lizzie Metcalfe sat in front of the typewriting machine with her hands resting idly in her lap, and with a vacant stare in her usually expressive eyes. Presently her brows curved slightly as the eyes assumed a troubled look and the whole appearance of her face indicated deep and perplexed meditation. Her thoughts ran in this way:

"I shall not be able to endure this for long; I must get another situation. That won't be difficult, but I don't think I can bear *that*, either. Oh, dear, how wretched I feel!"

There was just a suspicion of moisture about the eyes; she closed the lids in order to repress the rising tears, but this had the effect of making the first tears emerge and cling to the lashes. She hastily wiped them away, and glanced round to make sure that no one had entered and seen her.

"Mr. Henry Carter—Harry, I cannot help calling him—has changed much during the past few weeks. I suppose I ought not to have imagined that the managing clerk of a stockbroking firm such as this would ever think of me except as a typist, yet——" She seemed afraid to pursue the thought further, and looked round again. "Yes, he did. He paid marked attention to me, and encouraged me to think that—that he was—in love with me! Why should I not think it? I love him; I can, at least, admit that to myself. There is nothing to be ashamed of, even if he does not return it. Love recognises no controlling power; it comes as it will. But I am certain that he loved me, and now he avoids me as much as he can. What does it mean?"

Then her thoughts took another turn, apparently not more congenial.

"I must get away from here, because Mr. Desmond's attentions are becoming too evident. I can't marry that man, and if the chief of a big firm finds that a typist in his employ doesn't want him, there is no doubt about what will happen. Oh, I wonder why these things happen? And what has made Harry look so careworn lately?"

She was aroused from a deep reverie by the entrance of one of the juniors.

"Hallo, Miss Metcalfe! Haven't you been out to lunch?"

Lizzie coloured slightly as she remembered that she had sat for three-quarters of an hour busy with her thoughts instead of going out to lunch as she should have done.

"I —I didn't feel quite well, thank you!" she stammered. "I don't want any lunch."

"Oh, but you must have some!" expostulated the youth with good-natured concern. "You haven't appeared quite well lately, you know, and——"

"I have some biscuits," interrupted Lizzie hurriedly, not liking the idea that her secret should in part have shown itself in her looks and manner. "Those will be sufficient."

The afternoon was rather a busy one for all in the firm, and Lizzie had little time to think of her own concerns. All the letters had been cleared off, and she was thinking of going when Mr. Desmond called her in to take down another letter.

"You needn't stop for me, Carter," he said. "I'll lock the private door when we leave."

All the clerks had gone, and Carter had no desire to stay. He went to the lavatory to wash before departing, for he was a well-groomed man, leaving his roll top desk open.

Mr. Desmond was a man of fifty, just a little under, perhaps, but not far from the half century. He was a widower, with a daughter about the same age as Miss Metcalfe, as he himself remembered with just a little misgiving. Of course, he admitted, it would be more natural for her to fall in love with a younger man—Carter, for instance, a smart fellow of twenty-eight, who had risen to his present position by his ability. Still, there was no reason why she should have any objection to marrying a man of fifty. He had money, which counted for a good deal in such matters, and there was also a great amount of truth in the hackneyed remark about a young man's slave and an old man's darling. And he wasn't an old man! A woman gets old sooner than a man, so the discrepancy would lessen as the years went on!

Mr. Desmond took a long time to collect his thoughts in order to dictate that letter, and he appeared to have mislaid a paper containing information necessary for the purpose. They heard Carter return to his room, and they heard him depart.

"He didn't shut his desk," thought Lizzie. "I didn't hear the rattle and the bang. I must shut it when I have done. What a time this tiresome man is! Can he be doing this on purpose?"

She had guessed correctly.

"Miss Metcalfe," said Desmond suddenly. "I have no letter to dictate; I want to say something. I'll go straight to the point. I want you to marry me!"

He gazed at her anxiously, waiting for some reply. She turned pale, her very lips seemed white. She tried to speak, but no words came.

"I am afraid that I have upset you," said Desmond with some compunction. "It *was* rather sudden, I suppose, but surely you have guessed something from my manner lately? My daughter, I am sure, will be delighted!"

He was not at all sure of that, despite his words; he had made that remark for want of something better to say. He was confused.

"I really don't know what to say," gasped Lizzie at length. It was perfectly true; she felt that she could not accept, but she wished to say so in a manner that would not utterly offend him, and that was beyond her strength at that moment. "I think that you might do—that is, I don't think—— Oh, Mr. Desmond, let me go now and I will tell you to-morrow!" she concluded in desperation.

"Certainly!" responded Desmond with alacrity. He was feeling uncomfortable.

Lizzie almost rushed from the place and hurried home to her lodging. Her first idea was to write a refusal, and not go to the offices of Desmond and Co. again, but on reflection she gave up the notion and resolved to wait till the morrow and make the refusal as gently as possible. The decision to wait was in itself trivial, but it changed the whole course of events.

Lizzie's sleep was troubled; she dreamt in several ways that Harry was in distress, and that did not strike her as strange because she knew how preoccupied and thoughtful—almost neglectful—he had been. Her first thought on awaking was that she had not shut his desk; she took this upon herself as an act of negligence, for which he would blame her; she ought to have done it over night before leaving the office.

"It isn't my business!" she muttered at the breakfast table. Nor was it, yet she felt in an indefinable manner that she ought to have done it. "Perhaps I think so because I love him!" she admitted. And she forthwith resolved to get to the office before anyone else and shut it.

The caretaker handed her the key when she reached the large building in which the suite of offices was located. She entered the outer office and passed swiftly to Carter's small private room. The desk was open, and a curious clerk or office boy could have amused himself with the perusal of papers regarded as private by the firm, and possibly of Carter's personal papers and letters.

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As she approached the desk she noticed two letters lying on it, stamped ready for posting. Understanding that the managing clerk had forgotten these in his preoccupation, she took them up and casually glanced at the addresses, and her face paled. One was addressed to "Miss A. Desmond" and the other to a man to whom Carter often wrote. Then she noticed another thing; the writer had exchanged the addresses, sending Miss Desmond's letter to the male correspondent and *vice-versâ*.

"He is writing to *her!* Then he is in love with her, and she returns his affection!" murmured Lizzie hopelessly, a sharp pain at her heart. "I must send these letters on, but I must alter the addresses. Shall I type fresh envelopes and inclose these as they are?" She was almost too agitated to know what to do for the best, but she finally decided to take the addressed envelope off the letters and place them in fresh ones, addressed on the typewriter.

"No one will then know that he made a mistake, and he will not be laughed at!"

She addressed the envelopes first, then opened the letters; and then, perhaps it was only human nature, she read a line of the letter.

It certainly was not one of a series of love letters; it was like an apology for writing. She forgot the usual rules of upright conduct and read on.

It was a humble proclamation of affection; the writer dared to lay his suit before her in the hope that she would not find it unacceptable, that she would favour him with a reply and an appointment, or allow him to approach her father on the subject.

What did it mean? Lizzie stamped the letter as an effort, not a spontaneous effusion. That was not like Harry; moreover, Miss Desmond was scarcely the kind of girl to attract him, she reflected, although she had thought differently at first when reading the superscription on the envelope.

She was standing at his desk now, and she looked upon it as if in search of a clue. She found it in the form of a crumpled piece of paper just inside a pigeon-hole.

She felt no scruples now; she did not stop to feel or think anything. She smoothed out the paper and deciphered a few of the shorthand notes hastily written thereon. Only a small portion of the writing was legible to her, but that was enough. She took the other letter and read it; afterwards she placed the two letters in the new envelopes and hastened to post them. The air was cool and it soothed her.

"Good Heavens! I see it all now!" she gasped, her breath coming in short, quick pants. "I see now why he has been so worried, and I understand one or two remarks I have heard, weeks ago. Harry has been speculating with the firm's money; he was fortunate for a time, so he could 'cut a dash,' as they say; but he has lost and must get two thousand pounds in a few days, or——"

She shuddered; it was too terrible to think of.

"He is in debt now all round, and a loan is impossible. He will be found out in a few days, so he is trying to win the affections of Desmond's daughter as a last resource. If he succeeds, he will save himself, for Desmond cannot prosecute his daughter's affianced husband. He will be unhappy with her, and it is not fair to himself, to her, or—anyone else!"

She was back in the office again. Harry was making a desperate move, but it was very doubtful whether he would succeed, as the time was so short that the plot could not be far enough advanced for him to shelter himself behind the engagement. Could she, Lizzie, do anything to save him?

"I cannot believe that he is really wicked, he has been led away and this would be a terrible warning to him. I am sorry that he has come in contact with Groser, he is not a good man. Is there any way? Yes! It is hateful of me, but love is self-sacrificing, and I will do it—for him!"

Mr. Desmond shot a meaning glance at her as he passed through the office, her heart beat high, and she half arose to follow him, but sank back again. She must not be too precipitate. The managing clerk passed to his room, and it was evident that he knew nothing of his forgetfulness of the previous evening.

At last, Lizzie's agitation would allow her to remain inactive no longer, she rose from her chair with an air of stern determination and went straight to Desmond's room.

Mr. Desmond watched her expectantly as she carefully closed the door behind her. Lizzie approached him with an expression of determination which Desmond tried to interpret as an indication of pleasure, but with indifferent success.

"I have come to give you my answer, Mr. Desmond," said Lizzie with an effort. Her mouth was dry, and she had some difficulty in uttering the words. "I will consent to—to marry you—on one condition."

"Any condition you like!" exclaimed Desmond jumping up and taking her hand. "I hardly expected—and yet, I thought—I mean, I'm as happy as can be!" And Desmond certainly appeared beside himself with delight. "There is nothing I wouldn't do for you, Miss Metcalfe! Let me see, what is your Christian name? You must call me by mine, you know, and you must give up this work, and——"

It is impossible to tell how long he would have rattled on if Lizzie, who felt herself shrink from him, had not stopped him.

"You may not agree to the condition, after all, Mr. Desmond," she interrupted, trying hard not to betray her agitation. "It is this—That you give me two thousand pounds in Bank of England notes to-morrow!"

Desmond stared; he did not consider the condition a very onerous one, for he had made much money, but he was startled at the strangeness of it. What could a girl like Miss Metcalfe want with that sum, cash down at once?

"Ah, you do not agree!" cried Lizzie, showing distress in spite of herself. "But I must have the money or I will not consent. To-morrow or the next day?"

"Oh, I agree!" exclaimed Desmond hastily. He was not going to lose her. "But, you see, it's a strange condition. I can give you the money now, if necessary, but—h'm!—it is strange that a young woman should require so much immediately. You could have all you wanted when we are married, you see! Yes, yes, perhaps some relative is in trouble, eh?"

Desmond did not feel quite easy; it was mysterious, and he wished to get to the bottom of that mystery. He was an honourable man, very strict in his dealings, and with a horror of everything that appeared shady. The kind of man who would be generous to those who did right and very severe, almost merciless, to those who went astray.

"Exactly!" responded Lizzie laconically. She dared not trust herself to say much.

"Well, I can help them in other ways, perhaps," continued Desmond. "It is not always wise to do as you propose; it is sometimes better to help a little, and so stimulate individual effort towards getting out of trouble."

"Not in this case. The money is wanted at once," said Lizzie decisively.

"Then you shall have it to-morrow!" declared Desmond. He felt a pang of disappointment that the girl was not giving herself to him freely, but there is a thorn with most roses, and he persuaded himself that it was all right, and that they would be very happy together.

"Thank you!" said Lizzie simply.

She was about to turn towards the door when he caught her and lifted her face—such a white face!—to his, at the same time stooping to kiss her. The handle of the door moved, and Desmond hastily released her as Carter entered. He was too busy with the subject in his mind to notice anything; he concluded that Lizzie had been taking down letters, and held the door open for her to pass out.

An office-boy, who entered Desmond's office an hour later, was stricken with temporary speechlessness at seeing that gentleman waltzing about the room. Desmond hurried out to lunch after that, and when he returned he placed an envelope in front of Lizzie.

"I have fulfilled the condition without waiting for to-morrow," he whispered, and I expect you to come and thank me!"

He passed through the office to his room. The clerks were at lunch. Lizzie trembled as she recognised that the notes

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were there. She forgot about going to thank Mr. Desmond; she hastily typed a few words on a plain slip of ordinary note-paper which she had in her drawer, placed it in the envelope, then sealed the latter and laid it on Carter's desk. The words contained on that slip were: "From a friend. To help you out of trouble and disgrace."

Lizzie watched the door till Carter entered, and then hurried away to have her own lunch. She ate nothing, she could not eat, and she wandered aimlessly about the City streets till she suddenly remembered that she had been absent longer than the prescribed limit of time, when she returned to the office as quickly as she could.

"I say, Miss Metcalfe, the governor is waiting for you!" cried the office boy. "There's something wrong. Miss Desmond came just now and—There, that's his bell again!"

Miss Desmond had found out that her father wanted to marry his typewriter girl and objected, so thought Lizzie as she took off her hat and jacket and answered the call. She was in a dazed condition.

"Miss Metcalfe," said Desmond, holding out a letter, "has the money required by you any connection with this?"

Lizzie took the letter, and her heart sank as she recognised the letter written by Carter to his friend and accomplice. It was useless to make any denial, the letter stated the sum required, and detailed circumstances that revealed the misdeeds of Carter, and the blow had come so suddenly that Lizzie's countenance betrayed her. But how did that letter get into her employer's hands, and what had Miss Desmond to do with it? Then the idea flashed across her mind; she had, in her agitated condition, placed the letters in the wrong envelope and sent the incriminating epistle to Miss Desmond. In trying to save the man she loved, she had brought a disaster upon him!

"I know that the envelope was typed by Miss Metcalfe," observed Miss Desmond coldly. "She has a set way of typing envelopes. She knows all about this wrong use of your money!"

Lizzie Metcalfe sank into a chair and sobbed bitterly for a while, but Desmond spoke kindly to her, after bidding his daughter remain silent, and soon had the whole story out of her, so far as she knew it. It was not pleasant to learn that the girl had tried to sacrifice herself in order to save the man she loved; yet, on the other hand, it made him regret that he could not possess a woman who was ready to do so much. He stifled a sigh that such love could not be given to him, and asked the still weeping girl to go straight home at once.

"But you won't punish him, will you?" pleaded Lizzie. "I am sure he is not really wicked; it was a temptation."

"I will do my best," said Desmond, as he conducted her to the door. "For your sake!" he added, in a low, wistful tone.

Miss Desmond departed a little later, and Desmond rang for Carter.

"Carter," said his chief gravely, "this letter was sent to the wrong person. It will not be necessary for you to secure the hand of my daughter as stated therein, in order to raise the money, or get out of the scrape. The money has been obtained for you by some one in the office. You can guess who that is! Although there is no need for flight, it will be well for you to go away to some other country where you can begin again and work honestly. I will forgive the discrepancy which I shall detect in your books, and I will also give you the notes laid on your desk. They were mine, but you owe them to a girl who was ready to sacrifice herself to save you, and would have done so but for an accident. I do not suppose that you will ever possess her now, but you can at least try to be worthy of her!"

The last words have never ceased to ring in the ears of Carter, and they have furnished him with a motto and an incentive in the colony where he has settled. It is six years ago, but he knows through a friend that Lizzie Metcalfe is still single, and hope is gradually rising in his breast that he may one day venture to write to her and ask her if she will join him in the far-off land, and that she will consent.

Geo. Day.

Your Editor Chats.

As I promised last week, I am now going to give you a few hints as to the best method of putting your ideas for a story into readable form.

To begin with, the most successful stories are those which don't deal with "trick" ideas, but with the human emotions. By "trick" idea stories, I mean stories the plots of which turn on some sort of improbable invention—a walking stick or brooch which squirts out poison at an appropriate moment, or a mysterious handle to a front door which seems to have a human face in it, or nonsense of that sort. Avoid, if possible, incidents in which there is anything of the "knock-about" business, where one man fights a dozen and beats them, or where the gentle heroine gets dragged round the room by the villain, by the hair of her head. Select some striking situation and then sit down for an hour and think it carefully over, introducing as few characters as possible, and playing as much as you can upon the emotions of your characters. An excellent example of this style of writing is to be found in the serial story now running through these pages.

Having got your ideas roughly put together in your head, the next process is to commit them to paper. In doing this don't strain after fine writing; the best stories are always those which are written in the simplest language. Avoid a lengthy description of people or places at the opening of the story. To do this simply tires the reader from the outset. You want, so to speak, to jump in with both feet and grip the attention of the reader from the first line.

Now that you know what to do, see if you can write a short story. You can make it as short as you like, so long as it is not less than a thousand words. Then send it to me in an envelope marked "ATTEMPT," to the offices of SHORT STORIES, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and I will give a guinea to the writer of what I consider to be the best. All stories should reach me before August 22nd.

Result of the "Sentence" Competition.

THE prize of a barbaric guard goes to M. M. Payne, 3 Chicheley Street, Newport Pagnell, Bucks, for the following sentence composed entirely of words of four letters each, relative to our F. A. F.:—"From what vile slum come they—this vast host, this huge army? What real hope have they? They need food, they need play; give them what they need, feed them well. Take them away from this life that they live; away from this foul city, just this once. Make them feel real, true life. Help this good fund then; send your mite; open your hand, then your mind will find rest." Consolation gifts go to the following:—H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, S.E.; J. Ryan, 21 Abbotts Road, East Ham, E.; D. G. Jelley, 85 Ermine Road, Ladywell; W. Hambridge, 20 Milton Street, Banbury, Oxon; B. R. Dixon, Magherafelt, Co. Derry, Ireland; E. Payne, 3 Chicheley Street, Newport Pagnell; J. A. Downie, 231 Gt. Junction Street, Leith; Mrs. Carpenter, 4 Greencroft Gardens, South Hampstead, N.W.; R. Gray, 14 Algernon Terrace, Tynemouth, North Shields; T. Allison, 18 Fleet Street, Gorton, Manchester.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther.

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned." Mr. Crump next takes a walk on the common, and discovers some sand-bags.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

The rumour proves to be true. Alec had indeed managed to escape from the prison, and taking a boat had pulled down the river, after purloining some sailors' clothes from an empty barge. Just when he is thoroughly exhausted, however, he is run down by a sailing barge. His boat is smashed, but Alec is rescued and taken on board. The barge proves to be the *Mary Ann*, bound for Gurlston Bay. Arrived at its destination, it is hardly moored to the pier before Esther, who is taking a walk, arrives at the pier to watch the unloading.

Shortly afterwards Revelle saunters up, when suddenly Esther catches sight of Alec in the barge. With great presence of mind she leads Revelle away from the spot before he discovers whom she has seen. Late that night, after everyone has gone to bed, Esther contrives a meeting with Alec in the drawing-room of the house in which she is staying. The two lovers are clasped in each other's arms when a man's footsteps are suddenly heard outside the door.

A CHASE IN THE DARKNESS.

"If you love me, go!"

Alec Scarsdale pressed a burning kiss upon Esther's lips; broke away from her; darted across the room. The moonlight was playing on the lawn beyond. As his figure became framed in the window, the door was flung back. Seaton Revelle darted in, and sighted the figure, on the lawn now. As he reached the window it plunged into the shrubbery. The room itself was in darkness. He had glanced neither to right nor left, had not seen Esther crouching down so close to him that with an outstretched hand he might almost have touched her. His every thought had been centred on the man. It had all happened in far less time than it takes to describe. Only as he passed out into the moonlight did Esther realise that the man in pursuit of her lover was Revelle! Terror and surprise had momentarily robbed her of the power to think, to plan. Still crouching in the darkness, her hands locked together in a grip of agony, she saw him plunge into the shrubbery. Had he recognised the man whom he was pursuing? Oh, Heaven! What was happening out of sight? Her brain had recovered from the shock. Thoughts were scurrying through her mind with lightning speed. It might be that Revelle had not recognised Alec; that Alec might baffle pursuit! But if she were found there, her presence might give a clue to the identity of the unknown man. If she could only gain her room unnoticed? Her thoughts were not selfish—to screen herself and her reputation from scandal—but to shield the man she loved!

Swiftly, silently, she glided towards the door. She reached the threshold; then stopped dead. Someone was moving towards her from the hall.

Before she could retreat back into the room, there was a rasping sound. A match had been struck. A flickering light broke the darkness. A moment later one of her wrists

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was gripped, only to be released with a startled, incredulous cry, "Great Scott! Miss Mansfield—you!"

Having gathered himself up after his tumble, Gerald Phipps, the young Oxford undergrad., finding himself deserted by Revelle, had altogether lost his bearings, and, after groping his way forward for a few steps, had struck a match, to find himself face to face with a woman. The first thought that flashed through his mind was that she was one of the servants, an accomplice of the man whom he had seen on the lawn. Then the light had played on her features—Esther Mansfield!

The match fell from his hand. He trampled it under foot. Was it possible. Great Scott! Here was a pretty kettleful of fish! Esther Mansfield, the banker's charming, refined daughter, admitting a man into the house in the small hours of the morning. Revelle must have missed her in the dark. Phipps stood for a moment speechless, aghast at the situation. He was a happy-go-lucky young fellow, with rather rapid tendencies, but chivalrous to a degree. One of his tenets was—"Never give a woman away!"

"Look here!" he whispered quickly, "has anyone seen you?"

Esther had seen his face by the light of the match.

"No!" she breathed out.

"Then, for Heaven's sake, get back to your room. I—I won't give you away. Be quick! We shall be having the whole place awake in a minute, and down here!"

He had told himself that it was not a question of a burglary, but of an intrigue. He wished to save her reputation. Esther realised this; but she was willing to accept the slur on her character.

"You won't tell a living soul?" she whispered.

"No!" There was a distant, cold note in the hurriedly breathed out answer. "But go!"

The sound of a sharp in-drawing of breath, the faint rustle of a dress, told him that she had gone. He waited for a few seconds; then, striking another match, was about to enter the drawing-room, when voices reached him. They were followed by the appearance at the top of the stairs of two airily-dressed figures carrying candles. The next moment Phipps was conscious that some sort of fire-arm was being pointed at him, and a shaky voice, that he recognised as the butler's, cried out:

"Hands up, you ruffian, or I fire!"

"Coleman, don't do anything of the sort!"

"Gracious me! Mr. Phipps!"

Unseen, Esther had reached her room. It was in darkness. Quivering from head to foot, her anguish-wrung heart throbbing fiercely, she sought the window and peered out. Her own plight, her compromised reputation, were nothing to her! The episode of a few moments before was only remembered because the man had promised silence. And if Alec had not been recognised and had made good his escape, that silence would be invaluable. Let Gerald Phipps think the worst of her, it mattered not, so long as he held his peace! But what was happening? Lights were moving to and fro on the lawn now. Most of the household had been awakened. The suspense was almost unbearable. The window was open. Esther strained every nerve to catch what was being said. She recognised her host's voice; then Gerald Phipps spoke. She heard him explain how, leaving his bed to open the window wider, he had caught sight of a man in the act of crossing the lawn; how he had awakened Revelle; how he had tumbled at the foot of the stairs. Not a word about herself!

"Could you distinguish the man?" Esther heard Mr. Walters ask.

Her heart ceased to beat.

"No. I could see that he was a man, and that's about all. Revelle must have gone off after him!"

The house itself was being subjected to a rigorous search. Nothing was missing; but presently the butler approached his master with the rather sensational information that there were no signs of the drawing-room having been broken into. The man must have had an accomplice who had admitted him from the inside. The butler was quite certain that the window was securely fastened when he made his final round.

Phipps and some of the others were meditating starting in search of Revelle, when a figure limped on to the lawn.

"Hullo! Here's Revelle!"

Esther's heart leapt into her mouth. He was promptly surrounded by eager questioners.

"A confounded nuisance!" he ejaculated with considerable annoyance; "I managed to catch my foot in a branch or something. I had to give up the chase. My ankle is sprained!"

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"I'm afraid not. Only saw his back. Couldn't distinguish much; but there was something about the fellow's cut that suggested a sea-faring man!"

"Oh, God be thanked!" whispered Esther, as she locked her fingers together.

Alec had not been recognised. He had made good his escape!

These were her first thoughts; then—what of the future? Their moments together had been cruelly brief. There had been no time to shape plans. Esther had not even learnt how he had contrived to reach Gurlston Bay.

"The future!" she whispered, "it is in God's hands!"

A servant was hurrying away to the police-station. Speculation was rife in the smoking-room whither the gentlemen had retired. The ladies, all but Esther, had gathered together in one room. Miss Bullivant, staying in the house, repeatedly stated that she felt inclined to shriek, and then, being satisfied that her toilette, if somewhat unconventional, was decidedly "fetching," announced her intention of joining the gentlemen in the smoking-room. She did so want to know what had exactly happened, and, also, she would feel safer—"somehow, don't you know!"—with a lot of men around her. On reaching the smoking-room, she made a bee-line to where Revelle was sitting on a couch, his injured foot propped up. She had gathered a rough outline of what had happened.

"How frightfully brave of you!" she murmured. "I'm so sorry to think that you never caught the wretch. And your poor ankle? I'm *so* sorry! Does it hurt you very much?"

She sat down close beside him, and glanced round with a little laugh.

"I hope that I shan't shock anybody; but if anyone could spare me a cigarette—thanks awfully!"

Gerald Phipps had obliged. His boyish face wore a puzzled, rather pained expression. If it had been Miss Bullivant whom he had encountered so unexpectedly in the drawing-room he would not have been so utterly taken by surprise; but Esther Mansfield! Had anyone told him such a thing he would have flatly refused to believe it. But there was no gainsaying the evidence of his own eyes. He was feeling altogether uncomfortable. He had not seen much of Esther; but her charm of manner, her unaffected grace, had made an impression on him.

Perhaps on the morrow she would vouchsafe some explanation. Anyhow, rightly or wrongly, he had no intention of giving her away. But who, in the dickens's name, could the fellow have been? Great Scott!—the idea suddenly flashed across his mind as he held a light to Miss Bullivant's cigarette—could it have been that convict fellow to whom she had been engaged? The idea was not arrived at by any process of reasoning. He could not have explained why it had occurred to him, unless the talk that there had been among the men about Scarsdale had unconsciously affected the current of his thoughts. In fact, it seemed to be flying in the teeth of reason. Wrackam prison was a far cry from Gurlston Bay. According to the evening paper, it looked very much as if Scarsdale had come to an untimely end, though, as yet, there was no proof positive. But once an idea springs into existence, though based upon no solid foundation, it is not always easily eradicated; and Phipps found himself continually thinking of that convict fellow, for whom, both on account of his act of heroism in saving a warder's life and his daring escape—"so awfully

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OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

Our Powerful Serial.

sporting of him, don't you know!"—he had already conceived a great admiration.

Further speculation was put an end to by the arrival of the police. After a careful examination and much questioning, they came to the conclusion that there must have been an accomplice in the house; but whether burglary had been intended, or it had been a clandestine lovers' meeting, it was impossible at the moment to decide. The servants would have to be submitted to a close examination.

* * * * * * *

"If you love me, go!"

The words had spurred Scarsdale into flight. Capture meant prison again, and hopelessness. Freedom, if he could but keep it, meant opportunity to seek for proof of his innocence, perhaps to see Esther again! He heard the crash as his unknown pursuer plunged into the shrubbery after him. Then a low cry and a thud. He must have fallen. The hunted man quickened, gained the road, and went speeding on blindly. The neighbourhood was strange to him.

The road inclined steeply upward. The wound, furrowed across his back by the warder's bullet, had not yet healed. He had not yet recovered from the terrible strain of his escape; but he panted on and up desperately. Once he paused for a second to listen. No sounds broke the stillness. His plight was desperate; but not so desperate as it had been when, wounded and wearing a felon's dress, he had taken that leap into the fog-veiled river. And he had seen her, held her in his arms, heard again from her own lips of her undying love. The words had been as a draught of red wine to him! He had, indeed, much to be thankful for. But for the humane heart of the captain of the *Mary Ann*, he might have been back again at Wrackam prison by now. The nature of Scarsdale's wound had awakened the man's suspicions; he had started to question him closely, and Scarsdale, seeing more danger in evasive answers, had made a clean breast of it. It had proved the right course. "Look here!" skipper Barlow had said, "I'm a married man with a big family, and for their sakes I can't afford to run any risks. Same time, don't you be afraid that I'm going to give you away, because I ain't. If you hadn't told me, I shouldn't have known; but when we make for Gurlston Bay, I reckon we'd best part company!" And this had happened. After dark, Scarsdale had left the *Mary Ann*. At the last moment the skipper had forced a packet upon him containing bread and meat. He had taken the first road leading out of the village. He had shaped no definite plans when Esther's voice reached him.

When he paused again he was on the summit of a cliff. The dull roar of breaking waves reached him. The road turned away inland; but a foot-path, marked at intervals by white stones, ran parallel with the edge of the cliff, and at the point where it branched off from the road stood a sign-post. The words on it were legible in the moonlight: "To the Caves and Black Crag Lighthouse." The skipper had told him of the famous Gurlston caves. He was well-nigh spent, and wanted rest and time to think. He turned from the road and hurried along the footpath. Quarter of a mile further along the path divided, the upward track, according to the sign-post, leading to the lighthouse, the downward one to the caves. He took the downward track. A steep descent of some hundred yards, then a black, tunnel-like mouth, hewn in the rock that barred the way, confronted him. He was without matches. Entering the tunnel, he felt his way along the side. The descent was winding and very steep. Melancholy sounds, the distorted echoes of wind and wave, gave additional uncanniness to the darkness. At last he saw below him a light so faint that it was but visible darkness. The opening led out on to a ledge of rock, strewn with great boulders that had fallen from the cliff above. Now and again the spray of a breaker splashed over. Scarsdale turned. The rock wall behind him was perforated with as many holes as a rabbit-warren, entrances to the network of caves and passages that honey-combed the rock that towered up, sheer and precipitous, above. He stepped to the brink of the ledge. More rocks, cruel-looking, protruding like sharp, black teeth, from the white swirl of the water below. Away in the distance the reflection of the lighthouse beacon shimmered on the rustling waves. The spell of night added to the weird romance of the rugged spot. Scarsdale leant upon a boulder and stared out into the night, thoughts of joy and agony coursing through his soul. He thanked God for those few moments with Esther; yet it was agony to try to picture what had happened after his flight. Had his pursuer passed her unnoticed in the dark? Had she gained her room unseen? Or had she been discovered? He knew that she would rather die than betray him. He imagined her screening him at the cost of her reputation. Remorse stabbed him like a knife. He would have brought it upon her!

He was dead beat. He could go no further that night. Mechanically he drew from his pocket the packet that the skipper had thrust there, and opened it. Besides bread and meat it contained a screw of tobacco, a pipe, and a box of matches. Scarsdale felt a lump rise up into his throat, touched by the thoughtful act of kindness. Then something that he had not noticed fell to the rock with a metallic jingle, and lay glittering in the moonlight—a five shilling-piece!

Perhaps—he prayed God that it might be—he would be able to make good these acts of kindness one day! He picked up the coin, and made his way to one of the cavernous openings. Within, he struck a match. The light revealed a large cave, its low roof seamed with cracks, and here and there dark mouths that looked as if they must lead into the very bowels of the earth.

Surely a man might remain concealed here for days!

A wild thought surged to his brain. Would it be possible to communicate in some way with Esther, let her know of his whereabouts? The idea had quickened the beat of his heart. But how? He sat down in the darkness, filled and lighted his pipe. Would it be possible? Thought followed hard upon thought, but the question was still unanswered when his head began to droop forward and nod, and a desire for sleep mastered all else. Scarcely able to keep his eyes open, he struck a match. The inevitable picnicker had left traces behind him in the shape of litter and paper-bags. He twisted up a fragment of paper and lighted it. He was inured to a hard bed. Behind a fallen fragment of rock where the dust and sand of years had accumulated, he laid himself down. A few moments later he was in a dead sleep!

LOOK OUT FOR THE SPLENDID COLOURED COVER OF NEXT TUESDAY'S "SHORT STORIES."

MR. CRUMP COMMITS A BURGLARY.

It was rather a remarkable fact that so long as Miss Mansfield was at home, Mr. Penworthy had daily superintended the horticultural operations that were being carried on at the Woodlands; but, after Mr. Mansfield's and Esther's departure for Gurlston Bay, he had been content to leave matters largely in the hands of Banks, the gardener. He had, as he ex-

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plained to Mrs. Cobb, a number of jobs that required attending to. He had retained his rooms at Woodbine Cottage, though he had slept but one night there since Mr. Revelle and Mr. Faversham had left the Firs—much to the distress of Pollie, who missed the presence of the kindly little man more than words could have expressed. As a matter of fact, Crump had been assiduously shadowing Mr. Faversham, otherwise Benny, though parallel with this, he had not been neglecting the grim mystery that enshrouded Vance's death. A certain pencilled map that he carried about with him, and which he frequently scrutinised, bore a third cross that denoted where he had found the third bag of ballast, and a line had been drawn through the three crosses, the arrow-head at the end pointing to the words "Warham Reservoir." Crump was devoting most of his attention to Benny at present, in the hope of obtaining a clue as to the disposal of the stolen diamonds and notes. Having learnt that Revelle had gone to Gurlston Bay, and realising his motive, his movements were, for the time being, of less importance, and he could rely on Esther to keep him well informed. Tom Jackson and Fred, in the same way, accounted for the silent Railton between them. But Benny's life in London was altogether above-board. He had not spent his share of the robbery so lavishly as Revelle. Freed from the strain of mixing with upper circles, he was indulging in a mild career of dissipation—billiards, music-halls, theatres; but there was no display of impatience on Crump's part. He was a veritable Job. Once during his official career he had shadowed a man for some years—but he had "bottled him up" at the finish.

"Grandmother, grandmother!" cried Pollie, from the garden-gate of Woodbine Cottage. "Here's Mr. Penworthy!"

Then she darted out towards the homely little figure that had just surmounted the crest of the hill. There was a look of distress on Crump's kindly face; but it brightened with pleasure at the sight of Pollie. As she rushed upon him with open arms, he picked her up, kissed her affectionately, and then, having mounted her on his shoulder, ambled to the cottage, singing of how Pollie and he were sweethearts, many a year ago.

"Oh, I hope you're going to stop for long!" cried Pollie, as she slid down to the ground.

"Not for long, Pollie, I'm afraid. I must be off again to-morrow. Ah, Mrs. Cobb, I am very glad to see you again! And I hope the rheumatism hasn't been troubling you; but I haven't forgotten!"

He produced a bottle from his pocket.

"It isn't a patent medicine, Mrs. Cobb. It is made up from a doctor's prescription. I got it from my friend. I hope you won't need to use it; but if you should I hope that it will do you good!"

It was characteristic of the little man. He had been doing the work of three men; but he had not forgotten the old lady's rheumatism, and a promise made to obtain a prescription from a friend of his similarly afflicted.

Children are children, and Pollie was eyeing, at the same time pretending not to do so, one of the little man's pockets that bulged in a most promising way. Crump's own eyes were twinkling.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, patting the pocket in question. "Why, what on earth's this in my pocket?"

He produced a package.

"But this is some mistake. No—how remarkable! It's addressed to 'Miss Mary Cobb, Woodbine Cottage, Warham.' Well I never! And to think that someone slipped this into my pocket without my noticing it. Dear me! Well, it's evidently meant for you, Pollie, so you had better open it and see what it contains!"

It contained one of those miniature tea-services beloved of little girls.

"O-o-oh!" cried Pollie, scampering with delight, "and we'll have tea out of it next time we go on the common!"

"We will, Pollie!"

And Crump's brightened rather curiously, perhaps from the remembrance of certain discoveries made after his last tea there.

A Woman's Feat.

For a woman to walk eight miles with ease within a short time of being so weak from anæmia and indigestion that she could not walk across her house floor, may be regarded as a pedestrian feat of more than ordinary interest. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans enabled Mrs. Gertrude Morley, of Awsworth, near Ilkeston, to do this. She says: "I was so weak from anæmia, indigestion, and other allied ailments from which I had suffered from girlhood, that I could not walk across the floor without being fagged. Constipation and headache also troubled me sorely. For months I had been in this condition and had vainly tried all sorts of medicine. My husband then bought me a box of Bile Beans, and by the time I had taken them I was a great deal better. A little perseverance with them was all that was necessary to restore me to health. I am now well and recently walked eight miles with ease."

The above is by no means an isolated case of the vast benefit resulting from Bile Beans. They are the world's specific for anæmia, indigestion, constipation, piles, headache, all female ailments, liver and kidney disorders, warm weather languor, and all diseases arising out of loss of energy, defective liver action and assimilation. Supplied by all chemists at one and three-halfpence or two and nine per box. They are sold only in sealed boxes: refuse all offered loose.

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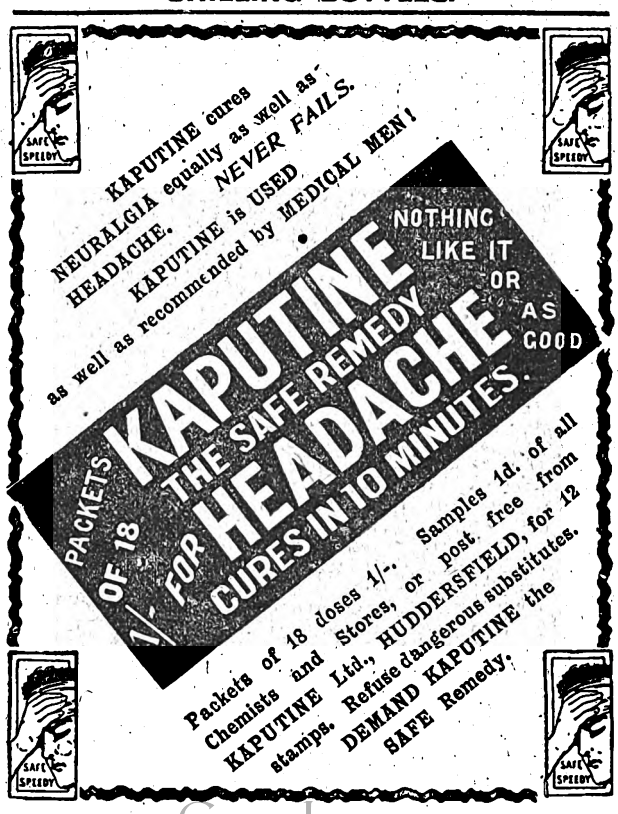

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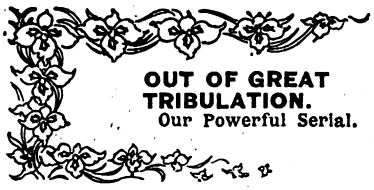

"And now, Mrs. Cobb, my young friends, Tom Jackson and Fred Wilton are off duty this afternoon, and are coming to see me. Can you manage tea for us, without putting yourself out?"

Then, having been hugged most vigorously by Pollie for the beautiful tea-things, he went into his sitting-room. The sad look returned to his face. He had read of Alec Scarsdale's escape in the morning paper. In the evening paper, he had read of the finding of the battered-in boat.

"It doesn't follow," he whispered brokenly; but—poor girl, poor girl!"

He drew his hand across his eyes, then, seating himself, started to write a letter to Esther. It was a simple, brief, but noble letter. He had finished, and was writing the address on the envelope, when Tom Jackson and Fred—both in mufti—entered. They, too, had seen the evening paper. The little man shook their hands silently. For a while the conversation was carried on in a subdued whisper; it was of Alec Scarsdale, Miss Esther, of hopes and fears. There was a set, strained look on Tom Jackson's honest face.

"We can do no more," said Crump gently, "than put our trust in the All-merciful!"

There was a considerable pause.

"But if it is so," whispered Tom Jackson fiercely, the first to break the silence, "we shall want payment in full for his life—for Miss Esther's broken heart!"

"We shall indeed, Tom!"

And Crump's face assumed an expression that was seldom seen upon it. There was another silence.

"But, my dear lads, we must not stand still. God helps those who help themselves, and I say it with all reverence. Fred, it is in consequence of your letter that I am here. An old colleague of mine, who does private work now—but, of course, you remember Grogan—has promised to look after Faversham in my absence. I regret to say that my efforts in that quarter have up to the present resulted in nothing. I had hoped—but no matter. Your letter, Fred, told me that you are going to have a quiet supper with my old friend, Tomlinson. Now for some time past I have been desirous of gaining access to the Firs. Hitherto the presence of Mr. Revelle and Faversham, also Tomlinson, have been obstacles in my way. But I fancy that a favourable opportunity presents itself to-night. I am afraid my entry, according to the letter of the law, would be accounted felonious, or, at least, unlawful, but I'm prepared to take my chance. I want, while you are supping with Tomlinson, to have a thorough look round the premises."

And at that moment, the little man moving in his chair, a faint rattle came from his pocket that to Fred's excited mind suggested skeleton keys.

"But, look here, uncle!" gasped Fred. "You don't mean to say——"

"But I do, my dear lad. I have quite made up my mind!"

There was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Cobb entered with the tea. And it was indeed a tea good to behold. Others had lodged at Woodbine Cottage; but never such a tea had been set before them; but then there had never been such a lodger as Mr. Penworthy. Crump inspired the men and women whom he came in contact with to do their best for him, whether they were landladies or young constables.

The little man sat himself down at the head of the table, and proceeded to pour out tea. Fred winked at Tom. The wink was returned. But they were sad winks, for a gloom was over all.

"And I hope," said Mrs. Cobb, "that you'll find everything to your liking, Mr. Penworthy!"

"Mrs. Cobb," answered the little man, "you have set before us a regal feast. And I wouldn't mind wagering that that delicious-looking jam is of your own preserving!"

"What I like about Mr. Penworthy," said Mrs. Cobb to herself, after she had left the room, "is that he's never too busy to be pleasant. And he does notice little things so."

"Tom, do you take sugar? Fred, I know you do! I understand, Fred, that with the exception of Tomlinson, and the old lady who comes in to clean up the place and cook for Tomlinson, the other servants have been given a holiday. In your letter you stated that nine o'clock was the time fixed for supper. Tomlinson is one of those machine-like, well-oiled men who are punctual to the minute. Those parts of the Firs that neither you nor Tom have had access to—I have contrived to obtain a very fair idea of from Mrs. Cobb. She is on intimate terms with one of the maid-servants. At about a quarter past nine I shall endeavour to effect my entry, probably by the back door. I don't suppose that it will be locked until after you have left the premises; but should it be, then I shall find another mode of ingress. I shall effect my entry while you are at supper. There is a very excellent billiard-table at the Firs. After supper, Fred, I want you to challenge Tomlinson to play you 'a hundred up!' Have a couple of sovereigns on the game. It will increase Tomlinson's interest. You will lose, Fred; but play him a second game for the same stake."

The little man drew out a five-pound note, and handed it to his nephew.

"Don't be afraid to flash that about rather ostentatiously. It will impress Tomlinson. Should he remark upon it, hint rather mysteriously that a policeman, if he knows his way about, has other sources of income besides his pay. Don't be afraid to give him the idea that you are an unscrupulous young man. Knowing something of Tomlinson, I take it for granted that you will have your supper in his master's dining-room. I shall want to know when you are passing to the billiard-room. You might either sneeze loudly, or whistle some tune—shall we say the 'Honeysuckle and the Bee'? And that Fred, I think, is all. Let me give you some more tea. Tom, pass your cup!"

The two young men interchanged glances of admiration. The little man, having poured out tea, affixed something into his button-hole, and the next moment a beam of electric light flashed from his chest. He gave a little chuckle.

"It is superior to a lantern," he explained, "and I obtained the idea from one of those men who suddenly spring on to 'buses and demand to see the ticket that one has invariably mislaid or lost. They carry such a lamp at night time. It is a compact and ingenious little affair!"

He switched off the light, and passed the jam to Tom. Then he produced a bunch of skeleton keys from a pocket.

"These 'twirls'—to give them their professional name—were once the property of Cully Scott, alias the Smasher, who is now leading an honourable, manly life, and whom I am proud to count one of my best friends. Better twirls than these he has assured me, could not be obtained for love or money. Fred, would you please cut me another piece of bread. Thank you! This bread is home-made. There is always such a charm to me about home-made things. I shall have to be very careful to-night, my dear lads; a mistake might render me liable to five years' penal servitude. But"—the little man's eyes twinkled—"if I should bungle, and Tomlinson's suspicions be aroused, I trust, Fred, that your zeal may be misdirected, and that you will look for me in the wrong place. Tomlinson is an arrant coward. If it were a question of looking for a supposed burglar, he would let you lead the way, and you would lead the wrong way!"

When, some time after, Fred and Tom had taken their departure, the little man lighted his pipe, and sat in sad meditation. His kindly heart ached for Esther. The morrow, perhaps, might bring news of Scarsdale. He felt that he would welcome even the news of his re-capture. Then he drew his pencilled map from a pocket, and studied it for some time. He shook his head.

"Rightly or wrongly," he muttered, "I am convinced in my own mind now; but, though the circumstantial evidence is growing stronger, there's not nearly enough to go before a jury at present—at present! To prove that poor young fellow's innocence is my first object; but I don't despair of bringing home this other foul crime to you, Mr. Seaton Revelle.

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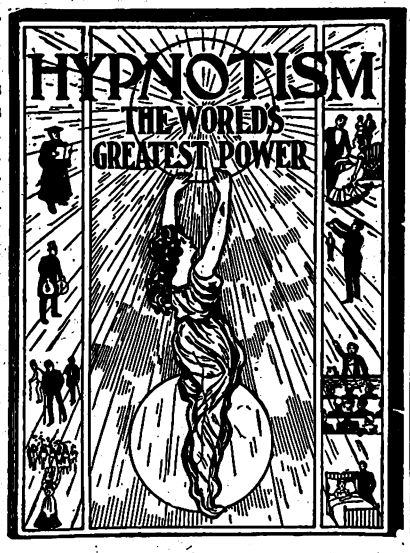

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Two Years' Guarantee. Easy Payments without publicity. Cycle sent on receipt of first payment.

EDWARD O'BRIEN, The World's Largest Cycle Dealer, COVENTRY.

KEATING'S POWDER KILLS BUGS FLEAS FLIES BEETLES

TINS 3d. 6d. 1s-BELLOWS 9d.

"TATCHO"

Gets the Hair Back.
Puts the Hair Right.
Keeps the Hair Right.

WHO SAY SO.

COMMANDER T. WOLFE MURRAY, R.N.

"Trobridge, Crediton, June 18th, 1902.

"I have found 'Tatcho' of distinct benefit to my hair."

MAJOR-GENERAL KEATE.

"High Croft, Winchester

"I find the Renewer excellent, and better than anything I have ever tried in the course of a long life. I could not have believed that any preparation could do so much good in so short a time."

LADY SYKES writes:

"Mayfair, W.

"I can honestly recommend 'Tatcho.' It has really entirely renovated my hair."

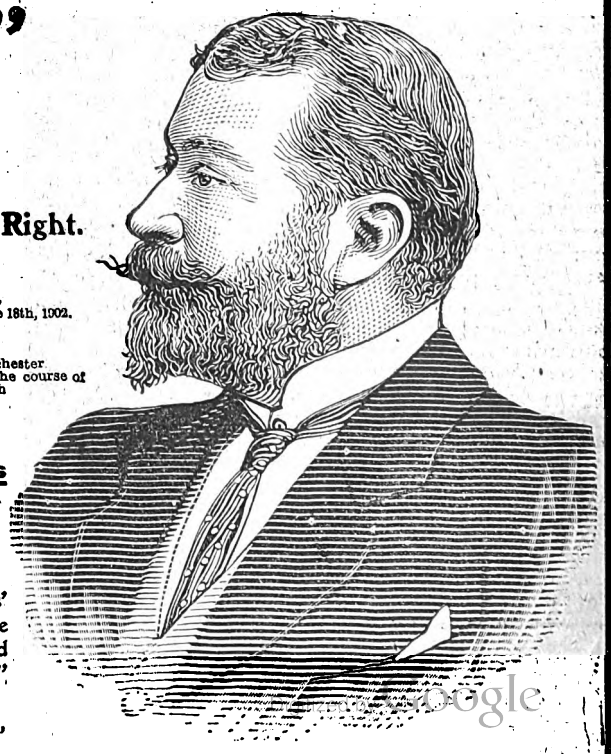
PRINCESS EUGENIE CRISTOFORUS PALŒLOGUE writes:

"Belvedere Hotel, Kensington, W.

"I would not be without it on any account."

MRS. BROWN POTTER.

"I use only 'Tatcho.'"



A 4/6 FULL SIZE BOTTLE of Mr. Geo. R. Sims' "Tatcho" is supplied to enable you to test its value at the NOMINAL PRICE of 1/10 at all Chemists', Stores, and Hairdressers', or direct, carriage paid, from the "Tatcho" Depot, 81 Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn, London.

Sold by all Chemists and Stores throughout the world, in bottles at 1/-, 2/9, and 5/-.

The fouler crime, but poor Vance is out of her misery, has found, I dare to believe, the rest that she craved for; but Esther Mansfield's misery continues, grows more acute. You cowardly dog, you! You foul fellow, you!"

When Mrs. Cobb entered, Mr. Penworthy announced his intention of going out for a stroll. Mrs. Cobb—nine o'clock was her average bed time—would not wait up for him. He carried his key.

Warham Church clock was striking nine when Crump left Woodbine Cottage. There was nothing about his bearing to suggest the daring venture upon which he was bent. It was only when the Firs was in sight that he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. Then, sitting on a stile, he drew off his boots, and drew on an extra pair of stout woollen socks. He concealed his boots in a ditch. The quiet road was deserted.

In his days of active service, Crump had been noted for his unconventionality of method. He was certainly living up to his old reputation now.

He passed into the grounds. Lights were shining from the windows of the room that he knew to be the dining-room. He chuckled softly.

"I thought so," he said to himself, "in the absence of his master my old friend Tomlinson is doing himself in style!"

He crept up to one of the windows, and peered through a chink in the shutters. He chuckled again. His sense of humour was tickled. A most *récherché* supper was spread upon the snowy cloth. Wine sparkled in decanters. Cut glass glittered. Tomlinson sat at the head of the table, in his master's accustomed place, and Fred was apparently doing full justice to the delicacies set before him.

"I take wine with you, Wilton!" said Railton, otherwise Tomlinson, raising his glass politely. Fred bowed, and also raised his glass. "I trust the wine is to your liking!"

"Quite a little comedy!" said Crump to himself, and then made his way round to the back entrance. The door, as he had anticipated, was not locked. He quietly admitted himself. There was not the slightest sign of strain or flurry on the homely face; its expression was rather one of mild amusement. Lights were burning.

"Mr. Revelle's rooms first, I think!" he said to himself.

He had never set foot inside the place before; but the description furnished him by Mrs. Cobb amply sufficed for his purpose. He made his way up the back stairs to Revelle's bedroom, a dressing-room adjoining. Here there was no light. He closed the door. A beam of light flashed from his buttonhole; then seeing a gas-jet, he drew the thick curtains over the window and lighted the gas. Had it been his own house, he could not have seemed more thoroughly at home.

Locks yielded magically under his skilful manipulation of the twirls, once the property of Cully Scott, alias the Smasher. Swiftly he searched through cupboards, wardrobes, chests of drawers, replacing the articles in such a careful way that there were practically no signs that they had been disturbed.

But, as yet, nothing of importance had been unearthed.

The whistled tune of "The Honeysuckle and the Bee" just reached him. He smiled faintly. Fred and Tomlinson were passing into the billiard-room.

"Good lad!" he muttered under his breath. "So far I've drawn a blank. Let us now try the dressing-room!"

In the dressing-room there was more skilful manipulation of the skeleton keys, more careful searchings and replacings.

"Hullo! This looks more promising. There's a false bottom to this trunk!"

The little man's eyes brightened. He withdrew his hand from the trunk in which he had been rummaging, and started to empty out the contents.

(Another splendid instalment next Tuesday.)

OUR NEW SERIAL.

In the course of a few weeks a powerful new serial story will start in *Short Stories*. It is the work of a favourite author, who has given many months of careful work to the story. The date of the number in which it starts will be announced shortly.

A WOULD-BE funny man writes us a joke about the weather, and spells it wethur. We don't like to criticise a good attempt, but this seems like the worst spell of weather we ever experienced.

LIPSLEY: "You know those cigars Miss Beacon sent me for Christmas?" Lapsley: "Yes." Lipsley: "Well, I gave a lot to my friends, and now I haven't any left." Lapsley: "What, cigars?" Lipsley: "No, friends."

A VERY small boy was trying to lead a big St. Bernard up the road. "What are you going to do with that dog?" asked a kindly gentleman. "I can't make up my mind," was the answer; "not till I find out what the dog thinks o' doin' with me!"

LITTLE BOY: "I want you to write me an excuse for being late at school yesterday." Jeweller: "Eh? You are not my son." Little Boy: "N—o, but mamma says I had plenty of time to get to school, so I suppose the clock you sold her doesn't go right."

FIRST YOUNG MAN (last summer): "I have met a good many amateur photographers, but I never saw one quite so devoted to the fad as you are." Second Young Man: "I never take photographs." First Young Man: "Eh? Then why do you carry that detective camera about with you all day, week in and week out?" Second Young Man: "Because when the girls see me coming all the ugly ones run away and all the pretty ones stay."

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Please send me a copy of "The Final War," for which I inclose the sum of 6d.

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By Madge Morris.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* Short Stories.]

The Advanced Flirt.

"A young lady to whom I was recently engaged has thrown me over," writes "Georgie." "She has been in the habit of leading fellows on to propose to her, and then refusing them. She has had twenty proposals of marriage, and will do all she can to attract anyone who looks at her a second time. Do you call her a flirt?"

* * * *

Yes, "Georgie," I do. If you had asked me to give my definition of a flirt, I could not improve on your own description of the girl. Further, she is a flirt of the most malignant type; one who appears to have no serious regard for the affections of anyone. Such girls, as we all know, usually end their lives old maids, or social outcasts, as, after a certain age, when their surface attraction has passed away, retribution always follows in their train, and sourness and disappointment soon do their work.

❦❦❦

Is She a Flirt?

"Herbert" has been hearing things to the detriment of his sweetheart. People have told him that she is only trifling with him, and give him instances of her flirtations with others. He has not seen her for some weeks, and has not heard much from her. How ought he to act to find out whether the stories are really true?

* * * *

It would be very much better for "Herbert" to tell her straight out what he has heard, and make her give either a denial or confirmation of the story. Too many love troubles are the result of this miserable mischief-making, and too many lovers allow themselves to be swayed by the off-hand opinions of others, when they have access to first-hand information which might easily dispel them.

❦❦❦

A Case for Withdrawal.

Is a man compelled to declare anything to a girl? "T. G." has been seeing a great deal of a certain damsel lately, and knows that she is steeped in admiration for him. He, on the other hand, is not particularly fond of her, though he does not know whether in time he may not grow to be. Meanwhile should he reveal his feelings to her at all, in response to her overtures?

* * * *

"T. G." is very foolish to be so attentive to a girl if he has no particular liking for her. Surely it is not necessary for him to be constantly with her? As he is, she has very good ground for suspecting that her own liking is returned. "T. G." had better draw off while there is yet time.

❦❦❦

Lover or Friend?

Is it a sign of love when a man makes a confidant of a girl, and tells her of his own private affairs, his past attachments, and other things of a confidential nature? "Lucy" is constantly made the confidant of men in these matters, but one man in particular is always seeking out her company, and when with her, constantly talks of himself in the most confidential strain. Does this suggest that he is in any way in love with "Lucy"? He has not as yet made any professions.

I should think the sign is rather that he looks upon "Lucy" as a friend. Some people, as you know, have the curious faculty of drawing other people's confidences from them. It is rather a trait of a person with great qualities of friendship than one to invite the overtures of love. "Lucy" had better not think too much of this man's confidences in her. Wait till he says something definite about his feelings towards you. When he does, be pretty sure he will be in earnest, as he evidently values you too much as a friend to make overtures in anything but sincerity. I have rather an admiration for friendships of this kind. They often have more likelihood of ripening into love than a good many of the idle vapourings of boys and girls.

❦❦❦

A Faint-hearted Swain.

"Bandy" has, he tells me, fallen in love with a certain girl, but does not want to say anything about it to her. How can he find out in return whether she loves him?

* * * *

Oh, faint heart, do you suppose these tactics will ever win you fair lady? There is no hard and fast rule on which to proceed in love-making. If in the course of your conversation you do not find some method of gaining her confidence, and talking intimately, evidently she is not in sympathy with you to a very great extent. Before you speculate as to whether she loves you, make sure if she likes you. That settled, the other may follow with time. These emotions are not made in a moment, and often take months to mature. Pursue your friendship with her as far as you can, and leave it to time to decide whether it is to ripen into love.

❦❦❦

Unrequited Affection.

Six years ago "Hetty" was seventeen and met the man who has attracted her more than anyone else in life. She has never seen another to equal him in her estimation. But since that time she has never set eyes on him until the other day. On meeting him again, he did not seem to show any particular pleasure at their renewed meeting, but "Hetty" felt more infatuated than ever. Should she give him any hint as to her feelings, or keep them absolutely to herself?

* * * *

"Hetty" had far better forget all about him now before the infatuation grows on her. Probably the man has other attachments. His coolness to her may have been the result of a desire not to arouse in her the old feelings, as he knew he could not reciprocate them. Let "Hetty" blot out his image from her mind—at any rate, if he shows no signs of reciprocating her attachment—and it will be an easier matter than allowing the infatuation to spread, and cause certain disappointment.

❦❦❦

A Question of Priority.

"Lottie" has two gentlemen friends who often visit her. One of them invited her to go to the theatre one night. After accepting she had a misunderstanding with him, and he left the house without visiting her for some time. Thinking the engagement was cancelled she accepted another invitation from the other friend for the same night. But after accepting the latter engagement, the first man called and claimed the appointment. She would rather have kept the second one than the first. Which ought she really to have kept?

* * * *

As "Lottie" had accepted the first engagement, she had no right to cancel it without letting him know. It would have been quite easy to drop him a line to say that she "regretted being unable to keep it." As it happened, the first man was entitled to claim his engagement, and "Lottie" should refuse the second. At heart the second man would have thought none the less of "Lottie" for being constant to her engagements.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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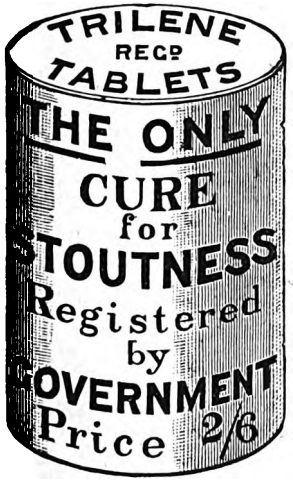
ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be **CURED** by taking

TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



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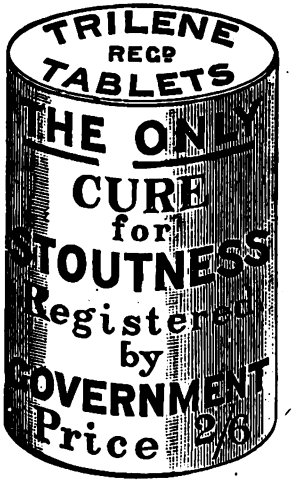
An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

Send **2s. 6d.** to **THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION**, 66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.



SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

MRS. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

MISS NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

MR. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

MR. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 2lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

MRS. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

MRS. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes, Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 23 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MRS. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

MRS. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

MRS. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 39 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

MRS. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

MISS JANE CARTER, of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

MR. THOS BLAKELY, of 27 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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CADBURY'S Cocoa is Absolutely Pure, the *Lancet* pronouncing it "the standard of highest purity." It is Cocoa, and the best Cocoa only.

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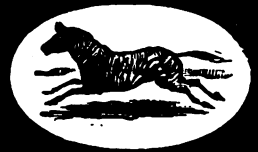
ZEBRA



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AS AN ARTICLE OF DIET
BIRD'S CUSTARD
is unrivalled for nutriment and delicacy of flavour.
BIRD'S CUSTARD is the *one thing needed* with all Fresh, Stewed, or Tinned Fruits. Practical housewives always keep a supply ready at hand.

NO EGGS! NO RISK! NO TROUBLE!

SHORT STORIES

1D

Two artists have painted a girl's portrait. She will marry the man whose picture she chooses. They await her choice.

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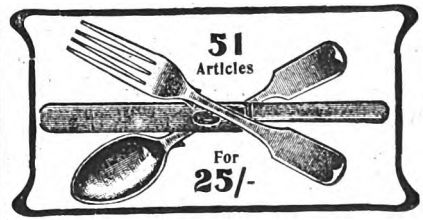

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Corsair Plate Lamp, 2/0; A1 Rim Brake, 6/6; Scorcher Brake, 1/-. Celluloid Mudguards, 3/9. Write at once for New Season's List of over 100 pages and over 500 illustrations of JUNO CYCLES and latest cycling accessories at lower prices than any other house. Sent Post Free. METROPOLITAN MACHINISTS Co. Ltd., S.Y. Dept., 75 Bishopsgate Street, Without, London, E.C., and Piccadilly Circus, London, W.

KEATING'S POWDER KILLS BUGS FLEAS FLIES BEETLES

TINS 3d. 6d. 1s- BELLOWS 9d.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently by taking TRILENE TABLETS (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*" Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE CO., Sole Proprietors 66 Finsbury Pavement, London.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 67 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 2½lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

SHORT STORIES

No. 712.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending August 23rd, 1902.

A NOVEL ENGAGEMENT.

Telling of a Girl, Two Men, and Two Pictures.

"WHICH do you think she will choose, Jack?"

Dick Halston turned from the two oil paintings as he spoke and looked inquiringly at his friend.

The latter raised his eyebrows and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Honestly, I never thought she would agree to our proposal," went on the first speaker, nervously.

Jack Steadman laughed.

"A woman's love of novelty, Dick."

A few moments passed in unbroken silence, then Halston spoke again.

"Hang it all!" he burst out. "I can't stand this suspense! It is only half-past two, and she won't be here until after four. I'll tell you what, Jack, I am going to run down to Richmond. This waiting is making me as nervous as a woman. I shall make a fool of myself if she chooses your painting. You don't mind?"

"No."

But the word was reluctantly spoken. However, Halston did not notice it. He caught up his hat.

"Good-bye, old chap. And you will let me know as soon as possible? If she chooses your painting, just wire the one word, 'mine,' and if the luck is with me wire, 'yours,' I shall understand it."

He wrung his friend's hand.

"Good luck to you, Jack—although that means the reverse to me, doesn't it?"

The door slammed behind him, and Steadman heard him bound down the steep stairs two steps at a time. He gave a low whistle, heaved a sigh, and then, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he fell into profound thought.

The two artists had long loved the same girl and she could not choose between them. The state of affairs between the trio grew from bad to worse, until there came a day when the two friends said that it was unendurable, that she was ruining their careers, and they implored her to consent to a plan which they proposed. Their proposal was that they should each paint her portrait from memory. No names were to be affixed to the pictures, and when they were finished she was to choose between them. The artist whose painting she chose was to be her husband. The girl demurred for a while, but in the end she gave her consent.

* * * * *

"I wish he had not gone," muttered Steadman. "It's awfully hard waiting here alone."

He rose and paced the length of the studio several times, coming at last to a standstill before the two pictures.

From the canvases a girl's lovely face looked out. In the actual painting there was little, if anything, to choose between them; yet, in looking at the one, you involuntarily waited for the girl to speak; in the other, you expected no such thing.

"How on earth did Dick get the soul into his?" exclaimed Steadman savagely. "It is splendid," he muttered. "Splendid!"

He turned abruptly, and fell to pacing the studio again. The girl's eyes seemed to follow him with a half mischievous expression, while the lips, half tender, half scornful, seemed to smile at his discomfiture. He threw himself into a chair with his back to the pictures. But soon, as if against his will, he had moved the chair so as to face them again.

"Why doesn't she come?" he cried fiercely, starting to his feet.

Then a demon rose up within him and whispered:

"What if she chooses his? You know it is the better. Look at that rose she holds so carelessly in her fingers; can you not fancy that you smell its fragrance? Don't you expect her to step out of the canvas and speak to you?"

Steadman drew his hand across his brow.

"No one would be the wiser," the voice went on. "Dick would go abroad at once. You know he swore he would. Then something could happen to the paintings—a fire—they would be destroyed. Better pluck the flower that he has run away from! He was not man enough to see the game out. Treachery?—Nonsense! They would never suit each other, but you—you could, you would make her happy. You feel that with her at your side you could do great things——"

He rushed across the studio to the paintings standing side by side.

"I must have you," he cried. "Ethel!" And the lovely eyes looked back at him, mischievously, alluringly.

* * * * *

There came a ring from below, followed by the light tread of dainty feet ascending the stairs.

Jack Steadman pulled himself together with a guilty start, and hurriedly drew a curtain before the two pictures. Then he went to welcome the anxiously awaited visitors.

"Oh, Dick has bolted," he said, with a somewhat forced laugh, in answer to Ethel's glance of inquiry round the studio.

"Bolted?"

There was surprise, anger and consternation in the girl's voice.

"There was scarcely necessity for that," she remarked coldly.

"You misunderstand me," interrupted Steadman. "Dick has only run down to Richmond until after your decision."

"Poor Dick!" murmured Ethel to herself.

"Indeed," she said aloud, with a contemptuous little pout.

Her good humour returned, and she chatted gaily.

"Now," said Jack Steadman, going over to the easels and

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laying his hand on the curtain, will you choose between these two pictures? Ethel," he said, turning to her aunt, but looking at the girl, "has promised to marry the man whose portrait of herself she chooses."

The old lady bowed, and Ethel murmured an inaudible assent.

Steadman drew aside the curtain with a hand that shook, despite his utmost endeavours.

A simultaneous burst of admiration broke from both ladies.

"They are beautiful," cried the elder lady. "Look at that one, Ethel! My dear child, it is a living likeness of your own sweet self."

And Steadman's face grew grey, for she pointed to Halston's picture.

"Far too beautiful for me, auntie," whispered the girl, for once abashed.

But Steadman, looking at her, thought bitterly that it was not lovely enough, and his breath came short as the shadowy thoughts of a few moments since took shape.

"Which do you choose?" he asked her in a curious, hard voice.

There was a moment of awful suspense, then Ethel answered low and hesitatingly:

"I ought to choose that one," pointing to the unhappy artist's own painting, "for it is less beautiful, and, therefore, must be more like me. But, oh!" with sudden rapture. "I cannot help but choose this! It is lovely!"

"Lovely!" chimed in her aunt. "And look at that rose, dear! Have you ever seen anything so exquisitely painted?"

"It is like the one I gave Dick the other night," faltered the girl.

There was a flush on her cheeks and a light in her eyes.

"Yes, it is the same," said Steadman quietly, "I begged it of Dick to put in my picture. It's colour was so perfect."

"Your picture?"

There was a note of despair in the girl's voice.

"Yes; mine."

Had either lady looked they would have observed the ghastly pallor of Steadman's face and the tense set of his mouth.

But the old lady was still lost in admiration of the painting, and Ethel had turned aside to hide the sudden clouding of her eyes.

"Come, Ethel, we must be going," said her aunt, and she shook hands warmly with Steadman, saying: "I congratulate you heartily on your great success and also on winning so sweet a wife. And you, Ethel, are a fortunate girl to have won so gifted a husband!"

Age had dulled her eyes. She did not notice that anything was amiss with the girl, and neither of them noticed the man.

"Good-bye, Ethel!"

There was an exultant gleam in his eyes. Mechanically the girl held out her hand to her future husband. Her lips moved, but no sound escaped them, and with a slight inclination of her head, she followed her aunt.

* * * * *

"A telegram, sir."

"Thanks."

For a moment, Dick Halston held the flimsy envelope in his fingers, turning it this way and that, dreading to open it.

"What a coward I am!" he muttered, and with a sudden resolution he tore it open.

At first he was only able to grasp the one word: "Yours." Then he read further:

"Come to the studio at once. Important."

* * * * * *

"Jack, old man! Jack, where are you? Where are you?"

It was Halston's voice calling, as he looked round the empty studio. But he received no answer. Then his eyes fell upon a letter addressed to himself in Steadman's handwriting. He opened it, wondering what it meant.

"Dick," he read, "forgive me! The temptation was too great and I fell. I claimed your picture as mine. Your love for her will make you understand. But, thank Heaven! I repented before it was too late. Good-bye, and forgive me if you can. "JACK STEADMAN."

* * * * *

And Dick Halston did understand.

Arthur Hales.

KITTY'S SISTER.

A Pathetic Love Story.

WHEN Katherine Graham learnt that Winifred, her elder sister, had fallen in love with Robert Maitland, her first feeling was one of anger and indignation.

She would have felt angry and indignant whoever had been the object of Winifred's affections, but the idea of Robert Maitland was particularly distasteful.

Katherine had only met Robert once, and on that occasion had taken a violent, and, as Winifred insisted, quite unreasonable dislike to him.

"When you know him better, you'll be sorry you wronged him," said Winifred, with tears of mortification in her eyes.

"I don't want to know him better," replied her sister, shortly.

"But, Kitty, you'll have to *now*," protested Winifred.

To this Katherine made no immediate reply.

"How long have you been engaged to him?" she demanded, suddenly.

"Why, Kitty, only since to-day, of course! As if I shouldn't have told you at once."

"Oh, I didn't know. You've been in love with him longer than that, haven't you, and never told me?"

Winifred began to laugh through her tears.

"So that's why you're so cross!" she exclaimed. "You don't like my having had a secret from you. Darling, I couldn't help it. I hadn't the courage to confess till I was certain *he* cared for me, *too*. Besides, you were away, and it's so hard to tell that sort of thing in writing."

"You might have told *me*," cried Katherine, "but you never even allowed me to suspect. It was horrid of you. I shall never forgive you, and—and I hate Mr. Robert Maitland."

"Kitty, you don't know what you're saying!" remonstrated her sister patiently.

She was so patient because she had begun to realise the situation.

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Katherine's outburst did not annoy her. In fact, if the truth be told, it pleased her not a little.

"Kitty's jealous," she reflected. And the thought that her sister was so fond of her as to be jealous of Robert made her forgive the unkind things Katherine said of him.

"Try and be nice to him for my sake, even if you do hate him," she pleaded.

But Katherine would promise nothing, and when, that same evening, Robert Maitland called to see them, she was so cold and repellant in her manner to him, that poor Robert thought he had never met a more unpleasant girl, and wondered how it was possible that two sisters could be so utterly unlike.

"She seems to lack everything that my Winnie has got," thought Robert. And few people, seeing the two sisters together, would have contradicted him.

Winifred Graham was by way of being a beauty, tall and exquisitely proportioned, the possessor of a perfect profile, limpid, childlike blue eyes, and hair the colour of ripened corn—as Robert, with pardonable lack of originality, was wont to describe it. Hers was a fair, sweet, lovable face, but not a clever one—decidedly not a clever one, said Winifred's detractors.

Some even went so far as to declare that they were bored by beauty without brains, and that Katherine's homely countenance was infinitely more attractive than her sister's.

It was usually ladies who made those remarks—ladies whose husbands and brothers did not share their opinion.

Katherine was not popular among men, not so much because of her want of beauty as because she had a way of saying cynical things which they considered a masculine prerogative.

"I wonder what her redeeming features are?" thought Robert, watching the girl curiously, as she sat, silent and sullen, in the remotest corner of the room, idly turning over the leaves of a book on her lap. "They say everybody has got some redeeming features, but, really, hers are not very obvious."

Perhaps it was just because Katherine's redeeming features were so very far from obvious that Robert felt a certain interest in their discovery. Besides, the girl was Winnie's sister, and Robert was prepared to do much for Winnie's sake.

He was not a fool, and he understood women better than most men.

It did not take Katherine long to discover that Robert Maitland was a man it was impossible to treat with that frigid politeness which was the attitude she had made up her mind to adopt towards her future brother-in-law.

Robert, apparently, was impervious to snubs, for the simple reason that he did not understand them. He ignored the most pointed rebuffs, and reduced Katherine to a state of indignant impotence by his calm and unruffled amiability.

He devoted himself to her so assiduously that Winifred laughingly whispered to him that she was getting jealous, and when at last he took his leave and Katherine held out two fingers, he bent forward and planted a brotherly kiss upon her cheeks as coolly and naturally as though he had been in the habit of thus saluting her for years!

Winifred laughed at Katherine's scarlet face, but Robert himself seemed quite unconscious of having done anything unusual.

"Oh, I was almost forgetting to ask you," he said, turning back in the doorway. "I got a box at the Lyceum for to-morrow night on the chance of your both being able to come."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Winifred. "Of course we'll come."

"I'm afraid I shall not be able to go, thank you," said Katherine stiffly.

"Kitty! Why not?" asked her sister.

"I don't think the servants should be left alone."

"The idea! Why, they've been left alone dozens of times!" cried Winnie.

"And I absolutely refuse to take 'No' for an answer," put in Robert.

"If you stay at home, Kitty, Bob and I shall insist on keeping you company," said Winifred.

"Then it's settled," declared Robert, firmly. "I'll call for you at half-past seven. Good-night and pleasant dreams."

Before Katherine could think of a suitable reply, he was gone.

"Isn't he an old darling?" said Winifred. "Kitty, you and I are going to have a lovely time!"

"I don't know what you mean," retorted Katherine, with an angry flush. "*I* shall not have a good time."

"Oh, Kitty, he's promised to take us *everywhere!*"

"He can take you. He certainly isn't going to take me."

"But you're coming to-morrow. You've promised, you know!"

"Did I promise?" asked Katherine uneasily.

"Of course."

"We haven't asked father whether we can go."

"As if that mattered! Of course he'll say yes. He always does."

This was true enough. Mr. Graham, a widower of five years' standing, troubled his head too little about his daughters to deny them anything. Wrapt up entirely in his business, he adopted the comfortable policy of ignorance in all domestic matters. Having satisfied himself that Winifred's suitor was desirable from a worldly point of view, he gave his sanction to the engagement, and there considered his responsibilities at an end.

He never shared in, and never interfered with, his daughters' plans. To him, paternal duties meant little more than the paying of dressmakers' bills, and, to do him justice, he did this cheerfully, and with unfailing regularity.

"Bob wanted to know whether we cared for the Opera," Winifred went on. "I told him we were dying to go, so he's going to get seats for the earliest possible date. Won't it be lovely?"

"Look here, Winnie," said Katherine gravely, "I am going with you to-morrow because there seems no help for it now, but that's the first and the last time I mean to inflict myself upon you two. You can reassure Mr. Maitland upon that point."

"Don't be horrid, Kitty! As if we always wanted to be by ourselves! And don't, *don't* call him Mr. Maitland, *please*. Just as if he were a stranger."

"He *is* a stranger to me," declared Katherine obstinately. "You forget, this is only the second time I've seen him."

"He couldn't help your being away when he got to know me," said Winifred. "And you must admit that he's doing his best to make up for lost time," she added, with a sly smile.

And Katherine, remembering that brotherly kiss, blushed but said nothing more.

On the following evening Katherine was forced to admit that if Robert Maitland had not committed the heinous crime of falling in love with her sister, she, Katherine, might possibly have learnt to tolerate him. As it was—well, he was really quite a pleasant person, but she could never forgive him, never.

By slow—by very slow—degrees, the girl's frigid politeness to Robert gave way to more cordial behaviour, until at last, almost in spite of herself, Katherine found herself on quite a friendly footing with her prospective brother-in-law, and one day she astonished that gentleman by remarking suddenly when they happened to be alone together—

"I want to apologise to you—Robert."

She had never brought herself to address him by his Christian name before.

"Apologise—to me?" asked Robert, in genuine amazement.

"Why do you look so surprised?" demanded the girl, and her grey eyes looked straight into his own. "You know that I have reason to apologise. I've behaved abominably. I daresay you hate me."

"Hate you—Winnie's sister? How can you think that?"

"Of course, for Winnie's sake, you put up with me," said Katherine, and something flashed up in the grey eyes. "If I were not her sister, I suppose you would think me detestable?"

"No," said Robert simply, and took her hand.

She withdrew it hastily.

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"I'm going to be quite frank," she said, with a flush on her face. "I don't see how we two can ever be really friends. When I heard that Winnie had promised to be your wife, I hated you as I'd never hated anyone before. Winnie is the only person in the world I love, and—and—I believe you understand."

"Yes—I understand," he replied softly.

"I—I'm beginning to see how selfish and unreasonable I am," Katherine went on, speaking with difficulty. "I despise myself. I try not to feel as I do, and yet I—I can't help being jealous of you still, and I think I—I shall hate you a little," she ended, with a laugh that was almost a sob.

"I understand," said Robert again.

"And yet, how should you understand it *really?*" asked Katherine, almost piteously. "You have so many friends. You are good-looking, and successful, and popular. Everybody likes you, Winnie says. But I'm ugly, and disagreeable, and insignificant. Nobody cares for me. Winnie's love was all I had."

Robert seized her hand, and this time the girl allowed it to remain in his.

"Foolish little girl," he said. "You think I've taken Winnie's love away from you? Isn't it just possible that in her heart there's room for both of us? Isn't it possible even, that she may care for you all the more now?"

Katherine shook her head.

"Do you know," continued Robert, "I never realised that I cared much for my own sister till I met Winnie. One love doesn't necessarily drive away another. Kitty, I don't see why we shouldn't be friends!"

"After I've told you I hated you?"

"Oh," said Robert cheerfully, "that was when you still thought you had reason to hate me. Now you know better."

"Do I?"

"You see, we're not really rivals. We can flourish quite happily side by side. If you don't mind Winnie loving me, I shan't mind her loving you. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"Anyway, it's making the best of things, and one should always do that."

"Yes," returned Katherine thoughtfully, "only it's generally so much easier to make the worst of them. *I* began by making the worst of you."

"Did I seem so very horrible?"

"Well—yes."

"Oh!"

Katherine began to laugh at Robert's discomfiture.

"You asked, you know, and I couldn't tell a story, could I? Besides—I've changed my mind!"

"Sensible person!" said Robert, giving her a hearty kiss.

The blood leapt to Katherine's cheeks. Somehow, it always did when Robert kissed her.

Winnie, entering the room at that moment, looked from one to the other in some alarm.

"You two haven't been quarrelling, have you?" she asked.

Robert laughed.

"On the contrary," he said, "Kitty and I have never got on better. We've come to the conclusion, Winnie, that we like each other very much."

Winifred looked doubtful.

"Is this true?" she inquired suspiciously.

"My darling, your scepticism is not very complimentary to either of us," remarked Robert. "Of course it's true."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Winifred, with a little sigh of pleasure. "Then you're coming with us to-morrow after all, Kitty?"

"Not I."

"But why not?"

"Because," said Katherine, smiling.

"Oh, I know what you mean," cried Winnie. "But you're all wrong. Bob and I would simply bore each other to death if we went alone, wouldn't we, Bob?"

"Of course," assented Bob, a trifle feebly.

"Well, you'll have to risk that," said Katherine, "because I can't possibly go with you to-morrow."

"Why won't you come?" asked Robert.

"Business," replied Katherine mysteriously, and would say nothing more.

"They would rather be alone," she reflected, with a pang to which she would not have confessed. "They don't want me always with them. If I were in Winnie's place, I shouldn't——"

She stopped suddenly, and cast a startled glance at Robert.

"What's the matter, Kitty? Why do you look so frightened?" asked her sister.

"Do I look frightened? I was only thinking of something."

"Something dreadful, of course," said Winnie. "Kitty's always thinking of dreadful things," she added, turning to Robert.

The latter gave Katherine a searching look. There was a curious expression upon her face, he thought; something that attracted him, yet made him feel vaguely uneasy.

From that day Robert began to take a new interest in his sweetheart's sister. The girl puzzled him, but, mingled with his perplexity, there grew up a certain subtle sympathy with her, the reason for which he understood but dimly.

Perhaps it was Katherine's lack of beauty that appealed to him, and roused his chivalrous instincts. To him there was something pathetic in the contrast between the two sisters.

Nature had been so niggardly to poor Katherine. As Robert compared his sweetheart's fair, flower-like face with Katherine's plain, uncompromising beauty, his heart warmed with a strange tenderness towards the pale-faced girl to whom so little had been given.

By-and-bye, however, it began to dawn upon Robert that Nature had been a little less unjust to Katherine than he had imagined. He discovered what Winnie's detractors had discovered long ago, that Winnie's beauty and Katherine's brains were in the same proportion.

It would be hard to say at what precise moment he realised the fact that Winnie was *not* a clever girl. When the thought did come to him in definite shape, Robert felt, first startled, then angry and indignant with himself, for it seemed like disloyalty to the girl he loved.

"I hate intellectual women," he told himself, with an air of defiance that belied the truth of his assertion. "So long as they're good, and sweet, and lovable, like my Winifred, what more can a man want?"

In his heart of hearts Robert knew that there *was* something more—something that Winifred could never give him.

Robert was ambitious. Though possessed of an independent income ample for his needs, he did not live in idleness. He had devoted himself eagerly, at a very youthful age, to the study of philosophy, and had already written several works on philosophical subjects.

His writings and lectures were beginning to be talked about at the time when Winifred Graham came into his life.

Robert had never met anyone quite like Winifred. She belonged to a type that was almost unknown to the young student. She was so fair, and fresh, and simple, so unlike the bluestockings to whose society he was accustomed. Her very ignorance fascinated him.

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A woman who had never heard of Kant and Schopenhauer! A woman who prattled charmingly of theatres, and concerts, and river picnics, of the latest song and the latest creation from Paris, a woman who never read anything more intellectual than a novel by Marie Corelli!

Winifred was a new sensation, a new delight to Robert. To him she seemed an embodiment of pure joy of living, of all that is bright, and fair, and innocent in life, and he succumbed without a struggle to the charm of her girlish presence.

Then, by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, what had attracted Robert so strongly to Winifred began to assume a different aspect, and presently he realised that the girl's light-hearted gaiety and careless enjoyment went hand-in-hand with a certain complete and, to Robert, astounding incapacity to appreciate the more serious issues of life.

At first Robert had attributed Winifred's want of interest in his own particular hopes and aspirations to simple ignorance. It should be his privilege to initiate his sweetheart into the mysteries of his beloved study.

He never regretted for a moment that Winnie was no blue-stocking, and he had no wish to make her one.

All he hoped for was that she might gradually come to understand and sympathise with the object of his labours, his strivings after truth, and reason, and the justification of things that from time immemorial have baffled philosophers and simple men alike.

But when Robert began to speak to her in this strain, Winifred opened her blue eyes very wide and stared at her lover in unaffected bewilderment.

"I know nothing about these things," she said simply, and began talking to him about the latest extravagance of the latest society actress.

Once or twice, Robert returned to the charge. Winifred became first perplexed and troubled, then reproachful, and even a little petulant. Robert, in his philosophical mood, alarmed and irritated her. She resented what she could not understand.

Those unknown, unexplored regions which her lover tried to open out before her, did not attract her. She had no curiosity, no desire to learn. Robert's learning worried her a little. It seemed to awaken a dim consciousness of her own limitations.

"I wish, I do wish, you were just an ordinary young man," she said to him, one day, after he had been engaged in a futile attempt to arouse her interest in certain extracts from a book of Professor Huxley's. "Robert, I sometimes think I ought not to marry you."

"Sweetheart," cried Robert, full of tender reproach. "What makes you say that?"

"I'm not clever enough for you, Robert. It's a pity you fell in love with me."

Robert laughed uneasily.

"Nonsense, darling," he said, "I'm the happiest man in the world, and I've no right to trouble your pretty head with things that can't interest you. I'm afraid I'm an old fogey by nature, but you'll have to teach me not to be one."

And he bent down and kissed away the wistful look that had crept into Winnie's charming face.

"You're quite sure you wouldn't rather marry somebody clever—somebody like Kitty, for instance?"

Robert started, and a deep flush suffused his dark face.

"What put that idea into your head, sweetheart?" he asked. With a sudden fierce movement, he took the girl in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

That was the last time Robert ever attempted to inspire Winifred with enthusiasm for his work. From that moment he never referred to it in her presence. He tried, with an earnestness that was almost pathetic, to keep within the narrow circle of his sweetheart's own innocent girlish interests, and he succeeded so well that Winifred's vague doubts were set at rest.

It was only to Winifred's sister that Robert spoke of his work now.

Not that Katherine had any greater pretensions to learning than Winnie. She was as frankly ignorant of the teachings of the great philosophers as Winnie herself, only there was this vast difference between them: That whereas Winnie was bored and miserable in the presence of superior knowledge, Katherine was fascinated by it, and impelled with the desire to make it her own.

Before long Robert had cause to marvel at the younger sister's keen intelligence, at the quickness of her perceptions, the ease with which she mastered ideas that were entirely new to her.

Katherine never did things by halves.

"It's to be friends," she had told Robert. And friends they became in more than merely name.

The girl never obtruded her presence on the lovers. She had an exaggerated horror of being "in the way," a feeling against which her sister was wont to protest with honest indignation.

But in spite of this morbid sensitiveness on her part, Katherine and Robert were thrown a good deal together, and the girl's ready sympathy, her genuine interest in Robert's work, was inexpressibly grateful to him.

Then it happened that Winifred received a letter from an aunt, an unmarried sister of her father's, inviting the girl to stay with her for a few weeks at her home in Edinburgh.

It was barely two months before the date fixed for the wedding, and Winifred was very loth to go.

"I can't understand aunt Kate inviting me now," she said to Katherine. "She must know how busy I am, and—and all that sort of thing."

"Perhaps father will let you decline the invitation," suggested her sister.

But Mr. Graham would not hear of this. It was one of those rare occasions on which he thought fit to exert his paternal authority.

"I have so much to do," pleaded Winifred.

"That's precisely why your aunt has invited you," said Mr. Graham, who knew his sister. "She wants to put you to the test. Remember, you are her favourite niece, Winifred. I can't allow you to ruin your chances. If you offend her now, she'll never forgive you."

Mr. Graham could be firm where his daughters' worldly prospects were concerned, and so to Edinburgh Winnie had to go, much to her own and Katherine's indignation.

Winifred's attempt at cheerfulness as she bade good-bye to Robert and Katherine at Euston was almost pathetic.

"You two are not to mope while I'm away, do you hear?" she said, furtively wiping away a tiny tear. "You're to go and see Kitty every day, Robert," she added, turning to her sweetheart with a pretty air of authority. "Kitty's promised to be so good to you that you won't miss me a bit."

Robert went home that night with Winifred's parting words ringing in his ears.

"I'm to see her every day," he said with a bitter smile that would have puzzled Winifred could she have seen it.

Robert kept his promise.

Katherine told him laughingly that she had no need of him. Her hands were full with preparations for Winnie's wedding.

"Now that Winnie's away I have to do double duty," she said. "You've no idea what a lot there is to be done. I don't know how I'm going to finish it all!"

"Can't the servants do it?" asked Robert.

"Now, isn't

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that just like a man?" cried Katherine. "Fancy leaving Winnie's *trousseau* to the mercy of the servants! Robert, your ignorance is appalling. You don't deserve to be married!"

"I know that," said Robert, so seriously that the girl looked at him in surprise.

"I was only joking, of course," she remarked.

"Perhaps it was one of those true words spoken in jest."

For some reason Katherine chose to treat the reply with flippancy.

"What a dreadful mood to be in!" she exclaimed. "The idea of cultivating a conscience on the eve of your wedding!"

"There's plenty of time."

"Plenty of time! And Winnie with not a thing to wear!"

"I meant there's time for—repentance."

"Robert, you're quite unbearable this evening, and I don't understand in the least what you mean," said Katherine, angrily.

"Katherine—what would you say if I told you that it was impossible for me to—to marry Winifred?"

The girl turned white to the lips. Her grey eyes—the only beauty that Nature had given her—flashed ominously. With an effort she controlled herself.

"I should say," she replied, in a voice that trembled a little, "I should say that was the poorest joke I ever had heard."

For a moment Robert was silent. His own face was almost as pale as his companion's.

"Forgive me," he said, at last. "I spoke like a fool. I'm sorry I distressed you. Forgive me, dear."

She laid her hand on his arm.

"Perhaps I ought to have taken the jest in better part," she said, "but just for a moment, I believed—I believed it was not a jest, Robert, and—you frightened me. That you had deceived Winnie—my Winnie—who loves you so—it was too horrible. Oh, Robert, if you should ever be unkind to her—if you should ever forget that she loves you——"

The girl broke off suddenly, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into a passion of sobs.

And Robert, calling himself brute and blackguard, stood by, powerless to comfort her.

He could not understand the violence of Katherine's grief. At that moment it was well he did not understand.

Presently the sobs ceased, and Katherine lifted a pitiful face to Robert.

"What a weak, hysterical creature you must think me," she said, with a smile that moved him strangely. "After my promise to Winnie, too! A nice cheerful substitute she's chosen for herself. Don't be angry with me, Robert. I promise not to be so foolish again."

And Katherine was as good as her word. She had never seemed brighter and happier and more light-hearted than in the days that followed.

Robert, on the other hand, was moody and depressed. A great change seemed to have come over him since Winifred's departure—a change that almost frightened Katherine.

The girl tried to attribute his strange conduct to Winnie's absence.

"It's only natural that he should be silent and depressed," she reasoned. "He's pining for her. He can't bear to be away from her so long."

And yet, though she dared not admit it even to herself, she knew that this was not the truth. The truth she had read in his eyes that night when he asked her the question she had chosen to interpret as a foolish jest. The truth she dared not face.

Then, suddenly, without warning, she was called upon to face it.

One morning Robert came to her with a letter in his hand.

"In less than a week she'll be home again," he said.

"I know," replied the girl brightly. "I've had a letter, too. Robert, I'm very glad."

"I'm glad, too," said Robert. But there was no joy in his face.

Katherine answered nothing. She understood too well.

"Kitty, I shall not see you again till Winifred comes back."

The girl gave him a startled look.

"Why, there are five whole days, and we have seen each other every day till now," she said.

"Kitty, I can't come again," he cried. "I daren't come again—till she is back!"

The girl began to tremble. Slowly, almost reluctantly, she raised her eyes to his. For a moment they gazed at each other as though spell-bound. And in that moment there was revealed to each something that could never be recalled.

With a cry he came towards her. The girl shivered and put out her arms as though to repel him.

"Kitty," he whispered, "Kitty, is it too late?"

His words seemed to break the spell that held her. Almost fiercely she shook off the hand he had laid on her arm.

"Robert, are you mad?" she cried.

The sound of her voice softened him. With an effort that was almost physical pain to him, he controlled himself.

"Forgive me," he said, humbly. "I did not mean to frighten you, but—yes, I *was* mad for a moment, I had forgotten."

"Go," she said in a low voice, not daring to look at him.

He seized her hand and kissed it.

"Good-bye—little sister," he said, softly. And stole from the room.

Grete Hahn.

THIS WEEK'S COMPETITION.

For this week's competition I want my readers to make a sentence of seven words, the initial letters of the words to be C, Y, N, T, H, I, A, respectively. A Solid Silver Pencil-case will be awarded to the sender of the best sentence, and ten consolation gifts, consisting of rolled gold hearts and charms will go to the senders of the ten next best. Sentences should be written on the backs of postcards only, and should be addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, August 26th. The Editor's decision is final.

Result of "Three Letters" Competition.

The first prize of a Solid Silver Pencil-case offered in this competition has been awarded to Mr. Fred Farr, Union Infirmary, Hampton, Evesham. Consolation prizes go to the following: Miss L. Thomson, 1 Church Row, Garratt Lane, Lower Tooting, S.W.; James M. Braidwood, 6 Gladstone Ter., Edinburgh; Miss Rose Lee, 24 Dorothy Street, Hightown, Manchester; Alexander Bruce, 4 Clarence Road, Handsworth, Birmingham; Miss Tucker, 293 Finchley Road, N.W.; Edwin Pearson, 417 Blackburn Road, Accrington, Lancs.; Miss Maggie B. Stuart, 12 Garnet Terrace, Mt. Florida, Glasgow; Mrs. H. J. Callander, 6 Brunton Terrace, Sunderland; Cecil J. Pearson, 140 Belgrave Road, Walthamstow; C. Buckley, 35 Walton Street, Heywood; John Connelly, 16 High Street, Dumbarton.

Result of "Cat" Competition.

Drawings of all sorts and conditions of cats were sent in, and the Silver Pencil-case has been awarded to Mr. Gilbert H. Dodd, 19 Talbot Street, Mauldeth Road, Withington, Manchester. The following have received consolation gifts: J. Thomson, 5 W. Montgomery Place, Edinburgh; F. N. L. Daubeny, Woodville, Alumhurst Road, Bournemouth; A. Bruce, 4 Clarence Road, Handsworth, Birmingham; W. E. Raymond, 8 College View, Bootle; Dorothy Griffiths, 186 Brighton Road, Croydon; J. McLay, 12 Burndyke Street, Govan, Glasgow; Mrs. E. Fisher, 63 Bold Street, Altrincham; R. Thomson, 5 W. Montgomery Place, Edinburgh; Mrs. Worrell, 3 Guy's Cliff Road, Leamington Spa; F. Peterson, 17 Oakfield Street, Altrincham.

TO THOSE WHO WRITE.

A Prize of One Guinea will be paid every week by the Editor for the best short story sent in by any of his readers. Contributions should not be less than 1,500 words in length, and not more than 3,000. The Editor reserves to himself the right to publish any contribution submitted. Stamped addressed envelopes must be inclosed for the return of the stories, but, while every care will be taken, the Editor does not hold himself responsible for possible loss of MSS.

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THE GREAT "PASS-IT-ALONG" SCHEME.

First Award, £10. Second Award, £5. Third Award, £2. Six Awards of 10s. each.

(A)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMPETITOR WHO SENDS THIS COPY.

When you have carefully read these rules, put an ink line round the instructions in the next column, write your name and address in the space at the foot of this page*, and in the next column; wrap up this copy of SHORT STORIES in a wrapper, fix a penny stamp on it, and post it to a friend of yours whom you think will help you. Then wait until the copy is returned to you.

All you need do is to send out your copy or copies of SHORT STORIES and wait until they come back to you with the names filled in.

The first prize will be awarded to the person whose copies of SHORT STORIES contain the greatest number of signatures of people to whom the copies have been sent, provided that the wrappers which carried the copies of SHORT STORIES through the post to each person accompany the list.

It is not necessary for you to know the people whose names you will find on your list when your copy comes back; they will, of course, be the friends of your friends.

There is no absolute necessity to write a letter to your friend explaining the scheme, but if you did so it would carry more weight.

HOW TO SEND IN.

Keep the wrappers as they are sent to you, and when this copy comes back send all the wrappers, together with this copy, to the Editor of "Short Stories," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "PASS-IT-ALONG," to arrive not later than first post Thursday, September 4th.

NOTE.—Competitors may send out at the same time any number of copies of this issue.

The Editor's decision is final, and readers may enter only on this understanding.

(B)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE WHO RECEIVE THIS COPY BY POST.

This copy of SHORT STORIES has been sent to you by a friend who is interested in this competition and who wants to win one of the prizes offered. When you have read this announcement write your name down in the space provided, and then forward this copy *at once* in a penny wrapper to a friend of yours. If you have no friend to whom you can send it, return the copy of the paper, *together with the wrapper in which you received it*, to the original sender.

If the original sender of this paper (whose name and address is written at the foot of this page) wins the first prize, *you* will also receive a prize. The paper must be returned to the original sender on or before Saturday, August 30th.

You must at once return the wrapper in which this copy reaches you to _____

(Competitor must insert here his or her name and address.)

IMPORTANT.

Fill in your name at once and post it on the day this is received. If you keep it longer it will lessen the chance of the original sender securing the first prize, as the paper will not be able to get into so many hands within the time limit.

If you receive this copy on Saturday, August 30th, fill up your name and post it at once to the sender, whose name appears at the foot of this page.

Why Not Try Yourself?

If you want to enter for this competition yourself, and win one of the prizes, get a copy of SHORT STORIES from your newsagent at once, and follow the instructions marked "A."

Those to whom this copy is sent sign here.

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Those who sign here will get a prize each if this wins first award.

*Name and Address of Competitor.....

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THE GHOST OF AN OLD LOVE.

And a Man who Married the Ghost.

IF ever John C. Studley came near believing in ghosts it was on the second day of July, at half-past three in the afternoon.

On that day and at that hour he had made his way through the woods that fringe the sandy cliffs near Sealand Bay, and had come out where he could look down over the whole length of the shimmering bay—and it was then he saw the ghost.

It was a bright, sunshiny afternoon; the rattle of hammers came up from the little ship-yard below; three visitors in a boat were pulling three various ways—yet it was under these most prosaic signs of the realities of life that he saw the ghost of Agnes Thorpe sitting under a tree, sketching the scene he had known so well twenty-two years ago.

Twenty-two years ago he had lived in the neighbouring village of straggling Kilcombe, the only son of old Captain Studley, and had sat many, many times either under this very tree, or one very much like it, while Agnes had sketched, as she was sketching now. Then one day he had said something that was unjust. She had called it cruel; angry words had passed, and what might have been smoothed over by a syllable of explanation had ended as a violent quarrel. In the wild illogicality of the angry man, he had thought that by causing her pain he would alleviate his own, and so had shipped on his father's whaler, and had sailed to the ice-fields and the snow. But man's temper is rarely formative, it is never an arbiter of fate, and storm and stress followed close on his heels for ten years. Then, when 'twas too late for him to return home, Dame Fortune had wooed him as though he were the best man in the world, and he was rich. Rich, without a soul to share his riches, and, about three weeks ago, a wave of loneliness and homesickness had borne him back here.

He had not been nearly so sentimentally affected as he had imagined would be the case, and now, just as he had come to the conclusion that the old place was very stupid, all the old memories had been revived in this startling fashion.

For it was startling, and he felt his heart beat faster as he looked at the wraith of his dead love. Then, as he hesitated whether to turn and run or address the spirit, a little fox terrier bounded from beside her ghostly ladyship and ran with sharps barks towards him.

"Come here, Gyp," cried the ghost, and even then Studley could not forbear another shiver, for the voice was that of Agnes.

But having seen strange sights and mastered himself, and drawing near, said, though quite tremblingly:

"Is your name Agnes Thorpe?"

No woman could look on Studley's face without feeling that it was that of a man of which some men might be afraid, but of which no woman could be. So—and for another reason, as you shall hear—it was that the ghostly artist said, and smiled as she said it:

"No, but that was my mother's name."

Then it all came to him in that swiftness of light with which he had so often seen the dawn rush in down there in the tropics, and he knew that his old love lived again in her daughter.

"My foolish question will show you that that does not surprise me," he said, "for you look very like her—your mother, I mean."

"You knew her then?"

"Indeed I did," he answered, "as perhaps you might know and as perhaps you might not, if I told you that my name is Studley—John C. Studley."

"Of course, of course," the girl said, tilting back her sun-bonnet, the better to look clearly at him, "I might have known it, had not my mother told me many times that you were dead."

"I was," he said, "dead to her, a suicide of love. And she, of course, is dead to me?"

"She is dead as our lives go," said the girl, "but she was never dead to you as love goes, Mr. Studley. She lived and died loving you, and my father, who is also dead, knew that and accepted her duty and wifely affection as the sweetest substitute she had to offer."

"Wonderful, and wonderfully sad," said the man. "'Twas all my evil and wrong."

"She never said so," said the girl. Then added: "And you loved her, did you not?"

"Well," said Studley, "if I was cruel and harsh, at least I have been consistent in my penance—if you can call a penance that which it was no pain to do—for I have never bestowed a duty and affection on any other woman."

"That's good; that's right," said the girl; "that's as I would have a man love me."

"There are many strange things about this meeting," he said at length, pinching the dog's cropped ears, for man and beast were already friends. "One is that I had meant to go away to-morrow and now I don't want to go away at all."

"Well, must you?" asked the girl.

"No," he replied. "I am a fairly old man, with no encumbrances—except those of property hardly won."

"Now, as to being an old man," said the girl severely, "that is arrant foolishness. I have a picture of you at home that my mother gave me and you look exactly like it."

He laughed.

"That's the reason you didn't know who I was when I asked who you were," he said.

"Well, I did half know you then," said the girl, "but I thought you were dead, while you didn't know at all who I was, for you thought I was your old sweetheart come to life. So that really evens up our errors and," here she laughed too, "in a kind of whimsical way, it makes us of about the same age, doesn't it?"

"Do you know," he said, after a little while, "I feel exactly as though I was again playing court to Agnes Thorpe through you?"

"Yes?" she said quietly. "Then I suppose I ought to feel as though I were being courted as a reincarnation of my mother?"

"And do you?" he asked.

"Almost," she replied.

"I wonder," he said, with a quaver in his voice, "I wonder it could ever—possibly—happen—that you could feel so altogether?"

The new Agnes did not answer, but surely you can guess that as the time went by he found out what that silence meant.

T. J. Vivian.

The Little Chap Knew.

A CLERGYMAN was speaking to a Sunday-school class. "Now, can any little boy tell me," he asked, "what is grace?" There was a moment's silence. Presently a diminutive boy of not more than ten summers held up his hand. "Please sir, I know," said he. The minister was pleased. "Well, what is it?" he asked. "Why, please, sir," said the small boy, "he's the champion cricketer."

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All's Right with the World.

By DAISY PENDER CUDLIP.

FIRST HALF OF THE STORY.

MRS. LESLIE is living with her two daughters, May and Nellie, at the fishing village of Porthtowan, near which are stationed two companies of the Royal Wessex Regiment. Captain Leonard Davies is one of her most frequent visitors, mostly on May's account, with whom he is great friends. Taking her out for a row one day, Captain Davies lands at a little sheltered cove, and, forgetting the fact that the tide is going down, gives himself up to the enjoyment of May's company. When too late they discover that the boat is high and dry between the rocks, and no amount of exertion will release it, and although they know what insinuations will probably be made against both the man and the girl, have to settle down to wait for the return of the tide. Meanwhile the seeds of calumny are speedily being sown at Porthtowan.

"For the sake of my daughter's good name I must consent."

MEANWHILE in the cottage above the village Mrs. Leslie, as the afternoon and evening wore on, began to feel anxious at the non-appearance of Captain Davies and the girls, for until Nelly casually strolled into the drawing-room at about seven o'clock Mrs. Leslie had no idea that the others had gone without her, and great was her annoyance at finding such to be the case, especially as it was getting late and the others had not come in.

"Why didn't you go with your sister this afternoon?" the mother asked querulously, so Nelly thought.

"Because it was so hot, and besides, they didn't want me, but they might have asked me nicely, I do think," went on the child in an aggrieved tone. "As it was, I just showed them I didn't care and let them go without me." Mrs. Leslie smiled at the child's pique, but found it wiser to refrain from saying anything, as she did not want to encourage this idea that the child was right in supposing her sister and Captain Davies were just as happy to be without her. As time went on and still they did not return, the mother's anxiety became keener every moment.

As May had rightly supposed, Mrs. Leslie guessed something of the state of affairs, but naturally her anxieties were all for the sake of her girl's good name. She felt very angry with Captain Davies for having exposed May to slanderous tongues, and more than half-inclined to drop his acquaintance for the future. As ill-luck would have it, after nine o'clock when she and Nelly had finished supper, and had returned to the drawing-room, a certain Mrs. Carroll, the widow of an officer who lived close to the Leslies', chose this particular evening to drop in at the cottage for a chat. She was a woman who loved gossip, a scandal was the joy of her life. During her husband's life-time she had made herself detested by every one of his brother officers, as the most obnoxious form of regimental woman who talks of "our regiment," and makes it her business to pry into the affairs of everybody.

Each subaltern as he joined the regiment fresh from Sandhurst was taken up by this woman, who, under the pretence of being kind, and "acting as a mother to the poor boy," gained from their guileless and trusting young lips many a family and personal confidence, which to their infinite surprise became miraculously known to everyone before very long.

At her husband's death she removed from the sphere of regimental mischief-maker. She had settled down at Porthtowan, far enough away from the garrison town of the former life for economy, but, alas, for her friends, quite near enough for gossip to reach her, and be made the most of by her foolish tongue, for she was more a fool than malicious. However, these are by far the most dangerous class, as unfortunately people believe them more readily because "they are so good natured."

In a very short time her lynx-eyes noted something was wrong from Mrs. Leslie's nervous, constrained manner. "Where is May?" she queried. Before her mother could answer Nelly chimed in with "She went out ever so early with Captain Davies this afternoon, and she hasn't come back yet."

"Not come back yet!" in tones of assumed astonishment. "My dear Mrs. Leslie, how shocking, and so compromising for poor dear May. But perhaps after all it is all right, and they are engaged. I saw them in the boat from my window this afternoon about half-past three, and certainly"—with a smile that was meant to be genial, but had the effect of looking spiteful—"and certainly they both looked very happy."

"I beg, Mrs. Carroll, that you won't run away with any impression of that kind," replied Mrs. Leslie with dignity. "Captain Davies is an intimate friend of ours, and I for one am most grateful to him for his kindness to my girls, seeing they have no brother, and as to your saying they looked extremely happy, surely your sight must be wonderfully keen to see the expression of a face at such a distance."

"You forget my telescope, Mrs. Leslie, you forget my little telescope." She said these words in a would-be playful and wholly exasperating manner, that made Mrs. Leslie long to shake the false smile out of her. Ignoring the remark, however, she said: "I can quite see what has kept them, they have been caught by the tide or something, and I can quite trust Captain Davies not to run any needless risk."

Poor woman, she did not know what to say, but she instinctively felt she must not appear anxious before this woman.

"Of course, of course, my dear, young people have a way of forgetting such trifles as tides and other disagreeables when they are together. I quite understand that, but the calm way in which you take it certainly surprises me."

Mrs. Leslie looked at her and did not answer, but that *enfant terrible*, Nelly, saw her advantage and took it with the remark, "That's just it, Mrs. Carroll, those two are simply awful, we should have been stranded in Smuggler's Cove heaps of times if it hadn't been for me. They never think

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of anyone but themselves, and t just serves them right for not taking me with them this afternoon."

There are times when a child's brutal truthfulness amounts to vice. Mrs. Leslie thought so now, and frowned at Nelly, who, unconscious of any wrong-doing, gave her mother away by asking "What *are* you frowning at? What on earth have I done?"

There being no reply to make to this Mrs. Leslie took refuge in silence, while Mrs. Carroll smiled knowingly, and said, "I thought so, you see I was right after all, these little things seldom escape me." Then finding she could gain no more information, she thought it wiser to withdraw with the parting shot that she should come over the first thing in the morning to hear the cause of May's delay.

It was with a sigh of intense relief that Mrs. Leslie saw her visitor depart; then, with an unwonted energy for her, she told Nelly to put on her things and go down to the beach with her to meet the others, as they would be sure to be back soon. Accordingly the two set out to watch for the truants. They had not long to wait, however, for by the clear light of the moon, which was now high up in the heavens, they saw a boat emerge from the shadow of the Cove known as Smuggler's Cove and come rapidly towards the beach.

As the boat crossed the silver pathway, they could easily recognise Captain Davies and May. In a few minutes the boat ran ashore, and jumping quickly out, Captain Davies hauled her further up the beach, and then lifted May out of the boat. "I *am* glad you came down to meet us," he said to Mrs. Leslie. "I'm awfully sorry that it should have happened, but the truth is we neither of us noticed how the tide was going out. I had asked your daughter if she would be my wife, and we were both too happy to notice anything of the sort. Mrs. Leslie, you will give her to me—I will try and be worthy of her." His voice took an imploring tone as he noticed the hard look of annoyance against him in her face.

"For the sake of my daughter's good name I suppose I shall have to give my consent," she answered coldly.

"May," she went on severely, "go home at once with your sister, I will follow with Captain Davies,"

Obediently she prepared to do as she was told, and with one look of love and confidence at her lover, she walked on with Nelly, her little head thrown a trifle higher than usual in indignation at her mother's suspicions. When they were out of ear-shot, Mrs. Leslie turned and in a low, concentrated voice, said:

"Now, Captain Davies, perhaps you will explain this business."

"Explain it!" he replied aghast, "have I not done so? I have told you exactly what happened, you surely do not suppose either of us guilty of such a piece of folly as to stay out there unless we could not possibly help it, do you?"

"I should hope not, at least I am sure my daughter is not the sort of girl to lower her dignity in that way, but how am I to know that you are not taking advantage of a girl who, having no father or brother to protect her, you think you can compromise with impunity?"

"You do me a great wrong when you imply such a thing, Mrs. Leslie," he replied. "I love your daughter dearly, and her honour is as dear to me as my own; surely the proof of this lies in the fact of my asking her to be my wife. Thank God I shall have the right to defend her good name now."

"You haven't then proposed to her from a mere sense of duty to protect her good name?" she asked doubtingly.

"Certainly not; we were engaged before we discovered that the tide had gone out, so no one can say anything, can they?"

"I hope not, I'm sure, but I'm afraid the majority won't believe it—however."

"We'll make them believe it, and don't you worry about it any more, Mrs. Leslie, you'll find a man a useful thing to have in a house—like a five-pound note or a Nasmyth hammer. People won't say disagreeable things so readily when there is a man to take up the cudgels on your behalf." And he laughed light-heartedly as he spoke.

"My dear boy, I sco

"Mrs. Leslie, you will give her to me—I will try to be worthy of her," he pleaded.
"For the sake of my daughter's good name I suppose I shall have to give my consent," she answered, coldly.

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you are going to be a considerate son to me, and I shall rely on you entirely. As you say, a man *is* a useful thing to have in a house; no one realises that better than I do since my husband's death, because I know the want of it." And she took his two hands in hers. "I shall not ask you in to-night as it is too late, but you may come and see May any time you like to-morrow. In the meantime, good-night, and think yourself lucky at having escaped my wrath so easily."

"Good-night, Mrs. Leslie," and he turned to go, then, hesitating a moment, he said, "You'll make it all right with May, won't you?"

"Of course I will," and with a much lighter heart than had been her portion an hour before, Mrs. Leslie made her way back to the cottage.

"I Demand an Apology!"

Good as her word, Mrs. Carroll put in an appearance the following morning, and was greeted with the news of May's engagement by Nelly, who prefaced her remarks with the words, "Didn't I say so."

Mrs. Carroll, after effusively congratulating May, went on to say "How lucky it was that Captain Davies was such an honourable fellow, as some men would not have acted as he had done, but," she continued, "as it had all turned out well nothing more need be said," with many other remarks of a like nature.

May, not knowing what was in her mind, thought her rather peculiar, and then thought no more about it.

Time went on, and it was arranged that the young people should be married at Christmas, there being no reason why they should wait.

It must be confessed that the news of Captain Davies' engagement and approaching marriage was not well received by the unmarried portion of his mess. They deeply deplored the fact, for Leonard was voted by one and all a "thundering good fellow," and it was a thousand pities he should give up his bachelor freedom for any woman, let alone a chit of a girl who had apparently "tricked him into matrimony," from which it may be inferred that Mrs. Carroll had, as per usual, been giving her version of the case at various tea-fights, which version had circulated very rapidly, much to poor unoffending May's detriment.

Had Leonard known anything of this he would have been furious, but he was the last man in the world to whom anyone would repeat gossip, either about himself or anyone connected with him. Consequently he went on in blissful ignorance of the fact that he was being pitied for having been "caught" by a match-making mother, and a clever, though seemingly innocent daughter.

* * * * *

The wedding, which was to be a quiet affair, was fixed for the first week in January, so that the honeymoon should fit in with the leave season.

A few evenings before this, the bachelors of the regiment entertained Leonard at a farewell dinner, for on his return from leave he would be a Benedict, a married man, and then domestic life would claim him for its own.

They drank his health frequently, and finally with musical honours, shouting very much out of time and tune. "For he's a Jolly Good Fellow," but still no one proposed the health of the bride-elect. At length the youngest subaltern present, who had imbibed a good deal more champagne than was good for him, got up very unsteadily, and to the consternation and horror of all, delivered himself of the following words:

"Gentlemen, on an occasion of this sort, the health of bride-elect is usually proposed, and as junior subaltern present, that duty involves on me, I suppose I ought to say that pleasant duty, but I shall not, as I consider under the circumstances it is nothing of the sort." Here someone tried to stop him and pull him down in his chair, but the boy, hardly responsible for his actions, would not be stopped. "Shut up," he muttered, "I will say what I think, and what all of you think, only you haven't the pluck to say so, that Davies has been 'caught,' and I'm not going to propose the health of a girl who tricks a man into marrying her." He shouted out the last words so as to be heard above the noise, for at his insulting words every man sprang up from his seat, and several tried to pull the boy down. As for Captain Davies, he was white with rage, and utter blank astonishment.

The next instant he sprang at the offender and would have knocked him down, had not several others intervened.

"If you don't eat your words, you young cur," he muttered, "I'll break every bone in your body. What the dickens is the meaning of this infernal lie?" he asked, turning to the other men, and noting the fierce red light in his eyes, no one liked to risk a reply.

"Do you hear?" he went on. "I demand an explanation and an apology, on behalf of the lady who is to be my wife."

"We are all most heartily sorry for what has occurred, and I am sure when Barker is sober no one will be sorrier than himself," said Captain Hall, who was the senior officer present. Then, turning to one of the other men, he told him to take Mr. Barker to his quarters.

"Sorry! I should think he would be, the insolent young cad, but I shall expect something more than that; I mean to have some explanation of his meaning which doubtless some of you can give me. In fact, in justice to Miss Leslie, I demand an explanation."

"Since you demand it, Davies, I suppose I had better tell you, but I fancy Barker must have got hold of and believed the rumour about your engagement, I mean the way it happened." And Captain Hall looked very uncomfortable as he spoke. He liked Leonard very much, and it was a most painful task for him to be obliged to tell him what the rumour was.

"I don't understand; will you kindly speak more plainly, if you please?"

Leonard was speaking very calmly, and apparently unmoved, but anyone who noticed how the words came from between closed teeth, and how the red light of anger blazed in his eyes, would have known he was far from being unmoved.

"I hate having to tell you, old chap, but hang me, you must know, people say you proposed to her to save a scandal."

"What!" he exclaimed, starting up fiercely—all his apparent calm forsaking him, in the suddenness of the shock Captain Hall's words conveyed.

"It's a lie, and I'll horse-whip the fellow who started it within an inch of his life. The brute!"

"I expect you'll find some woman is the originator and unfortunately a woman cannot be horse-whipped, so thinks she may say things with impunity. But what course do you mean to take with Barker? Shall you have him put under arrest for insulting you?" Captain Hall asked anxiously.

"I should most certainly have done so had I alone been concerned," he replied; "as it is, I shall demand an apology and hush the matter up for Miss Leslie's sake, and also for the credit of the regiment. I think," he went on slowly, "Barker will probably find it advisable to exchange."

"Thanks, old fellow; I'm glad you look on it in that light, it would have been a ghastly disgrace to the regiment if this thing were known. Up to this point we have had no cads, and, as you say, Barker must go.

"You may look to me to help you in clearing up this affair, old chap," he went on, holding out his hand which Leonard shook. "I fear a good many have got hold of this rumour, and we shall have to clear it up before your marriage. By the way, it's to be on Saturday, isn't it?"

"Yes, Saturday, and to-day is Monday, and as ill-luck will have it, I'm bound to run up to town to see my people on business to-morrow, and can't possibly get back until Thursday. What on earth is to be done?" Leonard leant his head wearily on his hand. The two men were left alone, all the others having gone to discuss the affair elsewhere.

"If you will trust me with the facts of the case, I think I can make it all right for you, old chap, for when I know the facts I shall then be able to contradict all the rumours that are about."

Then Leonard told him exactly all that had happened. He also told how Mrs. Leslie had met them on the beach, and the subsequent interview he had had with her, but did

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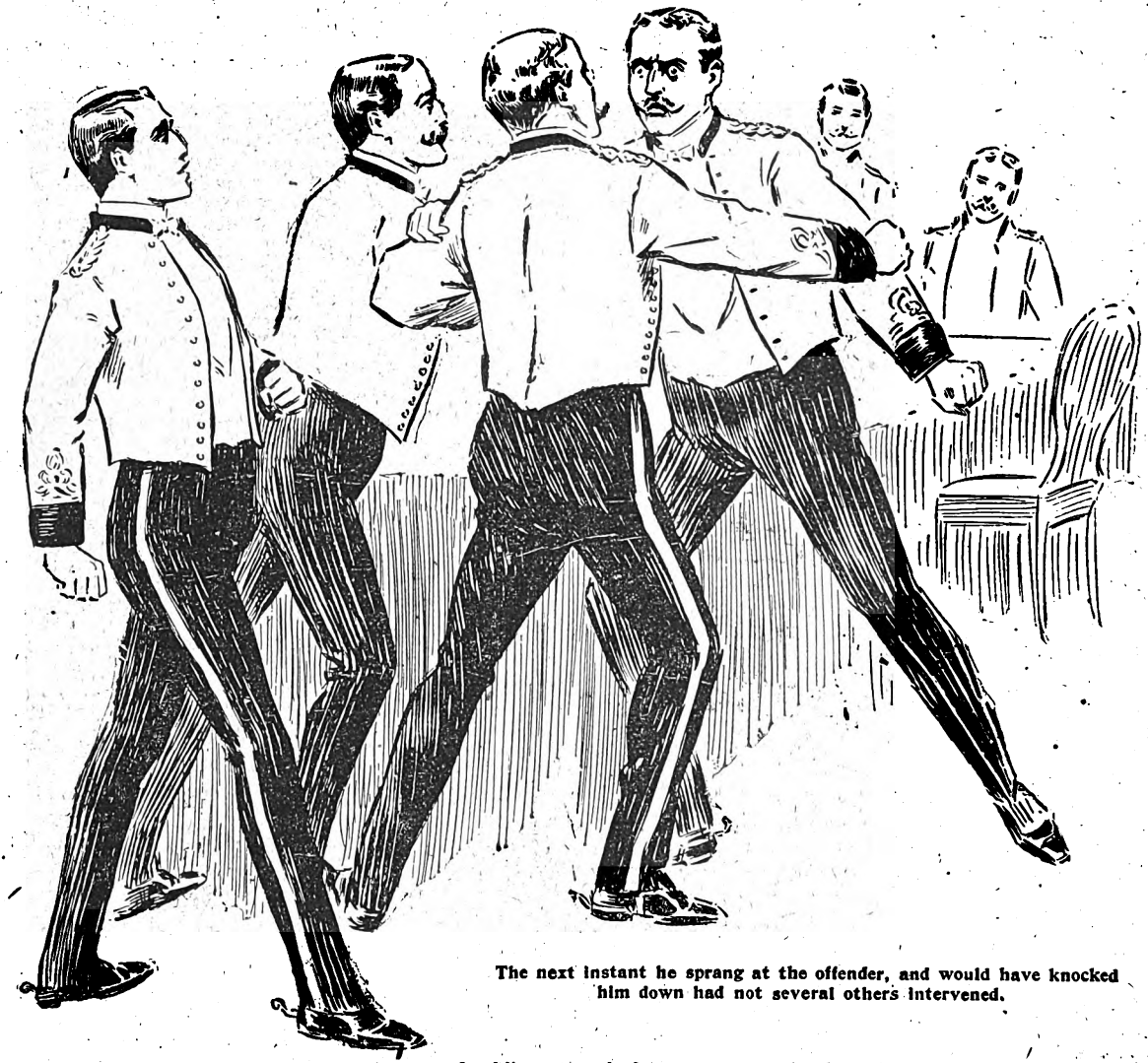
not think of mentioning the interest Mrs. Carroll had taken in the affair.

Captain Hall listened attentively to all that was said; then, after a few moments, he asked him if anyone else in Porthtowan was likely to know of their having been caught by the tide at the time.

Then the riddle began to solve itself to Leonard's mind. He recalled things Nelly had let fall regarding Mrs. Carroll's visit on the eventful evening, and how she, Mrs. Carroll, had "asked mamma if Captain Davies and May were engaged, and when mamma said no, how Mrs. Carroll had seemed



The next instant he sprang at the offender, and would have knocked him down had not several others intervened.

awfully amused, and then went home, chuckling to herself," as Nelly expressed it. None of these things had struck him at the time, but now he understood it all, and realised that Mrs. Carroll was at the bottom of all the mischief.

"I've got it all," he exclaimed, with more force than elegance. "It's that Mrs. Carroll, she must be made to contradict what she has said to everybody she has said it to. Do you think you can undertake the task in my absence?"

"I'll make her, my dear fellow. It's the least she can do. I'll get her version of the affair from her, show her what are the facts of the case and make her promise to set things right so far as she can by publicly acknowledging she was wrong."

"I don't see how you are going to do that—it isn't such an easy matter."

"I'll go with her to this 'At Home' at Government House on Wednesday; the conversation is sure to turn on Miss Leslie's wedding the following day, and then Mrs. Carroll shall contradict the rumours she has circulated. If she funks it I shall fix her with this gimlet eye of mine until she is forced to own up. This 'At Home' business is most lucky, as everyone in the neighbourhood will be there, and the truth will very soon spread."

This plan, being the best thing under the circumstances, was finally decided upon, much to Leonard's relief.

Whereupon the two men rose and left the mess together, to discuss the matter more fully in Leonard's quarters.

* * * * * *

Tuesday evening saw Leonard in town, where, awaiting him at his club, he found a letter from May, the contents of which staggered him beyond words. It ran as follows:

"You will doubtless be surprised at receiving a letter

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from me so soon after our interview this afternoon"—the letter was dated "Monday night"—"But, fearing for the first time the real state of the case, I rejoice that I am not too late to release you from your engagement, and the prospect of a marriage that could only be irksome to you. I fully appreciate and thank you for the chivalrous motive that prompted you to act as you did, and in such a way, believe me, as to completely blind my eyes to the real state of the case. Knowing now, as I do, that you had never intended to ask me to be your wife, and only did so in order to shield my name from scandal that might have arisen owing to a mere piece of carelessness just as much my fault as yours, I cannot trade any longer upon your generosity, or risk having it said that I had done so. I hope you will as thoroughly understand and appreciate my motive in breaking off our engagement, as I do appreciate your motive in having asked me to marry you.—Good-bye. "MAY."

P.S.—Mother, Nelly, and I are going to travel for a time, we leave here on Saturday.

"Good God! And Saturday was to have been our wedding day," exclaimed the man, as he finished reading the letter. "This must be put right at once. I must let her know I am not going to be given my *congé* so easily."

And seating himself at one of the tables he wrote a long letter explaining the whole thing, how the malicious rumour had been set going by Mrs. Carroll, and pointing out how absolutely untrue it all was.

"There is only one thing I fear," he wrote, "and that is, that when you learn I asked you to marry me simply because I loved you, and wanted you with no thought of saving your name from any scandal, two great virtues with which you had accredited me will be found wanting, namely, chivalry and generosity. But, my darling, if you will be content with the proof of my love for you now, the privilege of acting chivalrously and generously to you in the future shall be mine, and you may be sure it is a privilege I shall rejoice in. Let me hear no more talk of travelling abroad with your mother and Nelly on Saturday. I am coming to fetch you myself, and then *I* mean to take you *with me*. I am writing to your mother. Till Saturday, my darling little wife that is to be, good-bye,

"Yours ever, LEONARD."

Having sealed, addressed, and posted the letters which should put everything right, Leonard then set about the business about which he had come to town.

* * * * *

Saturday dawned bright and frosty, the little village looking in the bright, winter sunshine almost as picturesque as it did in the summer. The sea was beautifully calm and blue, and in fact everything conduced to make the day an ideal one for a bride. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the time fixed for the wedding, the old church on the cliff was crowded with friends, and a large number of the fisher-folk with whom "Miss May" was a great favourite.

In spite of the wedding being a very quiet one, the excitement that had prevailed during the last few days about it, and the rumour that at the last moment Miss Leslie had broken off the match on hearing the rumours that were afloat, had made the wedding one of great interest in the neighbourhood.

And popular favour had veered round suddenly in favour of the girl who had been so terribly maligned, and had been so plucky about it. Captain Davies was at his post looking as most bridegrooms do, like a fish out of water, and being continually told by his best man, Captain Hill, "to bear up."

The officers of the regiment had turned up in full force to support him in the trying moment, and to make some amends for the unfortunate event of a few evenings before, all except Mr. Barker, who, after an abject apology, had applied for an exchange which was subsequently obtained.

At a few minutes past two a carriage was heard driving smartly up over the gravel, and murmurs of "the bride" ran through the church.

* * * * *

The ceremony was over, the registers were duly signed, and they were man and wife. The organ, as they left the vestry, pealed forth Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," announcing the fact that "they were coming" to those outside. Showers of rice greeted the unfortunate couple as they emerged from under the porch, thrown by the children and fisher-women, who, with the barbarity of their class on such occasions, were unsparing in the supplies.

"Good luck to you, Mrs. Davies," called out one of the Royal Wessex Subalterns who had gone round to the other side of the carriage, then, starting three hearty cheers, he waved his hat after them as they drove off, the cheering being vigorously taken up by the people, while Nelly, forgetful of her dignity as bridesmaid, joined in with the rest. Captain Hill, with mock solemnity, reminded her of the dignities of her position both as a bridesmaid and also as being Miss Leslie now her sister was married.

"It's all very well," she answered, "but how can I be dignified with these?" looking ruefully down at a pair of long black legs, and making everyone laugh.

A couple of hours later Captain and Mrs. Davies left for London *en route* for the south of France.

"Leonard," said the newly made wife, putting her little hand in his, "do you know I can hardly believe that I am really and truly your wife, it seems too good to be true."

"It's true enough, little woman, and I hope I may never cause you to regret the fact."

And drawing her gently towards him he kissed her tenderly.

THE END.

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Love the Leveller.

The Romance of a Machine Room.

She threaded her way daintily through the great shop with its bewildering whirr of machinery and its roaring fires—its flying sparks and dirt and dust and smoke.

Now and again she stopped to watch some giant machine perform its almost human work. The men, with their splendid muscles and perfect skill, interested her immensely. But her companion was distinctly bored. The grime and sweat and dirt offended his aristocratic senses and the noise jarred upon his ears.

"What you can find interesting in this pandemonium I cannot imagine," he expostulated. "It is bad enough for those who have to be here and do the work; but to deliberately seek it when the sun is shining outside, the roads are hard and a motor car is waiting, is beyond me."

"Oh, Philip, can't you feel the thrill of seeing things done by real people?" she replied. "Just look at that man at the forge! See the great muscles stand out as he lifts the hammer. And see how skilfully he shapes the iron! The strength of a giant, the delicate touch of a woman—it is grand!"

"Well, I'm blessed if I can see it that way," rejoined the man. "Far from seeming romantic, it looks to me as though the fellow might as well be in prison as be compelled to spend his time doing that kind of work. Of course, I suppose they are used to this sort of labour—and somebody has to do it—but I can't say I care to see them at it—anyway, on a fine day with fresh air and a lively spin awaiting me."

Just the shadow of impatience crossed the girl's face at this speech, but she laughed merrily and continued her way through the shop.

It was Ida's first visit to the great works of which her father was the owner. She had been reared in the exclusive atmosphere of wealth, and her vision had not reached much beyond her father's palatial mansion, the theatres, the other palatial mansions in "our set," and the Continental tour.

Of course, she knew about the great mills, but heretofore to her they had been simply acres of gloomy, smoking prisons, from which there was wrested the money that brought all the good things.

On this pleasant day in the early Autumn, wearied with the conventional round of pleasures and pastimes with which she was surfeited, and somewhat aroused by a novel she had been reading, which dealt with the world of workers, she had determined to see the inside of those great smoky shops and find out just what was going on there and the manner of men who lived among them.

Her father had laughed at her whim, and as he had not time that day to go with her, Philip Hammond acted as her escort. Philip was her constant champion—her destined husband—the son of Mr. Norton's life-long friend, a successful banker.

It was but a moment after the conversation recorded between Miss Norton and Mr. Hammond that an accident occurred.

A man directly ahead of the visitors, carrying a heavy load on his shoulder, made a mis-step, fell against a great leather belt, and was carried off his feet and upward with the belt. As he realised his danger he gave a fearful shriek and his eyes met those of Miss Norton. The mortal terror in them burnt into her very soul and she shrieked—

"Philip, Philip, save him! Oh, save him!"

She saw the wheel to which the belt was dragging him and knew that he must be crushed.

Philip also saw the fearful danger, but stood as one paralysed.

He could have reached the man from where he was, but stood trembling with white face and horror-stricken eyes.

The attention of the entire shop had been attracted by the shrieks, and a score of men were running towards the scene.

"Pull that lever, you there with the white cap! The black one! Quick! Throw off the belt!" came in clear, commanding tones from behind. But Hammond did not stir. He threw up one hand to shut out the sight of the man being crushed.

In the meantime past the two visitors sprang the man who had shouted.

It was the blacksmith from the forge.

The man on the belt was right in the clutch of the wheel.

It seemed to Ida that she must surely faint.

At that instant the blacksmith made a lunge at a revolving wheel, caught two of the iron spokes and braced his stalwart legs.

It seemed as though he would be thrown against the machine beyond—but no, the wheel stopped with a jerk.

The muscles on the blacksmith's arms and chest stood out like whipcords.

"Quick, boys, quick!" he cried; "I can't stand this long."

He had no need to urge. Already two workmen had hoisted a third to their shoulders, and he pulled the victim from the wheel, with one arm badly crushed, but alive.

Then the blacksmith let go the wheel, and the machinery restarted to whirr and buzz. The men crowded about him, offering congratulations.

"Well, I'm blest, Joe. You saved Mike from bein' made into mincemeat that time. I didn't think it could be done. By Jove, Joe, I'd like to have your muscle."

These and similar compliments were fired at him as he turned with a broad grin to his forge.

Directly in his way stood a beautiful girl with blanched face, her great brown eyes swimming in tears.

"Oh, sir, I want to say that you are the bravest and strongest and quickest man I ever saw. I cannot thank you too much. I was afraid he would be crushed to death.

He flushed to the roots of his hair.

"It was nothing, miss," he said. "Any of the men would have done it."

That evening Ida went over the scene with her father. He knew all about it and told her that the rescuer was Joseph Madern.

"One of the best men we have," he said warmly. "A thorough mechanic and an inventor. We keep him at the forge because there is a particular part of a machine that has to be done by hand, and Madern does it better than anybody else. Few men have the strength and skill combined to do it. We pay him as well as though he were a foreman, but have to keep him at the forge. I have ordered that he be handsomely rewarded for his heroism to-day."

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"Papa, I want you to invite him to dinner," suddenly said Ida, after some minutes spent in thought.

"Who?" asked Mr. Norton, looking up from his paper.

"Mr. Madern. I think it would be a much nicer way to show appreciation of his heroism than merely to give him money."

Mr. Norton smiled. He was not wholly undemocratic in his instincts.

"But your mother," he said.

She had an answer, and the result was that Joe Madern found himself with palpitating heart going up the steps of the Norton mansion one evening.

He was neatly dressed and bore himself with a demeanour that charmed the girl as much as his exhibition of strength.

Mrs. Norton absented herself from dinner with cold disapproval.

After dinner Miss Norton took her strange guest to the library, and was astonished at the wide knowledge he displayed of books and the strong opinions he held on economic topics.

He told her of their working-men's club and the discussions they had. "You should attend one of our open meetings; it would interest you," he said.

"I will," she replied, and she did, and was still more astounded to hear him in debate where he stood like a lion to fight for his opinions, using always the most forceful language and displaying the widest reading and information.

She invited him to call, and he did once or twice. As he was about to take his departure on the second occasion, he said—

"I think this is the last time, Miss Norton, that I will see you, and I want to tell you how thoroughly I appreciate your kindness and how much I have enjoyed the evenings I have spent here."

"The last time?" she repeated, the blood rushing to her face. "What do you mean? You are not going away?"

"No, but it is better that I should not see you. We belong to different worlds. They do not mix. The very keenness of the pleasure I feel in coming here warns me that I had better not."

"There is only one world for kindred spirits," she said impulsively.

"Do you mean that? Do you know what you are saying?" he demanded, coming close to her.

She stood with downcast eyes. Then, straightening his broad shoulders and throwing back his head, he said: "Miss Norton, I am a plain, blunt man of the people and not versed in the ways of Society. I have discovered that I love you and I know that it would be presumptuous to propose for your hand. I do not quite understand what you mean by your last remark. If you mean that you consider that we are on a social equality I want to say that I love you with a love as deep and as honest as man ever had for a woman. I can offer you nothing but that which my arms may earn, and that is not what you have been accustomed to. Still, if it should so happen that your exceeding kindness to me means that you love me, all that is nothing."

He stood looking at her as in a dream. She swayed, and fell into his arms.

"That's what it does mean," she whispered. "You are the only real man I ever saw."

There was a dreadful scene when Madern spoke to Mr. Norton, but he sturdily told his employer that he had been accepted by Ida and they were going to marry with or without parental consent.

Mr. Norton summoned his daughter, and she corroborated the statement of her plebeian lover.

Then Mr. Norton told them that the girl had not a penny in her own right, and if she married Madern she never would have.

To which Madern replied that that pleased him exactly.

They were married. Madern left the employ of the Norton works and found another position.

The Nortons were unrelenting until some three years later, Mrs. Norton being dead and a fine baby boy having been born in a certain rose-covered cottage in the suburbs, Mr. Norton softened.

Now Madern is superintendent of the Norton works and a still better position may shortly be his.

W. Wendham.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have just secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

August 19.—A mixed year; business worries, and trouble with friends. Don't speculate. Clerks, teachers, and travellers will be in danger of losing their situations. Girls need care in love affairs, and must place very little confidence in male friends.

The day is bad to ask favours, travel, and sign papers. Good for dealing in property and land.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate and should work for others.

August 20.—An unfavourable birthday; have a care against mishap if using horses. Business and home affairs cause anxiety. Don't change residence.

Single girls will meet with disappointment in love, and must beware of false friends.

The day is evil and should not be used for marriage, doing business with governmental bodies, builders, or lawyers.

A child born to-day will be improvident, easy-going, and very unsettled. May become too fond of drink and pleasure.

August 21.—A good year for business; aged persons, speculators, and farmers benefit. Avoid law and guard against theft.

Girls will meet with some strange adventures in love matters, and will have attentions from married men.

The day is good for doing business with elderly people, but not with the young.

A child born here will be fairly fortunate. The mind will be active, cautious, and painstaking; the temper quick and strong.

August 22.—A successful year for business and finances. Friends can be made use of.

Many pleasant events for young girls; if engaged they will marry.

The day is good for marriage, making new friends, dealing with professional people and manufacturers of woollen goods.

A child born here will be generous, make friends easily, and will be fortunate in life.

August 23.—Beware of serious quarrels, law, and mishap. Much activity and little good fortune in business and domestic affairs.

Not a good time for love affairs.

The day is one to go steady; avoid speculation, and be careful against accident, especially if working underground or near water.

A child born here should keep in employ. It will be headstrong, quarrelsome, and sarcastic.

August 24.—Guard against loss in business and speculations. Those in employ are fortunate. Don't lend to friends or losses will result.

Girls will meet with disappointment in love; marriages are delayed through bad state of lovers' finances.

A child born to-day will be too generous and free. Will gain the respect of superiors and do best in employ.

August 25.—A good year for health, wealth, and business. Can enter into new premises, sign agreements, and buy property.

Young females receive attentions from widowers; if born near six a.m. they will have chances of marriage.

A child born to-day will be active, cheerful, and industrious, will be fortunate in employ or in business for itself.

Asturel.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mr. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

FRANKIE DEFIES LASCELLES AND DEFEATS HOPE.

THE STORY STARTS HERE.

CYNTHIA HAMILTON, a young girl from a Bruges convent, comes to England in the capacity of companion to her cousin, Frances Norton, whom she has not seen since they were together at school. Mrs. Norton will never talk about her past, which she spent in Jamaica.

Cynthia discovers that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the on-lookers finds them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it.

Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different.

Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation.

The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room; Cynthia, however, stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope.

While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard.

On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Mrs. Norton that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. Mrs. Norton asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

Mrs. Norton and Cynthia go to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, entices Cynthia to bet heavily, by which she loses £800. Mrs. Norton has also lost heavily, and to pay her own debts, she prevails upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, Mrs. Norton comes face to face with a man from Jamaica who knows all about her past life. Percival Hope has brought him in. It is a critical moment, but once again Mrs. Norton scores. She persuades Cynthia to engage Hope's attention by making love to him, while she herself purchases the Jamacia man's silence. He agrees to be silent for the sum of £1,000 to be paid before noon on the following day. Cynthia is immediately dispatched to Fluffy's chambers to get the money. It is past midnight, and while she is negotiating with Fluffy, Percival Hope bursts into the room.

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CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.
New Series of Stories.

THERE was that in Percival's face that made me wish to hide my own. I would not meet his eyes, but glanced appealingly towards Fluffy.

Mr. Thomson's self-possession did not fail him for a moment. He gently closed the door, walked quietly towards Percival, and offered him a chair.

"I'm very glad you happened to drop in just now," he said, as if it were quite an ordinary thing for Percival to call on him at midnight. "You've turned up just in the nick of time. Miss Cynthia," he smiled encouragingly at me, "is in a little difficulty. I'm sure you won't object to help her."

Percival ignored the chair, but schooled himself to listen. He even contrived to answer with an appearance of interest.

"No, not at all," he said.

But that was the breaking point of self-possession; with an abrupt movement he turned his back on Fluffy and leant towards me.

"What are you doing here?" he said fiercely, "at such an hour?"

Before I could reply, had I been able to do so, Fluffy interfered.

"Miss Hamilton came here to ask for my assistance," he said in a cold, level voice. As he spoke he laid his hand on Percival's arm, and swung him round, so that they faced each other.

"The child is in trouble," he continued, his eyes fixed steadily on Percival. "For the moment she is very worried, and—a little excited. With her permission I will tell you what that trouble is." He smiled kindly towards me, but I could make no answering sign.

Was it possible that Fluffy meant to give Frankie away? If not, what explanation could he offer for my visit? I waited in breathless expectation.

Percival was pale with rage. He bit his lips, and his hands trembled with passion. He was within an ace of losing once again control of tongue and temper, but something in the other's voice and manner, in the look of those small grey eyes, seemed to hold and master him.

For the moment Fluffy was the stronger man.

"Miss Cynthia was at the Derby yesterday," he went on slowly, "and, like the rest of us, backed Nestor. As a consequence she finds herself let in for some eight hundred pounds. More sensitive than the majority on the score of debts—gambling debts at any rate—she cannot feel happy till the bets are paid. Now, as you know, I am Mrs. Norton's man of business, and Miss Hamilton thought on this occasion I might act as hers. There are certain mining shares in Miss Cynthia's possession—they belonged, I understand, to her father—from the sale of which she hopes to raise the money for her bets. She looked to me to know what the shares would fetch, and to dispose of them for her. I am, however, leaving for the Continent to-morrow, or rather this morning. Miss Cynthia was aware of this, and realised that to-night was her only opportunity of seeing me. Ignorant of the value of the shares, and, failing me, at a loss for anyone to help her, she seized the opportunity. She came here to-night to bring these shares." He handed Percival some papers off the table. "You understand?" Fluffy tapped the papers as he spoke, but somehow I don't think his question had reference *only* to the shares.

I half expected Percival to show anger at the news that I'd been betting. I looked at any rate for some expression of displeasure. His attitude was very different, however. It seemed to me suggestive of relief!

"Yes," he said, with a little gasp, "I quite understand—mining shares I think you said, American aren't they?" Then turning towards me flushed and eager, he stretched out his hand.

I don't know what he was going to say, but I fancy it was something apologetic.

"Miss Cynthia," he commenced, "please believe me——"

Fluffy interrupted him.

"You're going to help us dispose of the shares, is that it, Mr. Hope?" he said sharply, and with a look I could not read.

"Of course, of course." Percival turned crimson and seemed positively abashed. "What can I do?" he asked, appealing to Fluffy. "I am most anxious to assist."

Fluffy calmly lit a cigarette, and took up his position on the hearthrug.

"The case stands thus," he said slowly; "the shares in my opinion ought to fetch a thousand pounds."

"I should say quite," remarked Percival, "their price fluctuates very little."

Fluffy nodded.

"If I were in town I could put the thing through to-morrow. As it is I shall have to commission a jobber, which will mean delay. There's nothing else to be done unless——" He paused. "Would you take the matter in your hands, Hope?" he said, "and dispose of the shares for me, or rather for Miss Cynthia?"

"With pleasure. But I think we might devise a quicker way of selling the shares than putting them on the market."

Fluffy looked embarrassed.

"It would, of course, simplify matters for me to give Miss Hamilton a cheque here and now for the amount," he said slowly. "But, unfortunately, I'm not a rich man. To be candid, I have not so large a balance at my banker's."

Percival smiled quite nicely, and remarked that he entirely understood.

"Perhaps you would allow me to undertake that part of the affair?" he said. "Suppose you hand the shares over to me, and let me draw a cheque for the amount. It would save Miss Cynthia trouble if she had the notes though, wouldn't it? I happen to have a fairly large sum on me this evening." He turned rather red and prodded a pocket book, from which he took two notes each for five hundred pounds. "I had a payment to make," he explained. (I wondered if the payment was to have been made to Casellis!) "You don't mind selling me your shares, Miss Cynthia?" he asked smiling.

"Thank you," I answered coldly, "but I prefer not to trouble you. I would rather Mr. Thomson commissioned the jobber that he mentioned."

Mr. Thomson shook his head.

"I never allow a client to interfere with the way in which I conduct their business," he said calmly. "I accept your offer, Hope, on Miss Hamilton's behalf, and thank you very much."

"Take the notes," he added, smiling at me, "and whatever you do, *don't* lose them. Are you sure they're safe? Then, that's all right. You won't bet any more, eh?"

I murmured faintly that I never would.

"I shan't be able to get round to Pont Street in the morning, I'm afraid," Fluffy continued. "I'm writing good-bye to Mrs. Norton to-night. She'll have my letter first post."

I longed to know if he intended sending the cheque Frankie had demanded, but there was no opportunity of asking him.

Fluffy accompanied us, Percival and me, to the Temple Gates, where my cab was waiting.

"You'll see her home?" he questioned Percival.

"Of course. Good night, Thomson, and good luck."

Fluffy waved adieu. I sat back in the cab, tired and inexpressibly weary.

It was a strange drive. Neither of us spoke a word, not because we had too little, but too much to say—infallibly a time for silence.

He saw me safely into the house and said good-night kindly, even tenderly.

I stumbled upstairs in the darkness and waited sleepless till Frankie returned.

She came back from the ball as fresh as when she went, and looking as young, indeed younger than I.

"You poor, tired thing!" she exclaimed. "Well, how have you got on? Did Fluffy send the cheque?"

"He's writing to-night. You'll have the letter in the morning. Frankie, I've got the money for my shares."

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"Who from?"

"Percival Hope!" And I told her all that had transpired.

She heard me in silence, a smile flickering in her eyes.

"Here are the notes, Frankie, will you keep them for me?"

"Not I, Cynthia, it's much too great a responsibility; I won't even look at them. Take my advice, and don't let those notes out of your sight until you hand them to Lord Chesterton. Put them in a safe place, and don't tell anybody where it is. You're certain Fluffy is going to write to me to-night?"

"He said so."

"Then I can sleep in peace and so can you. Casellis will have his cheque, Ella will get her sweetheart, you will pay your bets, and I"—she paused—"I shall confute Mr. Percival Hope. Good night, dearie, sleep well."

I was too excited to hope for much rest. I did not indeed fall asleep until the morning, and then my slumbers were broken by strange dreams. I fancied I heard footsteps at my door, and the handle softly, cautiously turned. In my sleep I seemed to feel somebody pulling at the bedclothes as though seeking for my notes. Half waking I thought I saw a figure glide quickly from the room. But when fully aroused I carefully examined my surroundings. I found the door fast shut as I had left it, the notes still tucked in safety under the mattress, while the gliding figure proved to be the curtain which, caught by a breeze blowing through the open window, streamed full length across the room.

I returned to bed, and undisturbed by further fancies, slept until the afternoon.

Frankie called me in time to see Chesterton; she stopped and chatted while I dressed.

"Have you seen Casellis, Frankie?"

"Yes, my dear, and thanks to you and Fluffy I have settled him. He won't trouble me any more. As for Ella, she's going to marry Jim immediately. I've made a point of it. I shall give them a wedding breakfast and pay their passage to the States. They'll sail next week."

Chesterton was very pleased to see me, and had brought some flowers and a large box of chocolates. I gave him the notes and he promised to settle with the bookmakers that very day and send me on the change.

He stayed a long time, but said nothing remarkable until the end of the interview.

Just before he left, *apropos* of nothing and with great abruptness, he remarked—"I've entered myself for the Cynthia Stakes, Miss Hamilton, but before I make the running I should like to know how the betting stands. Is it two to one on 'Hope,' or can I look for a fair field and no favour?"

"Racing terms are very hard to understand, Lord Chesterton," I answered, "but so far as I can tell, I think you might put some money on—the field."

His lordship dropped his hat and made for my hand, but I thought all things considered it was time he went, so I just managed to evade him and got clear of the room, or, as Chesterton would have said, "the course."

The next two or three days passed much as usual, men called in the morning, women some of the afternoon, and poor Toby all day. He avoided me, but was otherwise unchanged, except a sudden taste he seemed to have developed for *cognac*. Frankie took little notice of him, but so long as he was in her presence the boy appeared content.

I worried greatly over the bill Toby had signed; indeed, there were many things I had to worry over. But however sorry I was for much that had happened I was powerless to alter any of it. Frankie would go her own way, and I, from force of circumstances and affection, had to go with her.

One morning while Frankie was out driving, I was summoned to see a caller. Skinner presented his card with a perfunctory cough.

"Nathan" was the name engraved upon the pasteboard, a name to me of evil omen.

I hastened to the drawing-room, fearful lest Lady Gaveston should see and interrogate the moneylender.

"Mrs. Norton is out," I explained, "if you can leave a message I will deliver it to my cousin."

Nathan, a tall, good-looking man of quiet appearance and good address, heard me out in silence.

"I am sorry, but my business can only be done with Mrs. Norton. It is of great importance that I should see her this morning. With your permission I will wait."

He bowed and resumed his seat, leaving me in a terrible state of apprehension. Suppose Chesterton should arrive, or Kinross, or Sir John. What would they think of such a visitor? Nathan was known to most of the smart set, but purely in his professional capacity. He did not care for society, and only called on fashionable folk in connection with his business.

To find him there would signify to most people that Mrs. Norton was hard up.

I instructed Skinner not to show anybody into the drawing-room, and to let Mrs. Norton know I wanted her as soon as she returned. I took up my station in the window seat, and tried to talk unconcernedly with Mr. Nathan.

He seconded my efforts, and we passed a conversational if not a comfortable half hour.

At one o'clock Frankie returned, and swept into the room, a vision in pale grey and amber roses.

Nathan came quickly to the point.

"Some ten days back you brought me a bill, Mrs. Norton, signed by yourself and Sir Edward Ffolliot."

"Exactly"—Frankie nodded calmly. "Infamous interest you charged me, too," she added smiling. "You've not come to ask for any more?"

"My call is on a matter of business, Mrs. Norton, that is all. My partner has asked me to make inquiries in connection with Sir Edward Ffolliot. It has come within his knowledge that the baronet left England the day before the date on the bill. When did he sign, Mrs. Norton?"

"Two or three days before I called on you," said Frankie promptly. "I filled in the date after."

Nathan paused, and glanced at her significantly. With a dim sense of what was going to follow, and with an awful fear of the questions Frankie might compel me to answer, I slipped through the curtains separating the drawing from the other reception rooms, and waited out of sight, but in hearing.

"Sir Edward wanted to lend me the money himself," said Frankie. "Of course; I wouldn't hear of that, but at his own suggestion, I consented he should back the bill. He signed it here in this house. I and my cousin, the young lady whom you saw just now, were present."

"You are both prepared to swear that you saw Sir Edward sign?"

"Most certainly. I will call my cousin. Cynthia!" she cried, "Cynthia!"

But with my face hidden among the sofa cushions, my hands pressed tight to my ears, I remained deaf to the summons.

Nothing should make me swear to such a thing, nothing; and yet if Frankie were in danger, if she should be involved, what could I do?

I waited in sickening anticipation. It was one of the most awful moments of my life.

When I lifted my head Nathan was speaking.

"I will tell my partner what you say, Mrs. Norton. Doubtless he will accept the explanation. But remember the bill falls due in little over a month, and under *no circumstances whatever* shall we renew it."

Frankie made some laughing answer, but the money lender did not respond to her lightness of mood.

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"Frankie," I gasped, when he had disappeared, "how *could* you say such things?"

My cousin turned upon me wrathfully.

"Because I prefer to run any risk rather than let in my friends," she said. "If I had not said what I did Toby must have been involved. I will make any sacrifice rather than that should happen."

She looked quite beautiful as she spoke, and very heroic. I felt abashed—almost mean, without exactly knowing why.

Shortly after this Lord Kinross and his sister returned to town. And then there came the day—never by me to be forgotten—when Percival Hope had declared he would prove Frankie an adventuress.

He and Kinross arrived within a few minutes of each other, about three o'clock in the afternoon. Frankie and I went down to receive them. Lady Gaveston had gone to a flower show, and Skinner had received instructions that we were not at home to any casual callers.

Kinross looked somewhat grave, and seemed more than a little anxious. He shook hands eagerly with Frankie, and smiled pleasantly at me. Frankie nodded carelessly to Percival, who returned the salutation with a ceremonious bow.

"Mrs. Norton," said Kinross, with a touch of nervousness, "I have to ask your pardon for what I am going to say. My cousin Percival is here this afternoon on a peculiar errand. He wants to tell me certain things he has heard about you, but I decline to listen, save in your presence. Only on that condition will I hear him—now or ever. It remains for you to say whether or no Percival shall speak."

For a moment she faced them in silence. It was the crisis of her life, and even her indomitable courage and strong will quailed before it. If she refused to hear Hope, danger for the moment was over. But, and she realised it to the full, all chance of securing Kinross would end. He would leave her, never to return.

Her face went a shade paler, but her voice was steady as ever when she answered:

"I am glad to have the opportunity of hearing what Mr. Hope has to bring against me, and disproving it."

"Thank you," said Kinross softly, and stooping, kissed her hand.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing with me a person of the name of Casellis," said Percival, "I left him in the hall. With your permission, Mrs. Norton, I will call him in."

Frankie bowed, and Hope, marching to the door, summoned Casellis to enter. At the best he was an unpleasing-looking person, and on that afternoon he struck me as looking more than ever ill-favoured. He sat, or rather crouched, on the edge of a chair, blinking with narrow, half-closed eyes.

To this hour I cannot say whether or no Frankie was prepared for him; to this hour I cannot say whether or no he came determined, despite her heavy bribe, to sell her at the final moment.

Whatever her thoughts or his, their faces did not betray them.

"I gather that Mrs. Norton informed you that she was the widow of Richard Norton, who died some two years ago of malaria," said Percival to Kinross. "Furthermore, that with the assistance of Mr. Thomson she sold her late husband's estate to a company, and came to England on the proceeds."

"Quite so," said Kinross.

Percival paused.

"That man," he said at last, pointing to Casellis, "was employed as a clerk by Mr. Richard Norton. He tells me that his late employer did not die from malaria. His death was surrounded by most suspicious circumstances. It was believed in the island that he died from poison—you said this?" he asked Casellis abruptly.

"I did," said the man from Jamaica.

"Casellis further states that he overheard Mrs. Norton in conversation with"—Hope paused—"with a man whose name I will not at present mention. Mrs. Norton alluded to the rumours current as to the cause of her husband's death, and begged her companion to take steps to get rid of the body, and so avoid a threatened exhumation and inquiry. Shortly after Mr. Norton's grave was found to have been disturbed, the coffin opened, and empty. This outrage was put down to the natives, who, it was said, had a grudge against Mr. Norton. As a matter of fact, that gentleman was extremely popular with the natives. Furthermore, far from playing the part of a devoted wife, Mrs. Norton's extravagance practically ruined her husband. He signed bills to raise money for her jaunts to Paris, to meet which he had to mortgage the plantation to its full value. I may mention that the estate is not in the possession of a company, but at the present moment is devastated and deserted, save for a few wretched blacks. You are prepared to swear to all this?" he turned to Casellis, "as you have already sworn to me."

Casellis stood up, and gazed slowly round the room. Frankie, pale as death, looked straight at him, and her lips moved. A malignant smile twitched his mouth, he seemed to enjoy her terror.

Then a swift and sudden change came over him. Some thought, some memory, laid hold of him. He drew himself up, threw back his head. A light came in his eyes, a smile to his lips. He was transformed. No longer cringing, abject, he stood erect—a man, keen, alert, sinewy, lithe. So might he have looked years back, when to her island home Frankie first came. He was a half caste, quick to love, quicker to hate. What if it were revenge that prompted him to speak, revenge for all that he had suffered for the love of that proud, fair woman, who now so scornfully defied him?

Frankie's eyes still fixed on his, grew luminous, tender; a shadow of regret, reproach, stole into them. They filled with tears.

At the sight Casellis started, fell back as from a blow.

"I swore to it—yes," he cried, in a harsh voice; "but I swore falsely. I am guilty if you will, but she—she is innocent as Heaven!"

[*What happens next will be told next Tuesday.*]

She Objected to Exaggerations.

GUSHLEY: "Would you think of me if I were ten thousand leagues away?" His *Fiancée* (from College): "As the maximum diameter of the earth is only eight thousand miles, Claronce, your supposition is an impossible one."

She was Quite Proper.

"ELLA, you have been playing all the afternoon with these toy soldiers. That's not a proper amusement for a big girl like you," said her mother. "But, mamma, I was not playing with the soldiers. I picked out the officers and played with them."

The Modern Way.

SHE (as he finishes mending her tyre): "Oh, thank you so much. What should I have done without you?" He: "Don't mention it. I wish I could always carry the repair kit for you." Tenderly: "May I, Eleanor?" And the two bicycles continued to lean against the grassy bank.

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Foretelling the Future.

Blushing Bride: "I want to get a present for my husband; but I hardly know what to buy." Clerk: "Why not get one of these nice silk mufflers to wear during the evening?" Bride: "Oh, dear, no; my husband never goes out at night." Clerk: "Well, you might get it for next year. He will then."

Same Thing.

Wife: "And did Mr. Gay really say I was positively dove-like?" Husband: "Something of that sort. He said you were pigeon-toed, I believe."

Nearer the Mark.

The Clumsy Man (coming from the ball-room): "How can I repay you for that waltz?" She (whose train has suffered): "Oh, don't pay me; settle with my dressmaker."

A Mean Revenge.

"I've got even with Blimmins at last," said the Society reporter. "How?" "You know how jealous his wife is? Well, I have alluded to him as 'a great favourite among the ladies.'"

Quite Another Matter.

Old Boy: "Thomas, if my wife asks you where I am, tell her I have gone to the office." Servant: "Certainly, sir! But where are you really going in case anyone else should want to know?"

Excellent Advice.

Pompous Author (to veteran Editor): "What would you advise a man to do whose ideas are in advance of the times?" Veteran Editor (promptly): "I would advise him to sit quietly down and wait for the times to catch up."

The Badge of Poverty.

Mrs. de Rich: "The *Society Chitchat* is edited by a woman, isn't it?" Mr. de Rich: "So I've heard." Mrs. de Rich: "I should say she wasn't making much money out of it. She says 'a lavish display of diamonds is vulgar.'"

Extremely Awkward.

Blanche: "Isabel, what has put you in such a bad humour?" Isabel: "Why, I've just had a communication from Jack, and he writes such a horrid hand that I can't tell whether it is a proposal, an ode to Autumn, or that cure for chilblains he promised to send me."

Quite Correct.

Mrs. Youngwife: "You know those lovely thirty-shilling dining-room gongs we saw the other day? Well, to-day they were marked down to 12s. 6d. each, so I got three." Her Husband; "What did you get three for?" Mrs. Youngwife (sweetly): "Why, one for each meal, of course."

What Papa Said.

"George, dear," said the girl, "do you ever drink anything?" "Yes, occasionally," George reluctantly admitted. "But, dear," she went on anxiously, "what do you suppose papa would say if he should discover that the future husband of his only daughter drank?" "He discovered it this morning." "Oh, George, and what did he say?" "He said, 'Well, George, my boy, I don't care if I do.'"

No Joke There.

Mrs. Smith (who is reading a humorous paper): "I don't see any fun in these jokes about bigs bills for ladies' hats." Mr. Smith (with feeling): "I don't either."

The Blessings of Knowledge.

Little Girl: "Mamma says I must study grammar this term." Little Boy: "What's that for?" Little Girl: "That's so I can laugh when folks make mistakes."

Two Points of View.

Wife: "How people gaze at my new dress. I presume they wonder if I've been shopping in Paris." Husband: "More likely they wonder if I've been robbing a bank."

Liked Her Cheek.

Maud: "Did George kiss you last night when he left?" Ethel: "Certainly he did not; why do you ask?" Maud: "Nothing; only he just told me that he liked your cheek."

When the Sermon Doesn't Act.

When a man's collar gets unbuttoned in church and begins to climb up the back of his neck he might as well get up and go out; the sermon will not do him much good.

That Dreadful Father-in-Law.

Her Young Man: "I—I—I, sir, would like——" Her Father: "Well, what is it, young man? What have you got in your mouth?" Her Young Man: "I—I'm afraid it's my heart, sir."

But it Didn't Work.

Briggs: "Just for a joke, I told Miss Elderly the other day that when she laughed it was all I could do not to kiss her." Griggs: "What happened?" Briggs: "The next time I saw her she had hysterics."

A Complication.

"What's the matter, Parker? You look blue." "I am. I asked Miss Morrison to be my wife." "Ah! Rejected?" "No. Referred me to her mother, and—well, her mother rejected me herself last September."

The Retort Courteous.

Mabel: "Yes, I give you my hand with my heart in it." Jack: "You cannot do that." Mabel: "Why not?" Jack: "Your hand is too dainty and small to hold such a large heart." That made the engagement irrevocable.

A Long Wait.

Child: "Grandpa, how old are you?" Grandpa: "I am eighty-seven years old, my little dear." Child: "Then you was born eighty years before I was." Grandpa: "Yes, my little girl." Child: "Law, what a long time you had to wait for me!"

Squeezed Through It.

Mabel (to young bride who has just returned from her wedding trip): "But were you not frightened, Marion, dear, going through that awful tunnel?" Young Bride: "I should have been dreadfully without Charlie, but with him I managed to squeeze through it."

Songs and Songs.

Petted Bride: "Here is the bill for that fur cloak I told you about. It's lovely." Indulgent Husband (looking at bill): "Great Scott! You said you could get that cloak for a mere song." "So I did." "Do you mean to say that amount represents a mere song?" "Yes, a Patti song."

A Reasonable Request.

Husband: "My dear, I want to ask you one favour before you go off on that long visit." Wife: "A thousand, my love. What is it?" "Don't try to put the house in order before you leave." "It isn't hard work." "Perhaps not; but think of the expense of telegraphing to you every time I want to find anything."

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A Book-worm's Love Story.

In the British Museum Reading Room

DAY after day, for some months, I had sat in near company of a young girl, who, without being beautiful, was the possessor of infinite charm. Whether she worked so energetically for the mere love of the thing or from necessity I could not tell. I chose, however, to fancy her the help of a widowed mother who on slender means had perhaps still younger lives than my fellow-worker's to give her anxieties. Suffice it to say, on this point, my near fellow-worker laboured with zest, and often her example inspired my own somewhat flagging efforts. I found myself possessed of an unconquerable desire to make her acquaintance, yet I could not summon the necessary courage to address her. I have known many pleasant ties of friendship which had their origin in the Reading Room of the British Museum.

I am not going to give a glowing description of the "infinite charm" already referred to, much preferring to remain possessed alone of a fact, the remembrance of which adds a degree of extra pleasure when I indulge in retrospect.

On many occasions, while endeavouring to bring my wool-gathering brains into a state approximate to order, I had remarked troublous expressions spread over her intelligent face, as though some difficulty beset her in her work, and thought came to me to offer assistance, but my nerve always failed me. My triumph came later, away from "musty tome" and "giant dome." Such an opportunity as I could not let slip.

A cold but bright day in January of a certain year in the recently dead century, found me on my way to interview a notable member of Parliament, with the hope to secure through his aid a ticket for the House of Commons, where an important debate was on, and I was desirous to hear the "immaculate Joe," and then—well, not die, exactly, but feel myself acquaint wi' him.

I had proceeded as far as the top of Charing Cross Road, when I bethought me to take a 'bus. I became an "inside." There was but one other occupant—a lady—whose face was turned towards the front window of the vehicle. She appeared to be on the look-out for someone coming from the direction in which we were travelling.

Presently the conductor's voice startled us both, the lady turning about revealed to me the well-known face of "my lady" of the Reading Room.

The conductor's call upon us for "Fares, please!" together with the suddenness of my recognition, had rather flustered me. I began fumbling in my coat pocket for the needful copper coin, and was sensible enough to notice that the lady was doing likewise—not in my pockets, but her own—for her purse. Presently a vivid blush spread over her face, as she plaintively gave the conductor to understand she had left her purse and money at home.

The collector of fares—bless his ignorant and unappreciative vulgarity—was somewhat inclined to be coarse and inoffensive, as he remarked:

"Ho, I dessay! that's a tale wot ain't good enough for me. I've bin 'ad that way afore to-day. Wot are yer goin' to do?"

At this juncture I deemed it advisable to expostulate with the ruffian, warning him that it was no part of his duty to be uncivil. As I am somewhat herculean in build, my words had the desired effect. Then I begged the lady's permission to settle so trifling a matter, at the same time pointing out to her that the fact of our being fellow-workers at the British Museum would at least privilege me in so small a service. This announcement reassured her of the perfect propriety of the thing for she at once replied:

"That is fortunate. Thank you so much. May I ask your name?"

I gave it. "Richard Athelstane."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Athelstane. I am Eunice Frith."

After delivering herself of this gracious bit of information she departed on her way, leaving me in a seventh heaven of delight. For was not the ice now broken?

In the matter of years I am no longer a fledgling, and I have never been overburdened by the weight of worldly goods. This latter fact, no doubt, has been a main factor in keeping me from straying into pastures beyond those wherein I cropped my week to week end needs.

At the period of my first interest in Eunice Frith I was busily engaged in efforts to graft in some manner the American family of Shoddee upon the parent stock in England. It was a work of great wearisomeness, inasmuch as without the license used by the average genealogist, I had begun to experience considerable doubts as to whether the millionaire mill-owner from the other side of the herring-pond would respond so heartily as I could have wished to my views as to what a "reasonable and just" honorarium should be.

On the next occasion of my meeting with Miss Frith the merest form of greeting followed. As she handed me the bronze coin which annulled her self-conceived obligation, her renewal of thanks was accompanied by the faintest change of colour, but her words, "You were very kind to help me out of my dilemma" left no opening for extension of an acquaintance so auspiciously begun. Our sittings were within one of each other. We took them, and thus far there was the end. She evidently knew full well the existence of the rule of "silence" which the superintendent for the time ever strives so energetically to enforce, but which the many officials themselves do not consider it worth while to act up to. For it is noticeable that whenever Lord Bluffe or Sir John Bounder have occasion to visit the room they are far too important for the official cicerone to venture to check in their thoughtless loud-spokenness.

Eunice Frith, whether or no she divined that I desired a closer acquaintance, never bargained for the catastrophe, which though it brought fear and trembling for awhile to her, won for me the "Open Sesame" I had so longed for

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Having occasion to turn to a somewhat unwieldy volume, from which she was proceeding to make extracts, she had, in ignorance of rules, taken an ink-glass from its stand, for handiness' sake; a reader hurrying by her seat—a corner one—caught the edge of the volume, jerking it sufficiently to overset the ink-glass. The face of the volume at once presented a map-like appearance, where oceans and rivers seemed to be like empires on their westward march. Such a contretemps is calculated to stir the most phlegmatic of readers, but to the fluttering, bird-like Eunice Frith it was a veritable cataclysm. In her distress she turned her eyes around as if to see if the executioner were at hand. Those somewhat sad-looking eyes seemed to me full of woe. The opportunity was not to be lost. Jumping up, I went to her aid, and with sundry wisps of blotting-paper from a neighbouring pad remedied the mischief as well and quickly as possible, the disfiguring distilment not having had sufficient time to soak in and render the printing matter illegible.

She never forgot my prompt action in this matter. In a week's time we were on speaking terms, within a month an acquaintanceship had ripened marvellously. Gradually we came to understand each other. We sat side by side, the dividing chair separated us no longer.

It was all very nice, and, to use an Americanism, I felt "real good."

Then the time came when she assented to my invitation to drink tea with me in the gallery room. Over that delicious Souchong we chatted freely. She spoke to me of her mother—an invalid; of her brother—a clerk in a banking house. I gathered that the united earnings of these young people represented nearly the whole of the wherewithal of their otherwise happy little home. I know there are many similar cases. That is so, but, believe me, there could be but one Eunice Frith.

My work of pedigree-creating had palled sadly upon me for some time, and I began to think living among the bones—so to speak—of departed nobodies, far from exhilarating.

Once it happened Eunice's mother accompanied her to the establishment in Bloomsbury—the British Museum. As they were descending the stairway from the galleries, I was passing through the hall. Eunice introduced me to her mother, and we remained in conversation for the best part of an hour, when Mrs. Frith suddenly remembered her doctor's instructions not to "try herself too much," and pronounced for home. To her alarm, on our arrival at the vestibule of the Museum, it was raining smartly. Once again luck favoured me. My umbrella, a property which nine days out of ten I left at home, proved a ready friend for once. Under its shelter Mrs. Frith reached her 'bus in comparative dryness. As it looked as if the downpour would be continuous, I insisted she should retain it.

"Oh, no, Mr. Athelstane, I won't deprive you."

But my insistence carried the day, and suggested that Eunice might find it useful in the morning. That young lady, however, declared she "had one of her own."

Mrs. Frith settled the question by saying—

"I will take it, Mr. Athelstane, on condition that you will bring Eunice home this evening, and join us at our little tea-dinner, and then, you see, you can take possession of your umbrella."

To this I consented with covert rapture.

A Chapter of Accidents.

After leaving Eunice and her mother, I returned to the Reading Room, intending to put in an hour or two of work, but in this I was frustrated, by the receipt of a telegram, which announced the serious illness of my father and desired my early attendance at his side.

Here was a call that brooked no inattention. I showed the wire to Eunice, and begged her to express to her mother my regrets, and bidding her what was intended to be an impressive "Good-bye," left for my home at Wells, in Norfolk.

Little did I think that two long years would elapse before I again set eyes on Eunice Frith.

I was away in Norfolk for some three months, my father's condition varying to such an extent, owing to frequent relapses, as left me no alternative but to stay with him. I was his second son, my brother Christopher being two years my senior; our mother had been dead many years.

Christopher, somewhere about the early seventies, had shipped himself off to South Africa to seek fortune on the diamond diggings of the Vaal River. That good luck had been attendant upon him we had every reason to believe, but to what extent had nothing tangible to help us to an idea. His letters had been few and far between, neither lengthy nor graphic, but warm enough to show us that fraternal affection still existed in his breast, though perhaps in a very limited form.

My father had been dead some six weeks, during which period I had been busying myself in the administration of his little estate and winding up my enforced rest from pedigree-hunting and other such trifles, when the great change in my life began. The African mail brought me a letter from my brother Christopher, or rather from a friend of his, acting as amanuensis. Christopher had met with a very serious accident in the mine. Most of his ribs had been broken, and the doctors feared that much internal laceration had also taken place. Chris was anxious to see me, fearing a fatal ending. Would I come at once to Kimberley? He had also inclosed a draft for £100 to cover travelling expenses, and in case the world had not used me kindly. I was not to let the "old man" know of the accident, and suggested all sorts of other precautions.

To pack up my traps was but short work, and the old home I left in charge of a maiden aunt.

After I had booked my passage, I had a few hours to spare. These I spent in a vain search for Eunice Frith. I could hear no tidings at the house where they had lived. The landlady only knew they had left—gone, she thought, into "unfurnished" rooms.

I did not feel easy on the matter, but I hoped for the best, and made my way to a hotel near Waterloo whence I had to start the next morning on my first venture beyond the white cliffs of old England.

The Castle liner on which I had taken my passage did her voyage well and rapidly. The succeeding day to that on which I landed in Cape Town saw me being transferred, as rapidly as a South African Railway can manage it, northwards. In less than forty-eight hours from my start from the Cape, I knew I had arrived too late. Poor Chris had gone to the bourne whence none return.

His lawyer interviewed me soon after my arrival, condoled with me, and eulogised poor Chris' many virtues. He said that my brother had been a most successful man up to a certain point. But lately owing to—to—er—scruples, he had been placed at a disadvantage. Still, he remarked,

"Still, Mr. Athelstane, your brother died pretty *warm*. His personalty, I should say—well—let me see—er, well—is quite seventy thousand pounds."

I explained that my brother had never confided either to his father or myself the degree of success which he had attained.

"Indeed, sir," I added, "we know very little about his South African career. I presume he has a wife and—children?"

"Not so, sir. Your brother lived a very retired life, rarely joining in any of the many functions our citizens delight in. He was a good man, and a charitable one."

"Charitable?" I questioned. "Then I presume he has left large sums to your local institutions and hospitals."

"No, sir, not a penny."

"Then to whom does his money revert? Surely he did not die intestate?"

"Not a man in the world less likely to do so. No, sir, you are the happy man. By will—here it is, sir, in black and white—'all that I die possessed of I leave to my brother Richard Athelstane to be by him used and disposed of as may appear best to his own good and charitable disposition.'"

I was not inordinately puffed up by this sudden acquisition of wealth. One thing flashed first upon my mind, and that was that I should be for ever done with my old occupations. No

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more grinding out paragraphs, no more pulling about the dead and gone ancestors of mighty present-day pork butchers.

No more of ill-ventilated reading-rooms, whether under red-tape rule or otherwise. I should live in Utopia. To do this, I deemed it wisest and best to return to England. In due course, I arrived in London, and at once went back to the scene of my old struggles, the British Museum. It seemed as if I could not keep away. "Why did I go there?" you ask. To look for Eunice, or, maybe, get some news of her. But no, I could learn nothing; and it came into my mind that I had seen the last of Eunice Frith.

I had been home a month. Most of my time had been spent at my little place in Norfolk; still even there I had a restless feeling, as of some unaccomplished work to be looked after. What it was I could not divine. Then I betook myself to town again.

I had been one evening to King's Cross station to inquire after a package I had transmitted, but of which I had since received no acknowledgment. I made a short cut back in the direction of Russell Square, when my attention was drawn to a knot of children on the pavement. At first I could see nothing, but as I drew near I noticed one or two articles of furniture with a box or two corded over.

"One of those hateful cases of distraint—some poor lone, aged widow," I thought to myself. Even as I looked, a poor, worn woman, yet neat and tidy withal, looked up, her face by its pained expression telling a tale of woe. Where had I seen that face before? I had not gone on my way many steps before my recollection cleared. I hastened back to the forlorn creature, and pushing my way to her side, asked in an undertone:

"Are you not Mrs. Frith—Eunice's mother?"

"Yes, oh, yes! But you—who are you?"

Before I could make reply, another figure appeared on the scene. Eunice herself—but, great Heavens! how changed that face had become. In its thinness and wanness even the mother's sank into nothingness, as in heart-rending tones she gasped—

"O, mother, mother! have they turned you out like this? I came as soon as I knew the state of affairs."

Then she caught sight of me, knew me at once, as I could see, and drew shyly back.

I held out my hand to her, saying—

"You know me, Miss Frith. You are in trouble. Your mother cannot remain here, you must come with me."

Just then a heaven-sent growler, drawn by a horse which, positively, had four legs, and, what is more, could use them, appeared. I hailed the driver. He proved a smart man. In the twinkling of the dog-star's eye, I had put Mrs. Frith and her daughter inside, and jumping on the box told cabby to drive to King's Cross station.

In one of the waiting-rooms I heard the painful story my friends had to tell. Eunice's brother had lapsed from the direct course. In their endeavours to rescue him, their small capital of hardly-earned savings had melted like snow before the sun. Remorse so affected the brother's mind that to escape moral suffering he put an end to his life. Why is it the young are so forgetful of the sufferings of the old? However, affairs went from bad to worse, till Eunice by overwork broke her health, and went into hospital. The poor old lady hung on as long as she could, until an inexorable landlord called in the assistance of a bailiff.

A new home was soon found for them. Money *can* do that. I begged them to let me be their banker until such time as Eunice's health was completely restored. Their common sense was equal to the occasion, and they showed it by accepting my offer. A month's perfect rest in town, another at the sea-side, soon mended the health of these broken ones, more than ever dear to me. My old home in Norfolk forms a peaceful haven of rest for Mrs. Frith. At present Eunice is with her. No longer does she run danger of damaging the volumes in the Reading Room at the British Museum. I do not intend she ever shall, for next week I am going down to Norfolk. If I am lucky, there will be a bridal ceremony in the village church before I return to town.

F. Eliot.

Your Editor Chats.

The chief item of interest this week—to me, at all events—is the increasing enthusiasm of readers concerning "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."

For example, ADA expresses the hope that Frankie comes to a bad end. She likes "Fluffy," and thinks Kinross good fun. Percival Hope she regards as "a darling," and supposes that Cynthia marries him. Although ADA, to use her own expression, "is only a school-girl herself," she thinks she would have seen through Frankie sooner than Cynthia did.

Another correspondent, JOSEPHINE, does not seem to have much of an opinion of Cynthia as a woman. She says: "I am interested in her and, indeed, up to a certain point, feel sorry for her, but I cannot help thinking she is much to blame. She should have refused to have even faintly allied herself with Mrs. Norton's schemes. Please do not think me hard, but I am convinced that Cynthia could have retarded, if not stopped, Mrs. Norton's downward career if she had only been true to her principles."

Now, to deal with ADA first. I am sorry that I cannot very well arrange matters to meet her views, for the articles are true to life, and the young lady who has written them has simply stated plain facts. No doubt they could be made more exciting if romance were introduced; but I think you will agree with me that if this were done the whole idea of the series would be spoilt. Of course it is easy for the reader to see through Mrs. Norton and her ways, but, at the time, it was practically impossible for Cynthia to discover her true character. If this adventuress hoodwinked clever men like those whose names appear as Kinross and Sir John Strickland, how much more easy must it have been to hoodwink a simple girl like Cynthia Hamilton? I consider these articles are most cleverly written, for the reason that the little lady's companion, who is responsible for them, has treated them in such a way as to show the persons dealt with in their true light, without being influenced by after events.

JOSEPHINE'S criticisms are, perhaps, justifiable in a certain measure, but it is one thing to know for certain that Mrs. Norton was an adventuress (as JOSEPHINE now knows) and quite another thing for Cynthia to prove that fact to herself at the time when the incidents recorded were actually happening. Cynthia was just an ordinary simple-minded girl; Mrs. Norton was a woman of strong passions, a quick thinker, and a great schemer. Cynthia was passionately fond of Mrs. Norton, and convinced herself against her suspicions that nothing radically wrong was going on. Moreover, she was practically under the influence of this woman, and did not care to question her actions to any great extent. Had Cynthia been very strong-minded, she would, of course, have had a row with Mrs. Norton in the early stages of her position as companion, and then, not only would she have left, but "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA" would never have been written!

Finally, a man—"A. H. C."—writes: "In the capital series which you are running—'THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA'—there is given this week a very vivid description of Derby Day. I have a bet on the subject that this was written by a man. Every line of it suggests the masculine experience rather than the feminine intuition. Am I right? Have I won my bet?" Alas! "A. H. C.," you are wrong! The whole of the articles have been written by the young lady whose name is given as "Cynthia Hamilton," and, on showing her your letter, she said that she thought that it was quite a feather in her cap that anyone should have regarded her description of the Derby as the work of a man!

Your Editor.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther.

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned." Mr. Crump next takes a walk on the common, and discovers some sand-bags.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

The rumour proves to be true. Alec had indeed managed to escape from the prison, and taking a boat had pulled down the river, after purloining some sailors' clothes from an empty barge. Just when he is thoroughly exhausted, however, he is run down by a sailing barge. His boat is smashed, but Alec is rescued and taken on board. The barge proves to be the *Mary Ann*, bound for Gurlston Bay. Arrived at its destination, it is hardly moored to the pier before Esther, who is taking a walk, arrives at the pier to watch the unloading.

Shortly afterwards Revelle saunters up, when suddenly Esther catches sight of Alec in the barge. With great presence of mind she leads Revelle away from the spot before he discovers whom she has seen. Late that night, after everyone has gone to bed, Esther contrives a meeting with Alec in the drawing-room of the house in which she is staying. The two lovers are clasped in each other's arms when a man's footsteps are suddenly heard outside the door, and a minute after Revelle rushes into the room. He passes Esther without seeing her, and gives chase to Scarsdale. Shortly afterwards he returns with a sprained ankle; he has missed his man.

Crump now decides to burglarously enter Revelle's house at Warham and search Revelle's belongings. Aided by his nephew, Police-constable Wilton, who engages the butler's attention, Crump gets into Revelle's dressing-room and begins his search. Suddenly he discovers a portmanteau with a false bottom.

SIGNOR BALDERINI'S LETTERS.

CRUMP'S patience looked like being rewarded. Quickly, yet methodically, he emptied the trunk of its contents. It did not take him long to find out the secret of the false bottom. A slight lump in one of the sides proved to be a spring. Pressure upon it caused the flap to fly up.

"Now," said the little man, "we shall see what we shall see!"

He first turned his attention to a couple of wigs that lay in the recess, one grey-coloured, the other a dark auburn. He examined their insides, and having noted the name of their maker, produced pencil and paper, and jotted something down. A flat tin box was the next object examined. It contained a number of grease-paints, some crêpe hair in various colours, and a small bottle of spirit gum.

"Quite a theatrical outfit!" said the little man to himself, "This is interesting, and suggests disguises to me rather than amateur theatricals. It admits of speculation on the past, and suggests possibilities in the future; but it does not throw any light on the two matters that are uppermost in my mind."

Next he picked up what looked like a scroll of paper. It was discoloured with age. He unrolled it.

"Ah, indeed! This, again, is interesting, quite interesting! Dear me! Signor Balderini!"

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The paper, unrolled, had proved to be a small picture-poster representing a man in tights and spangles in the act of making a descent through mid-air, holding on to a parachute with one hand, in the other a lighted cigar. Beneath the picture the announcement in German, that at a certain date and at a certain place, the famous Signor Balderini would make a parachute descent. The poster was more than ten years old. Crump knew sufficient German to translate the letter-press.

For some three minutes Crump was busily employed scribbling on his piece of paper.

"H'm!" he muttered, "I have been able to trace Mr. Seaton Revelle's life back for the last ten years, then a blank wall confronted me. But now I wonder if I am jumping at a rash conclusion in venturing to believe that prior to that time there was no Mr. Revelle, but rather Signor Balderini? Does Seaton Revelle, the gentleman amateur balloonist, represent the apotheosis of Signor Balderini, the professional parachutist. It is curious, too, how this picture fits those words spoken by poor Vance, that early morning by the reservoir. 'Don't you hear the crowd cheering—cheering Jim! Only holding on with one hand, his cigar in the other, cool as brass, that's Jim!'".

Crump was reasoning as calmly and as deliberately as if he had been comfortably seated in his armchair at Woodbine Cottage, instead of being engaged upon an unlawful operation. There was absolutely no signs of flurry about the little man.

"Thanks," he went on, "to the date and names on the poster, there should be no difficulty in finding out all about the Signor, though this descent must have taken place more than ten years ago. Will investigation, I wonder, reveal the fact that the Signor's Christian name was James or the foreign equivalent? That, some ten years ago, he was supposed to have met his death by drowning? And was he married at the time? And to whom?"

The little man carefully rolled up the poster again and replaced it in the trunk. On his strip of paper he had scribbled down, amongst other things, the name of the printer.

"And if—allowing myself for once to jump headlong at a number of conclusions—I could obtain proof that the Signor and Mr. Revelle are one and the same, and that the Signor was a married man, and that his wife, believing him to be dead, entered into domestic service under the name of Vance—would not this constitute another link in the chain of circumstantial evidence that I am endeavouring to forge. If this poor creature was murdered, it will be very essential to be able to point to a motive. Miss Mansfield, God bless her! can prove that Mr. Revelle made a proposal of marriage to her, and at that time poor Vance was living. But a truce to conclusions!"

He dived a hand down into the trunk and brought up a bundle of letters bound together by a faded ribbon.

"Two games of 'a hundred up' should give me plenty of time!"

He untied the ribbon and glanced at the first letter. He gave a low whistle when he caught sight of the signature at the end. It was that of a married lady, occupying a high position in Society. In the second letter the surname was dropped.

"Oh, you vile scoundrel!" whispered Crump, the last letter read, "so this has been one of your sources of income—blackmail! And a woman, too!"

A second bundle of letters revealed another case of the same kind.

"You infamous blackguard, you!"

Then, a moment later—

"Hullo! This letter has got in here by mistake!"

It was written in a woman's hand, but different from the others. And the date proved it to be much older. Crump's eyes brightened; he screwed up his mouth.

"Dearest Jim," it ran, "to-morrow! I feel afraid, miserable, yet happy! You can perhaps understand. To-morrow we shall be husband and wife, and Alice Vince will be Mrs. James Balder. Oh, Jim, I am blushing as I write this. And yet I can't help feeling miserable. The dear old dad is sitting in the chimney corner, smoking his pipe, mother is peacefully knitting. I can't help crying a little. What will they say when they find me gone? It seems so wicked to deceive them. Oh, Jim, you will have to love me ever so much to make up for the love that I am leaving behind me. But they have always been against you, and I daren't tell them; but perhaps, when we are married, they will forgive us, knowing that it is too late to undo what is done, and it will all come right in the end. And when I think this, I don't feel quite so miserable at the thought of leaving them.

"Good-night, dearest Jim! This will reach you only a little time before I shall. Yours, most lovingly, ALICE."

Crump's expression was one of sadness and sternness mixed, as he folded up the letter and put it away in a pocket.

"I must certainly steal this. Jim Balder—Signor Balderini Alice Vince—Alice Vince—professional parachutist—amateur balloonist! A most pathetic letter, that, to me—the first act of the tragedy!"

He read through the other letters, then tied them up again, and replaced them in the trunk.

"With regard to the mystery of the reservoir I have made some little headway, but, in the other matter, I am afraid that I am no forrader. I had hoped, but no matter!"

He had exhausted the contents of the secret recess, but had encountered nothing to throw light on the manner in which the diamonds stolen from John Mansfield's safe had been disposed of. It was a disappointment to him. He started to replace the contents of the trunk, mostly clothes, taking care to search the pockets of each garment. He was essentially thorough in his methods, but his thoroughness was not to be rewarded on this occasion. He had closed down the lid of the trunk, and had just locked it again by the aid of one of the skeleton keys, one time property of Cully Scott, alias the Smasher, when a sound caught his ears—the sound of someone whistling. It was very faint, but he was just able to distinguish the air—"The Honeysuckle and the Bee!" It was the tune that he had arranged that Fred Wilton should whistle when he and Tomlinson passed to the billiard-room.

The little man sprang to his feet. The tune was no longer being whistled, but being sung in a hilarious voice that was not, however, free from an underlying note of strain.

Crump had realised. The unexpected must have happened. The handle of the door of the bedroom beyond was being turned. There was no way out of the dressing-room but through the bedroom. Crump was caught like a rat in a trap. One comprehensive glance round, then having turned out the light, he sprang to a cupboard filled with wearing apparel, that he had already examined. He crept in and drew to the door even as the door of the room beyond opened.

Railton, followed by Fred Wilton, the latter looking exceedingly uncomfortable, entered. Railton lighted the gas.

"But look here," expostulated Fred, "that was a most excellent cigar you gave me in the billiard-room. Nobody could wish for a better!"

"But I insist!" answered Railton in his suave voice, "The cigar that I'm about to offer you is of a far superior brand. It is quite the finest that it has been my lot to smoke. We keep them in the dressing-room. You want to treat your cigar as carefully as you do your wine. They are at present in a superb condition."

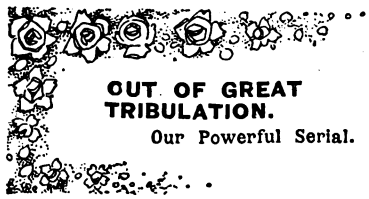
The cigars in question belonged to his master. Fred Wilton was suffering silent agony; yet he was powerless. The perspiration was beading out on his forehead when Railton passed into the dressing-room and lighted the gas.

"This," explained Railton, "is the governor's dressing-room."

Fred Wilton's heart was in his mouth. There was no sign of his uncle, but he felt positive that he must be concealed in one of the two rooms.

"This cupboard," said Railton, "is admirably suited for keeping and getting cigars into good condition. The hot water pipe running at the top insures a nice warm temperature. If you wished to purchase such a cigar as the one I am about to offer you it would cost you three shillings at least."

He pointed to a cupboard—the one in which Crump had taken refuge. Every word had been audible to the little man. He was absolutely self-possessed. The cupboard was a roomy



one, and admitted of a certain amount of movement. Quickly he took down a garment from one of the pegs. It happened to be a frock-coat. He was in an exceedingly awkward predicament, but he was full of resource, and he did not despair of extricating himself. The cigars were on the shelf above his head. There was not sufficient depth to the cupboard to enable him to conceal himself completely behind the clothes.

Railton opened the cupboard. A cry of terror, shrill as a woman's, burst from him. He had caught sight of the lower half of a man's body, the upper part shrouded by some dark garment. He was an arrant coward, Railton, and his master was quite correct in telling Benny that his nerve was absolutely gone.

Before he could step back, Crump had sprung, and had wrapped the frock-coat round Railton's head. It was a masterly manœuvre and beautifully executed; then, with a natty back-trip, he sent him flying backwards, still hopelessly enveloped in the coat.

Fred Wilton was standing motionless and open-mouthed. Crump sprang upon him with a hoarse, blood-curdling cry!

"Out o' my way, or I'll do fur yer!"

Then, instead of dealing him a murderous blow, he gave him a gentle shove, and with a jerk of his thumb indicated Railton as he lay on the floor, screaming and tearing frantically at the coat that still hooded him most effectually. Fred had recovered his self-possession. He understood. It was all over in far less time than it takes to describe. With a cry as if he had been struck a severe blow, the young constable reeled back and fell heavily on the top of Railton.

"Murder!" howled Railton.

The light went out. Then Fred winced from real pain. Railton had succeeded in getting free his hand, and, mad with terror, had fastened his teeth into the young constable's wrist.

Crump had gained the grounds. He was panting a little; but he was also grinning. That young rascal Fred had thoroughly entered into the spirit of the thing. His promptitude to grasp the situation and act augured well for his future career.

"To forget my boots," thought the little man as, silently and with a speed that would have done credit to a young man of twenty, he darted away, "would be an act of criminal folly. I can rely on Fred to keep my old friend Tomlinson very busy for the next ten minutes or so. But it was indeed a very near thing. Phew!"

It was past eleven o'clock when Crump, properly shod and the now superfluous pair of woollen socks tucked away into a pocket, admitted himself into Woodbine Cottage.

"Quite an escapade," he muttered with a chuckle. "And I must confess that I have enjoyed the excitement of it. And I'm proud, very proud of that young rascal Fred. I am very hopeful about his future. I do so want to see that lad get, if not to the top, very near to the top of the tree in his profession!"

Then he wagged a finger at an imaginary occupant of a chair opposite him, and shook his head.

"I know, my dear fellow, that, at my time of life—over sixty—I ought to be ashamed of myself! I know that my conduct to-night may seem very reprehensible; but I must ask you to wait before blowing me up. I confess that I had hoped for a better result; but my effort has not been utterly fruitless!"

He pulled out his notes, and the letter purloined from the trunk's secret recess.

"I am a step nearer the solution of the tragic mystery of Warham reservoir. I am grieved to say that, with regard to the other matter, I stand where I stood before!"

He shook his head sorrowfully. What news would the morrow bring of Alec Scarsdale? His kindly heart ached for Esther. Then he lighted his pipe. He was not in the least degree anxious about Fred. He felt quite confident in that young man's ability to see things through to a successful conclusion. He opened the letter. In the right hand corner was an address and a date. The letter was nearly thirteen years old.

"I must endeavour to obtain possession of a copy of the certificate of the marriage of James Balder and Alice Vince, also as much information as possible about Signor Balderini, the parachutist. I am very lucky to have friends abroad as well as at home."

Crump in the days of active service had done a considerable amount of continental work. He had fetched his writing materials, and was engaged upon a lengthy letter, when someone tapped on the window.

"That rascal Fred!" chuckled the little man.

When admitted, the young constable was in uniform. His right hand was bound up.

"Fred, my lad," said Crump quickly, "I hadn't realised that you had to go on duty so soon. I wouldn't for worlds be the cause of taking you off your beat. Duty's duty, my lad! Off you get. I'll overtake you in a minute; but I can't bear to think of your being off your beat. It's my fault, I know; but off you get!"

The little man hustled him out; then, having hurriedly locked up his papers, started out after him.

"Now, Fred," he said, having overtaken him, "you and I can talk, and at the same time it won't be interfering with your duty. Ah, my lad, you mustn't think me an old fidget, will you. But I remember a case of murder. If the constable hadn't been off his beat, murder would not have been done. I'm not blaming you, I am the cause. And now let me tell you that I am very pleased indeed with your conduct and presence of mind. Tell me what happened after my hurried exit?"

The young constable's story was quickly told. Railton, believing it to be the burglar upon him, had, for some time, continued to bite, kick, and howl for mercy simultaneously, and Fred had been in no hurry to undeceive him. Then at last he had been made to realise. Fred had explained that a blow below the belt had incapacitated him; that he had obtained a glimpse of the burglar before the light was extinguished—a hulking, murderous-looking fellow!

At that Crump chuckled.

"But," continued Fred, "though he was in one of the bluest funks, when I suggested that I ought to report at the station, he didn't fall in with the idea at all. Seemed to think it was too late; that no good would come of doing so."

"Exactly!" said Crump. "I can quite understand that."

"He implored me to search the place thoroughly, which I did. He seemed much relieved to find nothing missing. When I left him, he was still in a blue funk, hugging a revolver that he had unearthed from his bedroom. He begged me to keep quiet on the subject. I suppose one of the reasons being that he doesn't want the story of his little supper party to reach his master's ears."

When, on the following morning, Mrs. Cobb, shortly after six o'clock, entered Mr. Penworthy's room, she was surprised to find the little man busily engaged in writing letters.

"Gracious me, Mr. Penworthy," she exclaimed, "you don't mean to tell me that you've not been to bed!"

"Well, yes, Mrs. Cobb. I had a tremendous amount of correspondence to get through, and I am anxious to get it off by the first post."

The stack of letters beside him gave evidence of a busy night. He himself was looking a little heavy-eyed.

"Then let me get you a cup of tea, Mr. Penworthy!"

"That, Mrs. Cobb, would be most refreshing."

When later Crump returned from posting his correspondence, a number of letters were awaiting him. He sorted through them quickly, and selected one addressed in Esther's handwriting. He began to read; then gave a little start. His face lit up with a radiant beam. It was the letter Esther

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A Society Lady on Society Ladies and Corpulency.

"*Il faut souffrir pour être belle*," according to the well-known French saying, and if we may judge from the following statements of Lady Violet Greville in a recent number of *The Graphic*, verily "suffering to be beautiful" seems to be the order of the day amongst our pretty society women. This charming critic of her sex writes:

"The discomfort and severe self-restraint practised in diet by smart society women, who take a pride in their figures, would astonish those people who regard them as living a life of ease and luxury. They rise early, they take a breakfast of certain biscuits and hot water, they dine on meat and vegetables, of which onions form a prominent feature, they deny themselves tea, sugar, and spice, and all things nice, take no drink with their meals, eschew wine, and practise tiresome and fatiguing exercises twice daily. This is the regimen of an acrobat or an ascetic, yet it is cheerfully undertaken by pretty, young and happy women. Soon there will be no need of cooks."

Whether the cook is so soon likely to vanish into the *ewigkeit* we do not know; but of this we are fully assured, that all the distressing and disagreeable restrictions and the "tiresome and fatiguing exercises" are quite unnecessary, even when symptoms of obesity become more than usually alarming. A carefully considered dietary and a reasonable amount of healthy and enjoyable outdoor exercise are in all cases excellent; but to carry the regimen to the extremes described by Lady Violet Greville is not only absurd, but detrimental to health.

Amongst all the systems of reducing the body to normal proportions and keeping it in a perfect condition of beauty and symmetry, what is now widely known as the

"RUSSELL" TREATMENT FOR THE CURE OF CORPULENCY

stands supreme, not only on account of the *permanency* of its results, but because it involves no unreasonable restrictions whatever, no violent exercise, no weakening carminatives, and, moreover, the liquid compound which is, so to speak, the keynote of the treatment, is so pleasant to the palate that even a child might take it without a grimace. The "Russell" treatment does not interfere in the slightest degree with the ordinary avocations and pleasures of life, and where ordinary sanitary and hygienic conditions are observed, it cannot be otherwise than eminently beneficial.

ITS GENERAL EFFECTS.

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FOR FURTHER DETAILS

of the famous "Russell" regimen we must refer our stout readers to the fountain head, viz., to the originator of the system, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, who has devoted the best years of a long life to the study of the causes and the cure of corpulency. Mr. Russell is the author of the book "Corpulency and the Cure," of which our readers have doubtless heard. His lucid and authoritative treatise of 256 pages is already in its eighteenth edition. It contains most exhaustive information on the subject under discussion, and must be of immense service to persons of both sexes who, to quote Lady Violet Greville, "take a pride in their figures." The recipe of the principal compound employed by Mr. Russell is given in order chiefly to show the harmless character of its ingredients, which are purely vegetable, without the admixture of any deleterious substance.

To obtain a *gratis* copy of "Corpulency and the Cure," you have but to enclose three penny stamps (for private postage) to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., and you will receive a copy by return. We would especially point out the large number of extracts from laudatory letters received by the author from ladies and gentlemen who have had cause to be thankful for the *permanent* result of "doing Russell."

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OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

Our Powerful Serial.

had written after her return from Gurlston Pier and her glimpse of Alec Scarsdale.

"Ah!" ejaculated the little man, "a very great load has been lifted off my soul!"

He rubbed his hands together, and smiled gleefully.

"But what an extraordinary coincidence!"—then his face assumed a grave look—"but if by any chance he should encounter Mr. Seaton Revelle it might be very serious indeed! Miss Mansfield, in her note, does not say whether Mr. Scarsdale recognised her. If he did, I'm afraid from what I know of human nature that he will throw caution to the winds, and endeavour to see her, and that will mean recapture. I must write to her at once. Scarsdale's chance of keeping his freedom is to get abroad at once! But, in any case, a great load has been lifted from my soul! And though it would be heartrending should he be retaken and go back to prison, it might not be for such a very long period after all. He is alive, that's the great thing!"

ALONG THE CLIFFS TOWARDS THE CAVES!"

The investigations of the police had thrown no light on the identity of the mysterious man who had entered the drawing-room of Gurlston Hall. The servants had been severely cross-examined; but one and all had stoutly denied having left their rooms, and it was impossible to prove otherwise, whatever suspicions might be afloat. When the household had been alarmed, John Mansfield had been one of the last to be awakened. He had at once sought his daughter's room, to find Esther in bed. He had not dreamt of questioning her; but, having told her what had happened, had remained with her. But after a while, when she had assured him that she was not frightened, he had left her to join the men and Miss Bullivant in the smoking-room. Seaton Revelle, lying on the couch, Miss Bullivant close to him, had inquired after Miss Mansfield, expressing the hope that she had not been unduly alarmed. The banker had remarked proudly his daughter was exceptionally plucky, and that he had just left her. When Esther had appeared at breakfast, the police investigations were over, and Revelle had been driven over to his friend's place. One thought only was in her mind. Alec had not been recognised. So far he had evaded recapture. And she thanked God for this! The horribly compromising position in which she had been placed on the previous night was only brought home to her when, after breakfast, she met Gerald Phipps on the lawn. A flush brightened her white face. The young 'Varsity man looked painfully embarrassed. Nobody was near them.

"I want to thank you," said Esther in a low, tremulous voice, "for sparing me!"

He looked more embarrassed than before. For the life of him he could not think of anything to say.

"And," went on Esther, "think what you will of me; but you won't—won't forget your promise, will you?"

He found his tongue at last.

"Look here," he stammered, "I'm not—I don't want to think anything. I should not think of—giving you away!"—he used the expression for the want of a better one—"I have a sort of an idea that—well—that, don't you know, there was more in it than met the eye—and if you cared to trust me—won't you?"

Esther knew him to be a gentleman. Her instincts served her in good stead. She acted on the impulse of the moment.

"Yes," she whispered, "I feel that I can trust you. And I feel if I tell you, you won't regret having done what you did. In screening me, you screened an innocent man. It was the man whom I am engaged to marry whom I met last night!"

So it had been the convict fellow, after all!

"I say, look here! I don't want to know any more! You're a most awfully plucky, brave sort! If at the time I—well—I thought things, I ask your pardon now a hundred times. Will you—er—shake hands?"

Esther took his outstretched hand. The flush had deepened on her face. Stammering, halting, and incoherent his speech might have been, but it had been genuine.

"Thank you!" she whispered simply.

"And look here, don't you know, if in any way I could help you, please say so. I should be awfully glad to, if I could in any way, I mean to say that the fellow who, with chains on his legs, could go to the rescue of a drowning man, must have an awful lot of good in him!"

It was very bluntly put; but the words came straight from the heart—a gentleman's heart. Further conversation was put an end to by the appearance of others on the lawn. The mystery of the night before was for some little time the chief topic of conversation; then plans for the day were discussed. It was finally decided upon to make an excursion to Reefe Castle—a fine old ruin some distance inland. Mr. Mansfield asked to be excused. The morning post had brought him in a budget of business letters that required immediate attention.

"But you'll go, Esther. I'm afraid that I've got a morning's work before me."

"I'd rather not, father; I don't feel quite up to a long day yet. I think I'll stay here. Perhaps we can go somewhere together this afternoon."

"Mansfield," said Mr. Walters, "there's a thick sea-mist rolling up the channel at present; but if it clears by this afternoon, make use of the yacht, if you feel so inclined!"

Immediately overhead the sky was a cloudless blue, giving no indication of the low-lying mist that veiled the sea, and was slowly rising, presently to mount the crest of the cliffs and creep inland.

After the others had gone, and her father had retired into the house, Esther sat in a deck chair on the lawn, her shapely head bent forward, her eyes shaded by a hand. Where was he now? For a long while she did not stir; then a feeling of restlessness came over her. She rose up and made her way into the library where her father was busy with his correspondence.

"Father, I think I shall go for a little stroll."

"Very well, my dear child. Which way are you going? I might take a break presently, and come along to meet you."

"Along the cliffs towards the caves, though I don't suppose I shall get as far as the caves."

"Be careful, Esther—not too near the edge!"

She stooped down and kissed him on his forehead.

"You're such an anxious old daddy," she said, with a little smile, "where I am concerned!"

A few moments later Esther was ascending the steep road that only the night before Alec Scarsdale had traversed. When she reached the crest of the cliff she glanced down at the mist that, like a great grey cloud, veiled the sea from her. The distant hootings of steamers reached her, now and again the dull boom of the lighthouse gun, yet overhead the sky was cloudlessly blue. But the breeze was blowing from off the sea. She did not take the road, but moved pensively along the foot-path, marked at intervals by white stones, that ran parallel with the edge of the cliff.

For some time the banker continued to wrestle with his correspondence; then he leant back in his chair with a sigh.

"He's a charming fellow, well-connected, and a man of means. I do hope that in the fulness of time that it will come about!"

He was thinking of the possiblities of Seaton Revelle becoming his son-in-law. He put away his papers.

"Yes, I think I'll go and look for Esther now."

He was crossing the lawn when he caught sight of a figure, walking with a stick, limping up the drive. The man uppermost in his mind!

"Hullo, Revelle!" he cried, "this is better. I was afraid

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Dr. X. La Motte Sage made a fortune out of Hypnotism. He probably knows more about the subject than any living man. His methods are radically different from any ever before presented. By his new system he hypnotises people instantaneously. He tells you how to exert tremendous silent influence without making a gesture or saying a single word. He gives the only real, practical methods for the development of the power of Personal Magnetism that have ever been published. During all the time that Dr. Sage was before the public he made it his business to note carefully the effect of hypnotism upon the human mind. He became convinced that this mighty mysterious power could be utilised to the advantage of ambitious men and women who wished to better their condition in life. To demonstrate the correctness of his ideas when he retired from public life he founded a college where Hypnotism, Personal Magnetism, Magnetic Healing, etc., might be taught along the definite lines he had laid down. The result is that the college has grown to be the largest of its kind in the world. Thousands of successful students in all parts of the globe are living witnesses to the wonderful power and the great practical benefits to be derived from Dr. Sage's methods. The Doctor has recently written a book entitled "The Philosophy of Personal Influence," in which he tells in plain, simple language just how to acquire hypnotic power and the various uses to which it may be put. Among the many interesting things upon which the book treats are: How to develop magnetic power and influence people without their knowledge; how to cure bad habits and obstinate chronic diseases, when medicine and everything else in this line fails; how to implant a command in a subject's mind that he will carry out in every detail a month or a year hence, whether the hypnotist is present or not; how to hypnotise people at a distance; its value in business; marvellous scientific tests how to prevent people from influencing you; hypnotic power more fascinating than beauty; the use of hypnotism in the development of the mental faculties; controlling children; removing domestic troubles, etc.

The college which Dr. Sage has founded proposes to give away 10,000 dollars worth of the above books absolutely free so long as the special edition lasts. Any person who is in earnest can get a copy merely by writing for it. This book is handsomely illustrated by the finest half-tone engravings. It tells you how the marvellous power of hypnotism has been used to cast a secret mystic spell over people without their knowledge and how they have been for months, and in some cases even years, obeying the royal will of another. It gives you the secret of the development of what Senator Chauncey M. Depew calls the money-making microbe. Don't think because you lack a fine education and are working for a small salary that you cannot better your condition; do not think because you are now successful in life that you cannot be more successful. Dr. Sage's book has been read, and his methods are to-day being used by many of the richest men in the world. They know the value of personal influence, of hypnotic power. If you are interested, write on a penny post-card to-day to the New York Institute of Science, Dept. VA, 23 Rochester, New York, U.S.A., and a copy of Dr. Sage's book will be sent you by return mail absolutely free. This is a rare opportunity to learn the uses and possibilities of the most wonderful, marvellous, and mysterious power known to man. The book is enthusiastically indorsed by the most prominent business men, ministers of the gospel, lawyers, and doctors. It should be in every home; it should be read by every man and woman in the country who wants to better his condition in life, who wants to achieve greater financial success, win friends, gratify his ambitions, and get out of life the pleasure and happiness which the Creator intended he should enjoy.

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that you would have to give that ankle of yours complete rest for two or three days."

"No, it's not sprained as I thought—only a bit of a twist or a rick or something. I can hobble along quite famously with the aid of a stick. Where's everybody gone to?"

"Gone over to Reefe Castle, all except Esther and myself,"

"And where—er—is Miss Mansfield?"

"Gone along the cliffs towards the caves."

"'Pon my soul!" said Revelle, with a little laugh, "I believe that I'm capable of hobbling as far as that."

John Mansfield changed his mind about going to meet Esther. Under the circumstances he preferred not to make a third party.

"Well, I shall be seeing you again before very long."

Revelle waved his hand, and started to limp back along the drive.

His destination was along the cliffs towards the caves!

'TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH.

For all the hardness of his bed of rock and sand, Alec Scarsdale slept long and heavily. When at last he opened his eyes, a faint light filled the cave wherein he lay. At first, when the rugged outlines of the cave shaped themselves before his eyes, he fancied that he must be lying in the quarry at Greystone Prison. It was the sound of breaking waves that helped to bring back everything to his mind.

He passed out on to the ledge. It was a dull, grey morning. A mist fringed the horizon; but immediately about him the atmosphere was clear. He stood, drawing in deep breaths of the invigorating air, and taking stock of the wild, romantic surroundings. The ledge upon which he was standing, with its precipitous, burrowed background, was bay-shaped, inclosed at each end by towering white cliffs, their bases set in deep water. Atop the cliff to his left, the brow of which was overhanging, stood a withered, barren-looking tree. Beyond this, invisible to him, ran the footpath, set with stones, that led to the tunnel-like mouth that gave access to the caves.

He had no idea what the time was. He felt the better for his long sleep, refreshed by the invigorating air. He made a meal off the bread and meat supplied him by the kindly-hearted skipper, washed down by some fresh water that trickled from a crevice in the rocks. He thanked Heaven for the kindly forethought that had supplied him with pipe and tobacco. He sat himself down in the shadow of a great boulder to smoke, to think. What had happened after his flight? Had Esther been discovered? The thought made him writhe. He bitterly accused himself of selfishness. He had brought so much misery into her life. He stared mechanically at the horizon. The sea-mist was rolling nearer. Those moments with Esther had been so cruelly brief. If only he could see her again. He told himself that it was selfish; but he could not master his hunger.

He was still wrestling with his thoughts, when the mist crept up over the ledge, stealing round him insidiously like a damp shroud, and went onward and upward, topping the brow of the cliff and creeping away inland. The distant hoots of steamers mingled with the screechings of the circling gulls. Then the lighthouse gun boomed out heavily. To Scarsdale the mist seemed like the physical embodiment of the gloom that was stealing over his soul as he tried to solve the problem of the future. He must be going, somewhere—God alone knew how it was all going to end. If only he could see Esther once again!

"Help!"

He sprang to his feet.

It was a scream—a woman's scream, coming from out the mist, from somewhere above!

"Help!"

From somewhere above, but the baffling mist distorted sound. He glanced wildly up and round. As he did so, the mist lifted from the top of the cliffs.

"Oh, my God!" he breathed out sharply

Below the brow of the cliff away to his left, a woman was clinging to what seemed the white sheer side. Her feet were on a narrow, crumbling ledge, all that was between her and the water, more than a hundred feet below!

It was horrible! It seemed as though every moment she must fall. So narrow was the ledge, there was no room to turn upon it. She looked as though she were nailed to the side. And even as Scarsdale, horror-stricken, stared, a fragment broke away from the ledge, and crashed down. A moment later, and he was speeding like the wind. To reach the cliff above he had to ascend the tunnel leading up from the ledge. Once through, he darted to the edge of the cliff, went down on his hands and knees, peered over. The mist was rolling away inland. All was clear around, above, below!

Oh, God! His brain reeled.

For the grey, terrified, appealing face staring up at him, was that of the woman he loved!

Esther!

A deathly feeling of sickness swept over him, an icy hand seemed to have gripped on his heart. He saw her eyes dilate with a look that told of recognition—of hope.

"For God's sake, hold on!" he breathed out.

He dug his toes into the turf, stretched down his hand. Esther relaxed her hold with one hand, stretched up. There was a gap of two feet or more between the two hands. A fragment broke away from the ledge and crashed down. There would be no room for him upon the ledge below, if it bore the strain of the extra weight. If there had been room, and it had borne him, he could not have raised her into safety. the distance was too great.

"Oh, God! For a rope, a rope!"

And those mute, staring eyes were bent upon him, beseeching him to save her!

A rope! Oh, for a rope!

He thought of his coat. It would reach her; but without support he could not drag her up. There was nothing to give him a grip, a hold. The tree that stood behind him was too far away.

He cast a wild, despairing glance behind him. Some forty yards away stood a small barn. Outside, a horseless cart, a load of hay upon it. A thought flashed through his brain.

"Esther," he whispered down, "hold on, for the love of God, hold on a little longer! Can you, beloved, can you?"

Oh, the agony of it all—the life-and-death agony!

"Yes—but—only—a—little longer!"

"I'm coming back to you!"

He sprang to his feet; then raced like a madman to the cart. Yes, a rope was there, bound round the load of hay.

He tore at the knots. Heaven, for a knife! Then he used his teeth. At last. Only a few seconds in reality; but it had seemed to him an eternity of fiendish torture.

"Courage, beloved! I've got a rope. Just a little longer!"

It was a long, stout rope.

He lowered down one end.

"Make it fast round your waist!" he hissed.

With one hand she gripped it, wound it round her waist, knotted it. He darted back, wound the rope round the tree. There was yet plenty to spare. He made the end fast round his own waist. He had support now.

* * * * * * *

"Thank goodness, that confounded fog has passed over," muttered Seaton Revelle, as he rose up from one of the white stones beside the foot-path on which he had been sitting, "you don't catch me doing any walking near the edge of a cliff when there's a fog about—far too risky!"

He started to hobble forward again. Then suddenly——

"Good God!"

(To be continued.)

Splendid Serial Story Coming.

We have arranged for a magnificent serial story to follow the present one. The first instalment will appear in a few weeks.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

A LETTER FROM RUSSIA.

I have received a letter in German from a correspondent in Russia. Let me say it is no small pleasure to me to know that evidently Short Stories is read in the land of the Tsars. My correspondent is anonymous, and asks me if I could help him to find a wife. He is thirty, of good character and means, possessing some property. He is musical, good looking, fond of sport, but does not care for the girls of his own country. If he could meet a pretty foreign lady who spoke French, and could play and sing, he would be happy. Can I help him?

NOT A MATRIMONIAL AGENCY.

I should be most happy. But I fear such girls as my Russian friend seeks would readily enough find suitors of their own nationality. I cannot undertake to help him in finding a wife, as I would not like to be in any way responsible for sending an English girl to live in so uncongenial a country as Russia, unless there were a very strong love motive in the case. However, I place his statement on record.

I AM WILLING TO HELP.

While I cannot agree to be the medium for exchanging names and addresses, if any lady correspondent would willingly undertake such a mysterious alliance, it would be interesting to know it. If there are English girls so inclined, I shall be happy to make a statement to that effect in a week or so, when my Russian friend may think it worth his while to endeavour to find an English wife through mutual friends, or, if he can afford it, a visit to this country.

SAME QUESTIONS ASKED.

"F. K. B."—You will see that I answered a very similar question to your own last week, and the advice then given may absolutely apply in your own case. I hope that other correspondents who do not see answers to their own inquiries in this column will take it that the same ground has been covered in an answer to some other inquirer. The reason is, of course, that among my hundreds of clients, very many of them ask me practically the same questions.

A TYPINE'S DIFFICULTY.

"In Despair" is a typine, and for some time received the attentions of her employer. After a while she learnt that he was married, but was already herself in love with him, and continues to be in spite of this knowledge. She does not believe he is very happy with his wife. The situation is a very good one, and she cannot afford to lose it.

KEEP STRICTLY TO BUSINESS RELATIONS.

"In Despair" is in a very difficult position. Let her keep her situation as long as possible, but let her relations with her employer never go beyond those of strict business. It will require a great deal of tact and strength of will, but only in this way will it be possible to save herself from ultimate trouble.

LEAVE YOUR SITUATION IF POSSIBLE.

At the same time, if she knows of another place, or could get one easily, it would be very advisable to take it. By admitting that she is in love with this married man, and that he is paying attentions to her, she enters upon very dangerous ground. It would be better to at once place herself out of the way of temptation, which may sooner or later befall, and perhaps ruin both of them.

THE WIFE'S SCHOOL FRIEND.

"H. G." has a wife who, nine months out of twelve, is all that he could desire. But at intervals she is visited by an old school friend, whom "H. G." does not at all like. When this young lady is there, all matrimonial bliss disappears, and "H. G." and his wife are continually quarrelling. If he stops the friend's visits his wife will make it an eternal grievance. How is "H. G." to arrange the matter?

HUSBAND'S FRIENDS ARE USEFUL.

Has not "H. G." himself got an old school friend he can run to earth and invite to his house? If he has, and can manage the necessary entertainment, the best thing he could do would be to invite him to stay whenever his wife's friend appears. An Englishman's house is his castle, and if "H. G.'s" wife requires a friend to visit her, surely her husband can claim the same privilege. Ask him next time, "H. G.," and if your wife gets unmanageable, try what spending a few nights at the theatre or elsewhere with him will do to bring her to a proper frame of mind. Husband's friends may be made enormously useful assets in "taming shrews" if properly employed.

GRETA AND THE GARDEN PARTY.

"Greta" was out at a garden party the other day, and spent rather a long time with a certain young man who, she tells me, interested her. Later on, it appeared that her mother had been watching her, and she was subjected to a severe scolding, because it was "very improper for a girl to be seen so long in the company of a young man." Do I think "Greta" was really doing wrong, and if not, how can I advise her to defend herself against such troubles with her parent?

CONVENTIONALITY IS NECESSARY.

I sympathise very much with "Greta." It is not at all unnatural that if a young man's conversation proved interesting she should wish to prolong it as long as possible. At the same time "Greta," with the rest of our sex, is compelled to bow to little conventionalities. Nothing has given me more annoyance often than to have had to suddenly break off an interesting conversation because by doing so I was acting in a selfish way. "Greta" was invited to a party, and as she was the guest of another, obviously it was her duty to make herself as generally amiable to everybody as it is possible to be.

WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE.

I should, had I been "Greta," have contrived to enjoy instead of one prolonged and noticeable conversation, several little ones. After, say, five minutes' chat with the young man, she could leave him for awhile on the understanding that they would see each other later on, and that she could have made as soon as possible, repeating the meetings at intervals. There is a gentle art of mild flirtation which has a very difficult technique, and is not easily acquired. But let "Greta" always remember that whatever her own inclinations may be, when she is another's guest, politeness must always be the first consideration.

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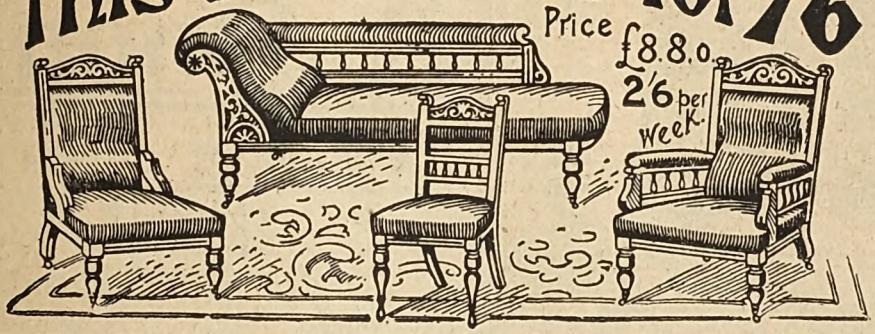

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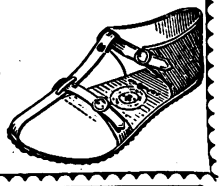

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Short Stories

No. 713.) Week ending August 30th, 1902. (Price One Penny.

"Oh, forgive me!" she cried, "I was mad!"

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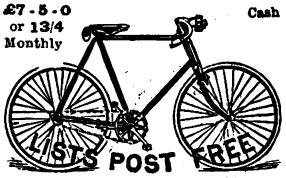

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Short Stories

No. 713. ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending August 30th, 1902.

HER RIVAL.

The Powerful Story of a Broken Masterpiece.

CLARE HARDING looked out across the square at the wind-tossed trees and the leaden sky, and the rain that had been pouring down in torrents all day long.

It was a dreary, desolate prospect, but the girl's mood was in harmony with the weather. She knew it and took a morbid pleasure in the comparison.

Yet, truth to tell, Clare had no business with dismal thoughts. If she had only known it they were of her own making. But she did not know this, and her misery was very real to her.

To Clare's friends it seemed that she possessed everything the heart of woman could desire—health, youth, beauty, and the love of "the best fellow in the world."

Well, that was their point of view; Clare's was different, and so it happened that when, according to the judgment of her friends, she should have been happiest, she was often most miserable.

There is tragedy as well as farce in such a situation, and a hair's breadth divides the one from the other.

Clare was no less in love with Dick Stanton than he with her. Yet there were occasions when her love meant only unspeakable wretchedness to her.

Dick was poor, but it was not his poverty that troubled Clare. She believed in the young sculptor's genius, in his ability to climb the ladder that led to fame and fortune. She knew that sooner or later the day was bound to come when Dick would be rich, respected, his name a power in the world of Art.

Already he had taken the first firm step upon that ladder, and soon he would be able to offer her the modest home that would content them.

There was no false prudery in Clare. She loved Dick, and she made no secret of her desire to become his wife.

The strange thing was that, though the girl realised that it was by means of Dick's genius that her dearest wish would be fulfilled, she looked upon that very genius as her greatest enemy.

From the very first, almost ever since she had known Dick, a fierce unreasoning jealousy of the sculptor's art and his enthusiasm for his art, had tormented her.

Many a time in the days before he had confessed his love for her, she had watched him when he spoke of his beloved work. With a strange pain at her heart she had seen the light leap to his eyes, and the colour to his cheeks, and even in those days she vaguely hated the curious, intangible power that could move him thus.

And now—now that she had a claim upon him—she had learnt to look upon Dick's art as upon some dangerous rival to herself that was for ever threatening to come between her and his love.

For a time he had succeeded in lifting her very near to heaven by the ardour of his wooing. He had thrilled her with his eager, passionate words.

"I love you with all my soul, with every beat of my heart," he had said. "There is no thought of mine that does not belong to you."

She had listened in an ecstasy of happiness, and for a time she was content.

Then, one day, she realised that the great love he professed for her was not the all-absorbing passion of his life of which she had dreamt.

She saw that his art still occupied a cherished place in his affections, and the slumbering demon of jealousy once more awakened in her bosom.

She tried to stifle the pitiful, contemptible thing, but it was too strong for her. The fear of it haunted her day and night.

And all the while Dick was absolutely unconscious of its presence. He made no secret before Clare of his devotion to his work. He gloried in it, and manlike he took it for granted that his sweetheart shared his enthusiasm.

And she, ashamed of her weakness, did not dare to undeceive him.

Once or twice she ventured to remonstrate with him, playfully, for some trifling neglect of her, but he little guessed the real bitterness of spirit that was hidden beneath the jesting words.

"You're late, Dick," she would say to him lightly, "I've been waiting for you a whole hour. Think of that!"

"My darling, I'm all regrets, but that Cupid of mine was a ticklish business, and had to be finished!" Or—"Psyche wouldn't let me get away," he would tell her gaily. "I had a model who won't be able to sit for me again, and so I was obliged to make the most of her, you see."

Then he would begin to talk to her fondly of his work' of his hopes and fears, of the difficulties he had succeeded in overcoming, and of those that were yet to be conquered.

There were moments when his ardour kindled hers when.

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she was carried away in spite of herself by the sheer force of his enthusiasm.

At such times she would listen eagerly, with shining eyes, to his eloquent description of some beautiful work of art, to his dreams of some bold, half-formed conception of his own brain that was to make his name immortal.

Then suddenly the hateful thought would come to her that in all this *she* had no actual part, that she was listening to the story of another love, a love that had supplanted hers, and then she would set her lips and clench her hands in a kind of hopeless rage because it was not she who had brought that look of adoration to his face.

Except when some business that was unavoidable called him away, Dick never allowed a day to pass without seeing his sweetheart. But his visits were often but a few moments' respite from work, when he would come to her only to snatch a kiss and a few hasty words of endearment.

Sometimes it was a pressing commission, or a capricious model that claimed his time; at others it was some sudden inspiration that had to be embodied, lest it should escape again.

"I'm sorry, dearest," Dick would say, regretfully enough, "but you understand, don't you, little girl? It's my duty, and it's got to be done."

His duty! How she hated the word!

But she only smiled back at him, nodding her fair head, and telling him she understood.

On rare occasions he would explain to her tenderly that, in the midst of all his work, he thought of her, and of the happy time to come when he could ask her to redeem her promise.

"It's only by my work, sweetheart, that I can hope to win you," he told her. "It's my work that is bringing you nearer and nearer to me. No wonder that I love it!"

The girl said nothing, but in her heart she thought—"It is a pretty pretence, but he can't deceive me. I know that he loves his work, not for my sake, but for its own. He loved it long before he ever knew me. If I were to die he would find his consolation in it. It is a joy to him, apart from me."

Dick's studio was but a stone's throw from the square in which she lived, but Clare seldom entered it.

Now and then she paid a brief visit to the place to inspect some piece of sculpture that he wished to show her, but she never came to him there while he was at his work.

At first he had reproached her with the fact.

"Why do you despise my poor workshop?" he demanded. "Think of the beautiful hours we could spend together! With your presence to inspire me, I could work twice as well."

"I'm not so sure of that!" she retorted. "I'm afraid my presence would only disturb you. And if it didn't," she added, with a little laugh that hid the tremor in her voice, "if it didn't, *I* shouldn't like it! You see, it would be so humiliating to be ignored in favour of clay and marble chips."

He smiled at this way of putting the situation, and he little guessed that the girl's words, so flippantly spoken, might be taken seriously as expressing her whole attitude towards himself and his art.

One day Dick came to Clare with a radiant face.

"My darling! Here is good news for you!" he cried joyfully. "More work has come to me—important work. A rich American has bought my Amaryllis, and he wants a companion to it. He came to the studio just now. Only think—he says he's going to *discover* me! If I satisfy him, my fortune's made! That's his way of putting it, not mine. Dearest, think of it! Our time is coming!"

He drew the girl towards him, and clasped her to his breast, and for one brief moment she was happy. His first thought had been for her!

"Tell me," she asked presently, "what is to be your subject?"

"Phyllis and Corydon," he returned, with a little grimace. "Hackneyed, isn't it? But I can't help myself. Mr. Van Martin chose it. He's left the treatment to me, though. That's a great deal to be thankful for. I must think of something new, and then hunt for suitable models. I have my eye on Corydon, but the lady puzzles me. None of my present models would do at all. Now, for instance——"

He talked on excitedly, half to Clare, half to himself, and soon he appeared to forget the girl's presence altogether. Drawing out his note-book he threw himself into the nearest chair and began to cover sheet upon sheet with rough pencil sketches, as idea after idea chased each other through his restless brain.

Clare watched him in angry, rebellious silence. The tears of humiliation and disappointment rose to her eyes, but she choked them back with a desperate effort of her will.

Presently, when the light within the room grew faint, she rose quietly, lighted the gas, and began to pull down the blinds.

Dick looked up from his work as a man who had been suddenly roused from a dream.

"My dearest, forgive me!" he exclaimed penitently. "What an ill-mannered brute I am! I'm afraid I quite forgot where I was!"

"Don't apologise, Dick," said Clare, in her quiet voice. "It's an absorbing business, I know."

When he had left her, she burst into a storm of jealous, passionate tears.

Some days later he announced, with an air of triumph, that he had discovered a model for Phyllis.

"She's an absolute treasure!" he told Clare enthusiastically; "as near physical perfection as anything I've ever seen. I was afraid I should have to do the usual patchwork business—taking an arm here, and a nose there, and a chin from somewhere else, you know. But with this girl it's all plain sailing. She's a beautiful creature in every way. I shall want no other model at all. The curious part is, she's not a professional, and yet she's as easy to work with as any woman I've ever had. Her limbs seem to fall quite instinctively into the right poses."

From that moment Phyllis and Cordyon were never out of Dick's thoughts or Clare's.

The young sculptor took an unaffected pride in his own creation. He was in excellent spirits.

"We're progressing more quickly than I had hoped," he told Clare one night. "Another day or two of good steady work, and my clay model will be finished. Alice gives me her last sitting to-morrow."

Alice; that was the name of his beautiful model. Her Christian name. He always called her by that. Clare supposed it was customary among artists, and yet—even so insignificant thing as this could trouble her when she was in a morbid mood.

She felt unreasonably angry with this girl—this Alice—who was the most perfect creature Dick had ever seen.

He had never called *her* perfect. But then, it would have been untrue, and Dick was never that.

He had often told her she was charming, or pretty, but he had never rhapsodised over her as he had rhapsodised over the discovery of Alice.

Of course, Alice was only a model. At least, *was* she only a model? No; Dick had mentioned something to the contrary. She could not remember exactly what it was. He had never told her anything definite, she thought. She, Clare, did not even know how he had made Alice's acquaintance. Since that first rapturous tribute to Alice's perfections, he had been a trifle reticent, she fancied. But she had asked no curious questions, lest he should think—what Clare would not have had him think for worlds.

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Jealous of an artist's model! The thing was preposterous. She could never stoop so low as that. But why, why need he have cast this creature's beauty in her teeth?

* * * * *

Clare turned away from the window with a strange expression in her grey eyes.

"Dick is late—later than usual to-day!" she murmured.

Then she remembered that this was Alice's last day. "That is what is keeping him," she thought. "He will want to make the most of his last opportunity. I wonder—I wonder——"

She stopped suddenly.

"Shall I?" she whispered to herself; and the next moment she had hurried from the room.

Ten minutes later she was standing outside the door of Dick Stanton's studio.

For an instant she paused, in breathless hesitation, with her hand on the latch.

Ought she to have come? Would it not be better to go back and wait for Dick at home? She had once made up her mind never to disturb him at his work. But that was just what she was going to do now.

Why had she come? Really, she was not quite certain. Was it to see Alice—the perfectly beautiful Alice, whom Dick——

Clare hesitated no longer. She threw off her dripping cloak in the narrow vestibule and knocked at the studio door.

"Come in!" cried an impatient voice. It was Dick's; evidently he was by no means well pleased at being thus disturbed.

Clare obeyed the somewhat ungracious invitation.

Dick was standing with his back to her at the far end of the long room, in front of the revolving table upon which "Phyllis and Corydon" had sprung into being.

He did not turn his head at her entrance.

"What is it? What do you want?" the girl heard him say, in a curiously absent voice.

Somehow, it never occurred to her that the questions could be meant for her, and she made no reply, but stood and waited until he should turn his head and see her.

But Dick seemed already to have forgotten the interruption. Unconscious of his visitor, he continued his absorbing inspection of "Phyllis and Corydon," giving a touch of his sensitive fingers here and there, until, satisfied at length, he took a long step back, and then, with a sigh of contentment, threw himself into a chair, the better to contemplate his handiwork.

"Dick!" said Clare softly; but the sculptor did not hear her.

"Dick!" she repeated, and still there was no reply.

She took a step towards him, moving so that she could see his face. At the sight of it all the colour left her cheeks.

She hardly recognised the Dick of her everyday experience.

His face was changed, transfigured by an expression of such absolute rapture as Clare had never seen on any man's face before.

Instinctively her eyes followed the direction of his own.

"Phyllis and Corydon." Two images modelled in cold, dull clay. Clare's blinded eyes saw that, and nothing more. They did not see the exquisite grace and beauty of the work, the poetic delicacy of its conception, the masterly skill of execution.

They only saw—Clare's rival. The apotheosis of all she feared and hated, the thing upon which Dick lavished that measure of his love which he denied to her.

A wild, senseless fury took possession of her.

She flashed one glance at Dick. That was enough. It was "Phyllis and Corydon" who held him enthralled; it was "Phyllis and Corydon"——

A mallet lay among the *débris* of implements, blocks of marble and plaster casts that littered the floor of the studio.

It came within Clare's line of vision.

Then, for one mad moment, the girl lost her self-control.

She seized the mallet, and, with a little inarticulate cry of rage, leapt forward.

There was a dull, soft thud, and the next instant a broken mass of clay lay scattered upon the ground.

The mutilated stumps of "Phyllis and Corydon" stood, calm and impassive, upon their pedestal.

* * * * *

"Why did you do this?" he demanded in a lifeless voice.

"Forgive me!" she cried. "I was mad! I didn't know what I was doing. Oh, forgive me!"

"I don't understand," he said, and shrank from her touch.

She fell on her knees at his feet and covered her face with her hands.

"I was mad—mad!" she sobbed. "And I hated it so!"

"I don't understand," he said again.

"I hated it because—because it had robbed me of you!" cried the girl. "I was mad with jealousy, and—and, Dick, I love you so!"

"And *that* is how you showed your love," he returned, and the simple words stabbed her like a knife.

"For God's sake, Dick, don't speak to me like that! Don't look at me like that!" she moaned.

"Get up, Clare," he said, not roughly, but in the cold, passionless voice that sent a chill to her heart.

She obeyed him, trembling with remorse and fear, and sank into the chair he placed for her.

"Tell me again what you said just now," he commanded. "I am dull of comprehension to-night, or else——"

He passed his hands across his eyes.

"I think I have never really known you, Clare," he said. "So you came here to-night for the purpose of destroying——"

"Oh, no, no! Not that!" she cried. "Not that! It was no deliberate act of mine. Dick, Dick, you can't believe that of me!"

"Why did you come?" he asked.

"I came because—because—oh, shall I ever make you understand? I was miserable, Dick, and sick for the sight of you. I have been jealous always, though you never guessed it—jealous of your art, your work. Then—that woman—Alice; you said she was beautiful, and I—oh, I didn't understand myself. I think I came to—see her—to see—oh, Dick, you will despise me!"

Eagerly, hurriedly, her voice broken with sobs, Clare stammered out her pitiful confession.

He listened patiently, and, in a measure, he understood, because he loved her.

"Clare," he said slowly, "Alice, at least, can be no rival of yours."

Even as he spoke they could hear the shuffle of clumsy footsteps outside in the vestibule, and a woman's voice raised in shrill declamation.

"I tell yer 'e won't mind, silly owl! Knock an' then trot in; that's the way with 'im!"

"Steady on! Don't you be in such a bloomin' 'urry, my dear!" a male voice protested in a lower key.

Dick hurried to the door, but before he could reach it, the owners of the voices appeared within the room.

"Alice!" exclaimed Dick, "what are you doing here? Haven't I told you——"

"All right, guv'nor," interrupted the male visitor apologetically. He was a short, thick-set young man, with a stupid, good-humoured face. "We're off in a minute. She would bring me."

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"'E wanted carryin' in, 'e did," remarked Alice, contemptuously.

Clare looked at the speaker in a kind of dazed wonder.

Was this really Alice, this young woman in the dirty blouse and patent-leather boots, whose language and demeanour savoured of gin shops and the Borough Road? Even to Clare's unpractised eyes, it was clear that the girl had been drinking. Her face was flushed, her utterance thick, and as she stood, she swayed slightly from side to side.

"And yet Dick is right," was the swift thought that followed the first shock imparted by Alice's condition. "In different clothes, and under different circumstances, she would be a lovely creature."

"I can't have you here like this," said Dick shortly. "Take her away at once," he added, turning to Alice's apologetic companion.

"You 'ear that, old lady?" demanded the latter; whereupon Alice remarked that she heard, right enough, and volunteered to push the young man's face in for him if she had any more of *his* sauce.

In the altercation that followed, it transpired incidentally that Alice had brought "her bloke" to the studio in order that he might inspect her counterpart, glorified by the costume of an Arcadian shepherdess.

When Alice's unsteady eye caught sight of the ruins of her glory, she burst into helpless, foolish tears, and was with some difficulty led from the scene by her faithful admirer. And so Dick and Clare were left alone together once more, with the shattered remains of "Phyllis and Corydon" between them.

For a while neither spoke. For her part terrible remorse and anxiety mastered every other thought. But for him the veil had been drawn, and as never before he understood the power, the intensity, and the madness of a strong woman's love.

* * * * *

"Phyllis and Corydon" were never remodelled, but the next year the artistic world was thrilled by an exquisite masterpiece which had been executed by a hitherto unknown artist; a masterpiece which brought more fame than ever "Phyllis and Corydon" could possibly have done, because inspired by both love and genius. Its title was "Love's Remorse."

Grete Hahn.

FOR ONE MAN'S SAKE.

A Story of Love Triumphant.

"Harold! Harold!—you love me, don't you?"

"Love you, Ella!—what a question to ask."

"Well, they say, you know, that perfect love begets perfect confidence. Now, it is because I feel that you are keeping back from me, something which closely concerns both of us, that I ask you the question."

"My dear Ella!—all that you say is very right and true—within limits, but it does not, I think, necessarily follow that because a man withholds anxiety and trouble from the girl he loves, he is, as towards her, wanting in perfect confidence; in the truest and best sense, that is."

"Then it *is* some trouble!" she said quickly.

"I did not say so."

"Ah!—but I know it, Harold. My heart tells me that you are engaged in some desperate undertaking, of which you well know I should not approve."

"Ella!—I assure you that you are needlessly worrying yourself. By this time, surely, you must be aware, that in my business the risks are more than equal to the advantages."

"Yes!—Yes!—but why won't you let me know of and sympathise with your risks, as well as, by and by, share your advantages?"

"Can't you see, dear, that it is kinder to keep you in ignorance of the risks?"

"Not, Harold, if they are avoidable, and will not bear discussion."

"Well, dear, I will go so far as to say that this matter which seems to be troubling your little heart so much, is connected with the note robbery at the Occidental Bank—more I cannot tell you."

There was something in Harold Baxter's manner, something which told of conscious concealment, and which belied the apparent frankness of his partial statement.

It angered the woman who would have laid down her life for him; who had no thought, no hope, no desire, that was not bound up in his life and welfare.

"It is not fair to me!" she cried. "It is cruel to trust me as you would your pet dog!—a piece of sugar now and then, and for the rest—nothing!—I tell you that it is unjust!"

"But Ella!—you misunderstand me!—you——"

"No, I do not, Harold. I understand you only too well, and I warn you, that in spite of your refusal to enlighten me with regard to what I know you intend doing, I *will* find it out, even though it be to my own sorrow."

Ella Rayne was no ordinary girl; being high-minded, and whole-hearted far beyond the average woman of to-day. From her earliest years she had known the pinch of poverty, and but little of the brightness of life. It was only since she had supported herself, and had met with her fate, in the person of Harold Baxter, the smartest young detective of the Criminal Investigation Department, that her way had become more sunny and pleasant, and that the future broadened out with the glory of inexpressible happiness.

A fairer girl, too, it would have been hard to find. Tall, shapely, and with big dark eyes, that, in the liquid, dumb devotion of them, told of a nature as nearly perfect as it was possible for anything human to be, she gave one the impression of absolute trust and truth.

Harold Baxter had in him all that goes to make a fine man, save one thing—a will of his own.

This was extraordinary, considering his profession, for a detective's duties demand as much as skill, strength of will and purpose. But so it was, Harold Baxter's will was as weak as water. He could not easily say no. Obstinate, as we have seen, he could be on occasion, and it was this trait in his dis-

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position, which, in this present instance, was to bring him perilously near to total life-shipwreck and ruin.

For more than a week, the public mind had been full of the latest criminal sensation, viz.—the theft, by some person or persons unknown, of notes to the value of £60,000, from the Occidental Bank, Lombard Street. The thing had been barefaced, having been effected in the middle of the business day, during the luncheon hour.

Clue to the perpetrator, or perpetrators, there was absolutely none, but it was generally held, when the case was put into the hands of Detective Inspector Baxter, that the chances of clearing up the mystery were increased a hundredfold.

As yet he had nothing of importance to report to headquarters. Then a strange thing happened.

This absurd coincidence is what the thief in the bank note robbery of Parr's Bank actually did.

Going home after her interview with her sweetheart, Ella found that since the morning a new inmate had arrived at the boarding establishment of which she was a member.

When she saw him at table, he proved to be a pretentious young fellow of the cuff-and-collar type, and uninteresting to a degree. He went out in the morning about nine, and returned regularly at six, but what his occupation was, nobody had the slightest idea or conception.

To Ella's great annoyance, the newcomer, almost from the first, persisted in favouring her with his particular attentions. Did she run out in the evening for a shopping expedition, or a breath of fresh air, close in her wake sailed Mr. Francis Iles (the name he had given to the proprietress of the establishment), who, with self-assumed impertinence, pestered her with his unwelcome and vulgar chatter.

On the fourth day after his arrival at the house in Brent Street, she had been compelled to make a stand, and to tell him plainly that she did not in any way desire his acquaintance.

It was in the neighbourhood of Oxford Street that the incident occurred.

"No?" he replied, with an abominable leer and wink. "That's bad—for you; for if you only but knew, I could cover you from head to foot with bank-notes, and still have a big lot over."

The word "bank-notes" sent a curious thrill through the girl. She knew of course of her lover's charge of the Occidental Bank case, and, though the connection seemed remote, and even improbable, she felt that, in some way, as yet unexplained, the man at her side was intimately concerned with the crime, and would be eventually unmasked.

Thinking thus, she suddenly resolved to keep friendly with the braggart, with the dim notion that it would be for the ultimate benefit of the man she loved.

"Mr. Iles," she said, "perhaps I was over hasty, and unreasonable just now; I did not mean to be rude to you, and if I said anything which in any way hurt your feelings, I must ask you to forgive me!"

"There!—I knew you didn't mean it when you said it. Of course I'll forgive you. Why shouldn't I? You're such a nice girl, you know, that a fellow would take a lot from you, and think nothing of it."

It was as much as she could do to keep calm, and to persevere in her policy of deception, the man's coarse familiarity was so utterly distasteful and repugnant to her. She braced herself, however, to suffer his company back to Brent Street, and to listen by the way to talk which did not interest her in the least.

Harold was to meet her the following evening, so that she was both surprised and disappointed at finding on her return a note from him, to the effect that business of the most urgent nature would prevent him from keeping the appointment.

Possibly, she might not have attached so much importance to the circumstance, but for the fact of a strange coincidence.

Mr. Francis Iles also received a letter at the same time as did Ella. That in itself was of no great significance, but when, at breakfast the next morning, the new boarder notified the mistress of the house that he should not be home until the small hours, and perhaps not until the next day, Ella's woman's wit saw a gleam of light through the darkness; felt instinctively that she was on the eve of a great discovery, and, with regard to her lover, a great deliverance.

Still, therefore, keeping up a semblance of smiling ignorance, she resolved to follow her new admirer from the moment he left the house in the evening on his mysterious business.

* * * *

On the northern heights of London, between the top of Haverstock Hill and Cricklewood, there is a mean street, left of the main road, and known as Neville Street.

The houses in it are of the broken-down, seen-better-days order, not by any means small, but, on the contrary, of fair size.

It was towards one of these houses that, about half-past eleven on the night after that upon which Ella had received George Baxter's letter, a man, wearing a long, dark inverness cape, and a broad, soft felt hat, made his way, with a caution that showed he feared recognition.

Within the shadow of a builder's gateway crouched a woman, whose ever low-voiced cry was, "Will he come?—Pray Heaven he does not come!"

As she saw the cape-wrapped figure advancing up the street, her heart almost ceased beating, and, as it passed her, she glided out, and noiselessly followed in its make.

It was only when the man had actually mounted the steps of the house he sought, that Ella Rayne awoke to the vital necessity for arresting his further progress.

To her lips sprang the cry that had been choked down in her heart all through the time of weary watch and waiting.

She had not time to stop him.

"Harold! Harold!" she cried. "Harold! stay, for your own sake, and for mine!"

But the net was spread for the bird; the door was on the jar; and even as his love's despairing appeal broke on the still night air, Harold Baxter passed rapidly in, without so much as hearing the voice of her who would have saved him, and—the door was shut.

For the moment she was the woman only, as she leant, broken in spirit, and weakened of limb and brain, against the railings of number nineteen Neville Street, and she sobbed as though her heart would break.

Then, the power in her nature re-asserted itself, and she began to ask herself, how she should gain entrance into this mysterious conference-house.

She could not gain admittance by the front door, so sought some other and surer way of getting in.

It suddenly occurred to her that perhaps, at the bottom of the builder's yard, there might be access to the end garden walls of the houses on that side of the street.

She had already noticed that one of the yard gates had negligently been left unfastened, so that she was free to pass through to the rear of the place.

Once possessed with the idea, she did not hesitate, but gently pushing open the gate, and as gently closing it behind her, she sped lightly up between the stacks of wood, and other building material, to find that the yard at the bottom turned to the left, running along the end garden walls, right up to the houses in the main road.

It was the selection of the right garden that at first puzzled her; things looked so different from the back, than they did from the street, that she realised the danger of scaling the wrong wall. For this was her aim and intention; though what she would do in the moment of emergency, in the face of some peril, terrible, because unknown, she knew not, and did not stop to think.

At last she decided that the seventh garden from the gate.

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way was the one she was in search of. There was not much difficulty in getting to the top of the wall, a small, light ladder lying near at hand affording the means.

It was then she saw a light in the first-floor back; but the blind was down, so that if she made no noise, there was little fear of her being prematurely discovered.

Silently, but with evident effort, Ella drew up the ladder, and lowered it down the inner side of the wall. Descending she found herself in a tangle of neglected vegetation.

There being no moon, she had to feel her way towards the house, her only visible guide being the illuminated window of the first-floor back.

Across the blind she now saw, more than once, human shadows pass and repass. This but stimulated her to renewed exertions, though as yet she had not formed any definite plan for entering the house.

Presently, she came to a door—it was locked. Then she tried the window of the back kitchen, which to her joy she found unfastened.

Now everything seemed clear and straight before her. Softly slipping up the lower sash, she crept through into the room. A few red embers in the grate gave just sufficient light for her to steer her way to the door without displacing the furniture, and so making a noise.

Out in the passage, and at the foot of the stairs, she made out a faint light at the top of the latter, proving conclusively that the conspirators, if conspirators they were, had, for some reason, the door of the back room open.

What should she do? Had those above heard her movements? But her course was settled for her, and on the instant.

A heavy step moved across the upstairs room, and came out into the passage.

"Who's there?" called a harsh, deep voice.

Hearing no word in reply, the speaker called again, louder, and with greater peremptoriness, and insistence, "Who's there? If you don't answer, I'll come down and shoot you like a dog!"

Trembling in every limb, Ella cowered by the side of the kitchen stairs, her stock of nerve and sustaining power well-nigh exhausted.

Down the stairs came the heavy tread. Had the man turned to the right on reaching the bottom, he must have, of a certainty, discovered the intruder. What he did was to move in the direction of the front area door.

This was Ella's opportunity. Without sound or cry, she darted up the stairs and into the room above, to come face to face with Detective George Baxter, and—Mr. Francis Iles.

On the table was a heap of notes and gold, the ultimate destination of which was only too clear to the horrified girl.

"Ella!"

"Harold! don't hesitate!—I know what you were about to do! But I have been strengthened to save you."

"But Ella! how——?"

"Quick!—I charge you, do your duty—quick!—seize that man and handcuff him! You will then have only one to deal with. Quick!—here he comes!"

The craven Iles was soon under steel, Ella's presence seeming to have an instantaneous effect for good upon her weak-minded, tempted lover.

As the greatest danger of all neared him, he felt himself possessed of a lion's strength.

"Get into that corner, Ella!" he said, with the words flinging there the manacled bank clerk.

It was not a second too soon. The man who now appeared in the doorway, was of gigantic build, and though grizzled, was evidently possessed of enormous muscular powers.

Then began a struggle, which to this day is famous in the annals of the "Yard."

"Jim Riley!" said the detective, watching warily, meanwhile, every movement of his adversary, "drop that revolver and surrender yourself as my prisoner."

With literally a howl of rage and disappointment, the big "crook" rushed at George, trying to bear him down by sheer weight.

But quickness of eye and adroitness count for something in such cases, and the detective succeeded in evading the onslaught.

Then, shaking himself free of his opponent, Riley raised his revolver and fired point blank at him.

That had surely been Harold Baxter's last moment on earth, but for a hand, the hand of a woman, that knocked up the weapon, causing the bullet to find its billet in the ceiling.

Swift as lightning Harold saw his advantage, and taking his enemy on the surprise, felled him to the ground with a chair; stunning him, and rendering him incapable of immediate further mischief.

It was the work of an instant only to clap a set of handcuffs upon the temporarily insensible man.

"Ella! run to the street door, and whistle for the man on the beat. Here, take my call!"

A sleepy policeman soon appeared on the scene, and when he had returned with a four-wheeler, the two prisoners were without further trouble soon on their way to Cricklewood police station.

* * * * *

Next day the papers were full of the marvellously clever capture of the Occidental Bank thief and his accomplice by Detective Inspector Baxter. Not a word, however, was said as to the nearly successful bribing of that officer by the prisoners, or of the leading part played by a certain young girl.

Once and once only did he and she talk about it, and that but briefly.

"How did you guess, dear," said he, "that these scoundrels were trying to bribe me from doing my duty?"

"By a sight which I caught of the letter received by Francis Iles—or rather Pacey, the bank clerk—at the same time I got yours postponing our meeting. He dropped it when he left the table, and—and I saw that——"

"What an opinion you must have had of me, Ella!"

"Never mind, now, dear," she said, tenderly, "we will forget it."

"I'm afraid," said Harold, as he held her face between his hands and looked down into her eyes, "I am not worthy of all you went through, dear, for me."

"Will you believe me," she answered him, "when I say that I would do it again, and yet again, with the same object—to save you."

"Ella! you are an angel!—and I——"

"You!—you are just the man to whom, through the future, the angel looks for all the happiness an angel can reasonably expect on earth."

Ralph Enderby.

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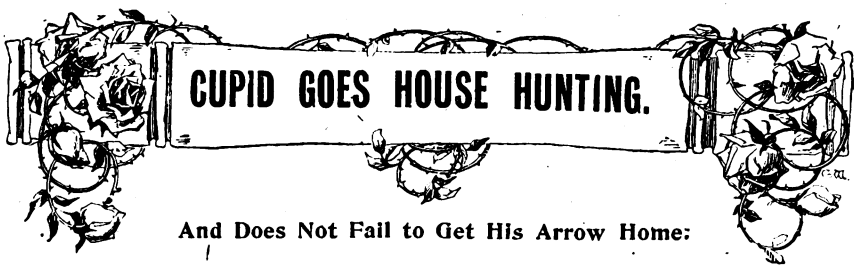

CUPID GOES HOUSE HUNTING.

And Does Not Fail to Get His Arrow Home.

"Just when I'm looking my best," declared Florence Donaldson, "there's nowhere to go and no one to see me!"

Her sister-in-law laughed amusedly at this fearless avowal. "One of the cruel fatalities of feminine existence," she observed.

Florence, dressed in her new spring dress, had just run across from the flat opposite to see if she could not inveigle her relative into an afternoon's outing. Young Mrs. Donaldson, however, was too absorbed in the making of a dainty blouse to be lured from the sewing machine.

Flushed and bright-eyed, she was working with an ardour that brooked no interruption.

"Fred wagered that I wouldn't have this finished when he came home to-night, and I'm determined I shall," she informed Florence, pausing just long enough for a swift smile and glance.

"Oh, these young wives!" sighed the girl. "I wonder if I'll ever be so crazy for my husband's approval that I'll stay cooped up indoors on such a radiantly beautiful day as this?"

"Of course you will, Florrie—and you'll take delight in it, too. Love transforms labour, you know."

"So I've heard," remarked Florence, with a grimace; "but that doesn't alter the fact that there's nowhere for me to go this afternoon." She cast a look of mingled vanity and bitterness upon her jaunty self as reflected in the mirror.

"I'm really sorry, dear," murmured the sister-in-law. Then, glancing up suddenly, she beheld Florence fully for the first time.

"Why, you do look lovely, Florrie, I declare! I believe I never saw you look so charming."

The girl made a mock obeisance. "Thank you, Mistress Mabel. I've succeeded at last in wringing a compliment from you. Now, perhaps, you can sympathise." She turned disgustedly from the mirror. "If," she pursued, scornfully, "it happened to be one of my off days, when my hair wouldn't wave, my belt refused to dip and my collars choked me, and if I had decided for once to be miserable and had thrown on the easiest, and consequently the ugliest, dress I could find, every friend I possessed would be dropping in to see me, begging me to go for a drive, or a call, or a pleasure trip of some sort."

"That's usually the case," laughed Mrs. Fred Donaldson. Then she seemed to recollect something. "I declare, Florrie, if you are really anxious for an outing, I can suggest one. Oh, if you just could go it would be such a help. Do you suppose——"

"Let's hear about it," encouraged Florence.

"Well, would you care to combine a business and pleasure trip, and at the same time do me a great favour?"

"Delighted," answered the girl. But her tone was neutral. She would await particulars.

"The matter really ought to be attended to this afternoon. I was going to try somehow to make time for it at the last moment, but you see how impossible that will be."

"Well?"

"You know, Fred and I have been looking up a house for the summer——"

"Oh, for pity's sake!"

"Thank you, my dear, for your readiness to help me."

"I beg your pardon, Mabel. But of all things—house hunting! It's the last thing I imagined."

"I suppose so—but, listen, Florrie. There's only one house to go to—it belongs to one of the university professors. I've already corresponded with him about it, and he is anxious for me to come out and have a look at it. You will be able to tell whether it will suit or not."

"I thought," remarked the girl, "that you said the trip would combine business and pleasure?"

"Now, Florrie, how unkind! Won't it be a pleasure to meet the genial professor?"

"Well, that depends. Is he old or young?"

"Oh, you incorrigible! He's a settled man with a family. They're all going away for the summer, and he wants to let the house for that period. I imagine from the tone of his letters that he is a most amiable gentleman."

Florence meditatively adjusted her hat. It was pretty and creamy, and it had pink roses under the brim.

"If I thought," she mused, "that there was any possibility of there being a nice grown up son in the family——"

"Florence Donaldson, aren't you ashamed! Do take a sensible interest in the matter, for my sake at least. I really wish you would go out and see what the house is like. Of course, if the chief requisites are lacking, we won't consider it. However, I imagine it is just what we want. You know Fred and I are expecting our various relatives to visit us this summer, and we will need a roomy place. The situation is ideal—out near the park, you know, and——"

"Oh, I'll go," laughed Florence, good-naturedly. "Of course I'll go, sister, dear, if you feel that you can trust my judgment. But you must be sure to enumerate all the 'chief requisites' before I go, and not recollect them afterwards."

"Well, there should be a nice lawn—you know how Fred glories in a lawn—and, let me see now—there are three or four other very important items. Sit down while I think."

Florence obeyed. She listened patiently while Mrs. Donaldson recounted the necessary requirements. The "three or four" important points had developed into at least twenty before the interview was ended.

Florence was smiling when she started out on her mission. It was not just the sort of adventure her buoyant spirits craved, but it was at least diverting.

"Shady trees," she repeated to herself, "large verandah, roomy kitchen, gas range, sunny bedrooms," and so on.

She had it all well fixed in her mind when she reached Selborne Street and turned east.

"Yes, the situation was most desirable." So thought Florence when she walked along the pretty avenue, with its rows of comfortable dwellings and its borders of well-kept lawns. All about her was the radiant freshness of awakening summer. The trees had that joyous look which the bursting of new leafage brings, and the grass glowed with the emerald brightness of young and springing green.

Young Mrs. Donaldson's surmise as to the professor's amiability proved correct. He was certainly a genial man. But he was also extremely hard of hearing, so that, in spite of his affability and the charming way in which he made Florence feel at home, there was the immediate drawback of an imperfect understanding between them.

This began when Florence introduced herself, mentioning the fact that there had already been some correspondence concerning the house.

"Ah, certainly, Mrs. Donaldson—I remember quite well. Indeed, I hoped you would come to-day, for there have been other parties looking at the place, and I wanted you to see it before I considered any other proposition."

"I intended to come earlier in the day—that is, my sister did, but she was too busy. It was she who wrote the letters. I am Miss Donaldson."

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"Eh? Oh, yes, yes—so I understood. You and your husband——"

Florence raised her voice. "My brother and my sister," she corrected him, "are the ones who wish to take the house. I came in my sister's stead, as she was too busy. She wished——"

"Eh? Brother and sister coming? Yes, I remember—the letter mentioned that there would be relatives to visit you, and that you desired sufficient room. Well, the house looks big enough, doesn't it? Come and I'll show you through. Mrs. Powell and the girls are out, or they would be glad to assist. However, I think I am well enough acquainted with my own domicile to explain its various merits. Just a word, Mrs. Donaldson, before we go any further. Since writing you something has occurred which makes our plan of leaving for the summer not quite so definite as it was. There will be some uncertainty for at least three or four days. Then I can let you know. Meanwhile, you might as well see the place."

Rather than struggle further to correct his mistaken impression of her identity, Florence let the matter drop. There was no use being particular about it, especially as the affair was so uncertain. There was time enough for him to discover his error when circumstances should make it necessary.

So she followed him through the rooms, taking mental note of the important features and smilingly answering to the name of Mrs. Donaldson. She herself talked very little, for she felt disinclined to exert herself sufficiently to make him understand her.

"And now you must see our back garden. Pardon me if I say it, but it's the pride of the family. We flatter ourselves that the rear of our home is quite as attractive as the front."

They passed from the dining-room upon a broad, shaded verandah. A beautifully kept lawn stretched before them. Adjoining it was a tennis court, where two young men were at play.

Florence had so completely forgotten her jest regarding a possible grown-up son that she was genuinely taken by surprise when Professor Powell exclaimed: "Ah, there's my boy Will at the game again. Pretty good player, eh? That Ellis fellow's a good one, too. They're both fiends when it comes to outdoor sports."

Florence judged as much from the appearance of both young men. They were well tanned and muscular. The taller of the two had a really handsome face, but Florence liked the other countenance better. There was something decidedly winning in its expression, and the eyes were clear and direct in their glance. She noticed that young Powell looked more than once towards the verandah where she stood with his father.

The girl expressed herself as delighted with the grounds. "I'm sure my sister will be pleased," she assured the Professor. Of course he did not catch the real significance of her remark, and she felt the same hopelessness in regard to enlightening him.

Indoors once more, Professor Powell had a sudden recollection.

"I declare! The Seymours are going away for the summer. There's no uncertainty about that. Suppose you go over and look at their place? They wish to let it furnished, the same as we do. I think it would be wise, for in case we don't go, you might be able to arrange with them. Come to the window, I'll show you the house."

The sound of a screen door closing rather noisily in the next room caused both to turn. A glimpse of tennis flannels was visible in the shaded dining-room.

"Hallo, Will—is that you?"

"It is," answered a masculine voice that tried not to seem embarrassed.

"Will, will you show this young lady where the Seymours' house is? She came to see about our place, you know, and——"

Young Powell needed no urging. He emerged very readily from the dining-room.

"It seems to me that you left that game rather suddenly," observed his father, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "But the joke is on you, young man, for it's Mrs.—and not Miss, as you no doubt imagined it would be."

Florence felt the stirring of her feminine vanity as she saw the unmistakable disappointment in the young man's face.

"My son, Will—Mrs. Donaldson."

Oh, that wretched blunder? But how was she to explain it now? The professor would think it strange that she had allowed him to go so far uncorrected. It was too late, evidently, for such an explanation. Further words would only complicate matters.

On the way to the Seymours', young Powell was very attentive. When a young woman has dancing brown eyes and wears a hat with pink roses under the brim it is difficult for a young man to act otherwise, even when he is aware that she prefixes Mrs. to her name.

The Seymour residence was fully as attractive as the Powells'. Florence was sure it would prove satisfactory, in case the latter family decided to remain in town.

"And now," said young Powell, as they retraced their steps, "we've got things ready for any emergency. You and your husband——"

Florence could stand it no longer.

"Oh, don't please!" she burst forth. "I haven't any husband!" And then she explained it all to the amazed young fellow.

He laughed with her over the ridiculous mistake. His laugh sounded particularly light-hearted.

"I've taken you so far out of your way," he apologised; "we're a long distance from the station. It is much nearer now to go across to Cottage Grove avenue. The walk will be pleasant. If you don't object, I'll accompany you."

Florence did not object.

"You live with your sister?" he inquired, as he swung along by her side.

"No; but I'm in the same building. We live in a flat."

"You—you see her often then, don't you?"

"Y—yes; I presume so."

"I hope father will stay in town. People are foolish to leave this pretty place for the summer. I tell you, it's all bosh, this rushing off to out-of-the-way places where one doesn't find the conveniences and pleasures that he could enjoy at home. Think of the parks, and the drives."

Florence agreed with him. Never before had anyone presented the matter to her quite so convincingly.

The walk seemed a very brief one, after all. Will Powell could not but remark it.

"We'll let you know in two or three days about our decision," he told Florence as they stood waiting for her car. "I hope your sister will like the Seymour place."

Then, as he put her on the car: "Good-bye, I'm glad I met you. And, do you know, I'm awfully glad you're not—Mrs. Donaldson.

Florence could not be angry with him, somehow. She tried to frown, but the attempt broke up into a merry laugh.

Will Powell had his wish. The professor decided to remain and Mrs. Donaldson—the real Mrs. Donaldson—was delighted with the Seymour residence.

Young Powell called personally to make known his father's decision. And he managed to see Florence, although his business was with her sister-in-law.

"What in the world did he talk about all that time?" inquired the latter suspiciously, when at last he had gone.

"Oh, lots of things—tennis, and golf, and outdoor sports. I shall take them up this summer, Mabel. You know it is just what I need."

Mrs. Fred Donaldson smiled knowingly. "There's nothing like having an incentive," she observed. And Florence blushed.

Angela Morgan.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

THE RETURN OF PETTIGREW.

THE STORY STARTS HERE.

I arrive in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, whom I have not seen since we were together at school, and discover that my cousin is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by my cousin.

A few weeks later, my cousin, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it.

We next move into a house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to Frankie, and is refused.

Frankie is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation.

The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Frankie leaves the room; but I stay, and, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope, overhear Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Frankie is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. I tell Frankie what I have overheard.

On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Frankie that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. My cousin asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We now all go to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, entices me to bet heavily, by which I lose £800. Frankie has also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevails upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin comes face to face with a man from Jamaica who knows all about her past life. Percival Hope has brought him in. It is a critical moment, but once again Frankie scores. She persuades me, much against my will, to engage Hope's attention by making love to him, while she herself purchases the Jamaica man's silence. He agrees to be silent for the sum of £1,000 to be paid before noon on the following day. I have to go to Fluffy's chambers to get the money. It is past midnight, and while negotiating with Fluffy, Percival Hope bursts into the room. Fluffy saves the situation by telling him that I have come to get money to pay my debts, whereupon Hope immediately forwards me £1,000.

The next day marks the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. He and Kinross arrive with Casellis at Pont Street, and Casellis is asked to say what he knows of Frankie's dark past, but, instead of disclosing any unpleasant facts, he swears that she is a perfectly innocent woman.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.
The Return of Pettigrew.

For a moment the half-caste faced Percival's steady look unmoved, his dark eyes, flashing with passion, fearlessly met the challenge in that steel cold concentrated gaze, but—it was only for one short, silent moment.

The next, he had collapsed. He was once more a cringing, servile specimen of yellow-skinned humanity, bowing before the storm of execration, threats and menaces that broke over his head.

He attempted no excuse, offered no explanation for his conduct. He had sworn falsely, and if needs be, must suffer for so swearing.

"His object in making such infamous charges?" This last from Kinross.

"He had none," with a shrug. "Men were evil sometimes—in Jamacia, at all events—without an object."

"Let him go," said Frankie, "I don't blame *him*, he was only the tool of another and more unscrupulous man." She pointed the remark with a contemptuous glance at Percival, without, however, at all disturbing that inflexible person.

After his first outbreak against Casellis he remained quite calm. From playing a prominent part in the proceedings he relapsed for the time being into a spectator. He made no demur when Kinross insisted that Casellis should sign a confession of false witness, and smiled in an easy fashion when the half-caste declared he had been bribed to speak.

Cool and impassive, Percival waited till the confession was duly signed, and the door closed behind the man from Jamaica. Then with a terrible persistence he returned to the charge.

"My first witness has broken down," he remarked. "I will call the next."

Kinross quickly interposed.

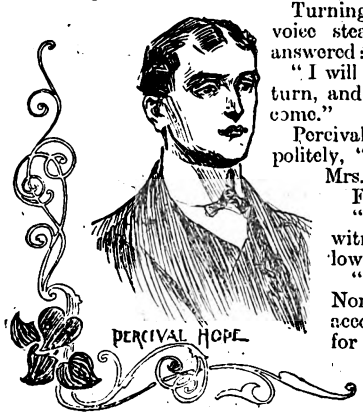
"No more, thank you," he said angrily. "I don't propose to subject Mrs. Norton to further insults."

"It is not for you to decide whether we shall go further into the matter this afternoon," said Percival. "I have three points against Mrs. Norton. One only has been raised. It remains for her to say whether the other two shall be heard now or later."

He spoke without a tinge of temper or bitterness. He might have been a judge, I thought, or a state executioner.

Frankie could not restrain a nervous shiver as she listened. He was so strong, so implacable, untouched by her charms, indifferent to her beauty, superior to all her arts—ruthless and indomitable as Fate.

From him she glanced to Kinross with a touch of appeal. There was no reassurance in his Lordship's face. He was indignant for her and against Hope, but behind the indignation the old doubt, the old suspicion rankled still. She must go through the ordeal to the end.



Turning to Percival, in a voice steady as his own, she answered:

"I will hear your witnesses in turn, and confute them as they come."

Percival bowed and asked politely, "if he might ring for Mrs. Norton's maid."

Frankie smiled sweetly.

"Certainly—are all your witnesses culled from the lower classes, Mr. Hope?"

"By no means, Mrs. Norton. I have taken account of your predilection for the aristocracy."

With an exclamation Kinross started to his feet.

"This is *too* much!" he cried, glaring at Percival.

Frankie leant forward, clutching his arm.

"Bear with him patiently a little longer," she said quietly, "for *my* sake." She still held his arm as though fearful of his powers of self-restraint. Kinross flushed, faltered, and finally sat down.

Ella Martin entered the room in a tearful and terrified manner. Much confused, she glanced from Percival to Frankie, twisting her apron in many and divers shapes,

"Listen attentively, please," said Percival, "and answer my questions slowly and carefully."

The girl trembled and remained quiet only with an effort.

"You told me last week that you had reason to suspect a certain person of stealing the photograph of Miss Vernon's diamonds from your box?"

"I did, sir."

"Who is the person you suspect?"

"My mistress, Mrs. Norton. Please, Mr. Hope——"

He stopped her with an imperative gesture.

"Don't interrupt! You can say anything you wish later. You told me, I think, that the day after you showed Mrs. Norton the print you missed it from your box, and that you afterwards saw it——"

"Oh, Mr. Hope, I *must* speak. I—I—" she paused, red and white by turns. "It's quite true," she went on with a gasp, "I said all that, and I believed it every word, but——"

Percival Hope remorselessly cut her short.

"Since then you have discovered how kind and generous a mistress Mrs. Norton can be?" he sneered.

"I have discovered something else besides," said Ella, with spirit. "I have found the missing print," and she held up the photograph of Mary Vernon's jewels.

"I found it in my box this morning, not an hour ago. It had got pushed among a packet of letters, and in going through them I discovered it."

"Most satisfactory and extremely interesting," sneered Percival. "Was there any special reason for searching your box this morning?"

"I am leaving Mrs. Norton to-morrow, sir. I am going to be married."

Percival smiled.

"That explains many things," said he. Then, with a sudden change of manner, he turned to Frankie.

"Can you explain *this*?" he asked abruptly. "This letter from Messrs. Newland, the jewellers in Oxford Street? Listen—and, if you can, explain.

"'We are in receipt of your letter and photograph of earrings, but regret we are unable to execute a replica of same in paste. Please find print duly inclosed.'

"Well," he jeered, "can you answer that?"

"The letter was never sent to me," said Frankie firmly.

Percival flashed a look at Ella.

"You found this letter?" he demanded.

"Yes——"

"In Mrs. Norton's room at Lady Winchin's, some few days after you missed the print?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fairly conclusive evidence, I think, Mrs. Norton."

"That the letter was found in my room, or to be exact, in my desk, yes, but not that it was addressed to me. Look"—she pointed to the sheet of paper, "a piece has been torn off the bottom. The name and address of the person to whom the firm were writing is missing. When you took this letter from my desk to sell to Mr. Hope"—she turned quickly to Ella—"what name was written there?"

Her attitude was full of menace, and her voice cut like a knife. But the girl made no haste to answer, while she grew whiter and whiter, and her lips seemed unwilling to shape the words.

"Miss Mary Vernon," she said hoarsely, "that was the name."

"It is not true," cried Percival, roused at last. "Upon my soul, I swear it is not true."

"It is your witness, not mine, who speaks," returned Frankie. "If you challenge a part, you must challenge all

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she says. Would you like to know how and why I came to take charge of the letter—*Mary's* letter—or have you heard enough?"

It was some moments before Percival replied. He was very pale, and had, I think, hard work to master himself. When at last he spoke it was in his usual quiet tones—

"For the present 'yes.' For the future——"

Frankie passionately interrupted him.

"I shall never again refer to Mary's connection with the matter," she said indignantly, "and if at any time you state what has been disclosed concerning her, this afternoon, I shall declare such statement to be a malicious invention on your part. If I can help it neither you nor anyone shall breathe a word against her—I have your promise?"—she turned to Kinross—"to be silent?"

"Not a word shall pass my lips," he answered gravely.

"Then"—she faced Percival with superb assurance—"I can defy you, Mr. Hope. Mary's reputation is not likely to suffer from your unsupported testimony."

My cousin's challenge passed unnoticed. Percival, eyeing her steadily, held his peace. But he pocketed the letter from Messrs. Newlands.

Ella's dismissal in a flood of tears was hastened by a sharp ring and a thundering knock at the front door.

"For me—I think," said Percival, colouring slightly.

A moment later and there entered, unannounced and in great haste, Hiram Pettigrew!

His greetings were general and effusive.

"My dear Mrs. Norton, this *is* a pleasure. Percival, my boy, how are you? I came up this morning from Southampton, drove to your rooms, and found your note requesting me to come here straight away. Miss Cynthia, you're looking blooming. Fit as ever Kinross? That's right, I'm glad to see you all."

At this moment Lord Chesterton made his appearance. He listened to the millionaire's oration, then made his way quietly to Frankie.

"I got Hope's note," he said, "and came along at once. What's up?"

"Mr. Hope's giving a surprise party, I should say," laughed Frankie. "I didn't know you or Mr. Pettigrew were coming, Lord Chesterton, though of course I'm charmed to see you both."

"It's about that pocket-book of mine," said Hiram, shaking hands. "I gather that Percival has got hold of a clue to some of the contents. He rather thinks you can help him."

Percival nodded. "Yes," he said, "Chesterton can be of great help. I should perhaps apologise for conducting investigations here, but as Mrs. Norton was present when the robbery took place, I thought she might like to assist at the recovery of some of the stolen porperty."

"Charmed," murmured Frankie, with a self-possession equal to his own. "Most thoughtful of you."

Chesterton looked puzzled and a little annoyed. He scented a disturbance in the social atmosphere, and resented his inclusion therein. Of all things he disliked "a scene."

"I have unfortunately been unable to trace the majority of the missing notes," continued Percival. "Those that have reached the Bank of England have been presented by apparently respectable people, who were able to account for their possession in a legitimate manner. The notes would appear to have been taken to the continent and there distributed. Some few, however, changed hands on a race-course. Of these I have been able to trace two—each for £500."

He glanced sharply at Frankie, but she never moved a muscle.

"The notes were paid in by a bookmaker in a large way of business. He informs me that to the best of his recollection he received them, with others, from Lord Chesterton in settlement of bets on the Derby. You would assist me greatly Chesterton if you could recall how those particular notes came into your hands?"

Chesterton smiled in a large, tolerant fashion.

"Same way as most notes—from my bank, I suppose," he said.

"Pardon me, most distinctly *not* from your bank. No concern could or would pay over to a client a note stopped by the Bank of England."

"Then," said Chesterton carelessly, "I'm afraid I can't help you. I've a terrible memory."

"Let me assist it. The bookmaker tells me you paid these notes on behalf of a lady. Possibly the lady herself gave them to you?"

"Possibly," returned Chesterton, unmoved.

Percival began to grow impatient.

"I am determined to thrash this matter out," he said. "If you will not give up the information privately, you will have to do so in public."

"No power on earth can make me say anything I do not choose," replied Chesterton.

"I admire your chivalry. Believe me it is misplaced. The lady will not thank you for your reticence. She does not court publicity."

Hope spoke with a determination that frightened me. I did not understand why he wished to find out the name of the woman whose bets Chesterton had paid, and I could see no possible connection between the notes handed to his lordship and those stolen from Pettigrew's pocket-book. It was no business of Percival's, and yet——

Chesterton's eyes met mine in a steady and scrutinising fashion. I don't know what he read in them, alarm or perhaps appeal.

"Look here, Hope," he said, "you're going too far. Take my advice, keep the lady out of the question." There was the suggestion of a threat in his voice, but Percival, an ugly look on his face, sneered in reply.

"Thanks, I don't stand in need of your advice. I want something of more value—the truth. You paid that money to Bell on behalf of Mrs. Norton, from whom you got the notes. Deny it if you dare?"

"I do. Mrs. Norton did *not* hand me the notes."

"Who then?" asked Percival, jeering in open disbelief.

For a moment there was silence, to me an awful silence. Then with a great fear at my heart, I forced myself to speak.

"I gave Lord Chesterton the notes. He paid them to Bell for me a day or two ago."

"*You!*" cried Percival, dismay and horror depicted on his face. Then pulling himself together he laid his hand on Pettigrew's shoulder.

"Ask her," he said. "I can't."

Chesterton, who had made his way over to my side, smiled reassuringly.

"Good little girl," he said softly. "Don't be afraid. Buck up and tell the truth. Where did you get the notes from, Cynthia?"· said Hiram. "Did—did your cousin give them to you?"

In a flash I understood what it all meant. Percival was trying to prove that Frankie was a thief. *Frankie*, when all the time——

"My cousin," I said in a loud voice, "No, it was *you*," and I pointed straight at Percival, "you bought my shares the night I was at Fluffy's for £1,000. You gave me two bank notes each for £500. Those same notes I handed to Lord Chesterton."

There was an instant and an indescribable confusion.

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Every one seemed to talk at once. Frankie, I remember, laughed at Hope in an insolent and triumphant manner, and Kinross glared at him defiantly.

Pettigrew's voice hushed the others into silence.

"What did you do with the notes when you came home, Miss Cynthia?" he asked.

"I asked Frankie to take care of them, but she refused. She told me not to let them out of my sight. I had the notes under the mattress that night, and carried them about with me next day, until I gave them to Lord Chesterton."

"Did you look at the numbers of the notes?"

I shook my head.

"No, I only saw they were for £500."

"Perhaps somebody came in your room during the night, and—and interfered with the notes," broke in Percival. "Did you hear anybody?"

The recollection of that fancied step outside my door, the gliding figure at my bedside returned to me. What if they had not been fancy after all? I hesitated. Percival eagerly noting the pause, urged me again.

"Think," he said, "for Heaven's sake think. Don't you understand?" He came quite close to me in his agitation. "The pocket-book—you found it under your chair. These notes were in it—these notes——"

"You gave them me," I cried. "You gave them me."

Percival shook his head.

"They are not the same," he said. "I entered the numbers of the notes I handed you, here in my pocket-book. They do not correspond with those you gave Lord Chesterton."

"Then, then," I said bewildered, "oh, you don't think I stole the notes, you can't think that? I never touched the pocket-book, I never saw—" I broke off in dismay. The green and silver book that I had found hidden in my box rose up before me. I was speechless.

Once again Pettigrew intervened.

"Have you any reason to suppose that the notes were tampered with during the night?" he asked.

I shook my head. I could not tell this keen-faced man of figures that had resolved themselves into window curtains, steps that had proved themselves a dream.

"When did you enter the number of the notes you paid my cousin, Mr. Hope?" asked Frankie. "At the time, or the next day?"

He seemed positively pleased at the question.

"The next day," he said.

"You might perhaps have remembered incorrectly."

He passed over the sneer and answered gravely: "Perhaps."

"It seems to me," said Kinross, "that there's a mystery in connection with the notes, and the sooner we recognise it as such the better—eh, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"Certainly," said the millionaire. He smiled very kindly at me, patting my shoulder.

I did not dare lift my eyes, but stood the picture of guilt before them all.

"I propose a vote of confidence in Cynthia," continued Kinross, laughing.

"I second that," said Chesterton.

They all said nice things to me, but there was a sense of constraint about them all the same. Pettigrew left soon after, and Chesterton accompanied him.

Percival turned deliberately to Kinross.

"Are you coming?" he said slowly.

For a moment Kinross hesitated. He knew all that the question meant. He had signified his intention of proposing to Frankie should she come scatheless through the afternoon's ordeal. She had done so, had vindicated herself and her position. Why then should he pause? By all the laws of honour his place was there beside her, beside the woman who had gone through so terrible an hour to win his love.

Frankie drew a hard, deep breath. The suspense seemed more than she could bear.

Kinross turned, and, with his usual grace, lifted her hand.

"I am staying, Percival," he answered, "always!"

"I congratulate you—both!" was the quiet reply.

And then the door closed behind him. Frankie had won.

I followed close on Percival, leaving my cousin and Lord Kinross to themselves.

I met Lady Gaveston on the stairs just returned from the Flower Show. She had captured a bargain in the way of pelargoniums, and was eager to show off her purchase. She dragged me to her room in triumph, and I had to listen to a long and rambling account of the warfare that had raged between her and a "painted creature" relative to their price.

"That reminds me," her Ladyship fixed me with her glasses, "I met young Ffolliott this afternoon. He had taken far more strong drink than is good for any Christian. I testified to him upon the evils of intemperance, I trust with good results. I can't think what's come to him, he used to be a decent laddie. Can you imagine, Cynthia, he spoke this afternoon of marrying your cousin? I could have boxed his ears. Such impudence! A child like that without a penny! Frances must be careful, gossip so soon gets spread! She must stop the boy."

I nodded, and, making an excuse of fetching water for the pelargoniums, escaped from the room.

My head was splitting, I felt unutterably humiliated and disgraced by all I had gone through, and milady's news of Toby came as a fresh blow.

My mind for the moment was more full of Toby's worries than my own.

The affair of the notes seemed too hopeless a mystery ever to be fathomed. In despair of finding a solution I turned to other things, but all the time, like the strain of some haunting melody, the memory of those midnight footsteps coming and going at my door came back to me.

I felt no surprise at meeting Toby in the hall, and milady's words had more or less prepared me as to the condition he was in.

The boy was very excited and extremely obstinate. He declared he would not leave the house without seeing Frankie. He was engaged to her, going to marry her, had every right to see and speak to her.

"Every right!" he repeated, holding tight to the dining-room door.

I felt infinitely distressed and ashamed for him. At any moment Kinross or Frankie might emerge from the drawing-room. I trembled to think of what might follow.

"You can't see Frankie now," I urged. "Come later, there's a good boy!"

No; he would stay and wait till she was disengaged.

It was no good to argue with him, the chances were that further opposition would result in an unpleasant scene.

"Will you be quiet if I let you wait? Promise me you will stay in the morning-room till I fetch you?"

He promised, and I pioneered him safely to Frankie's cosy nest.

"Not here!" he said abruptly. "No, I can't stay here. I'll wait in the dining-room if you like, though I don't see why she can't come to me now."

I looked at him reproachfully. He flushed and moodily retraced his steps.

Finally he retired into the dining-room and collapsed into a large arm-chair.

I shut the door carefully, conscious of having overcome a great danger—if not to me to my cousin. Somehow, I felt myself more than ever identified with Frankie.

I wished Lord Kinross would go, that I might learn the result of the all-important interview. He must, I thought, have proposed, and she of course would accept him. Surely her success was assured, nothing stood in her way save Toby.

Close on the thought came a knock at the door. A minute later I heard a man's voice in the hall—a voice that sent all the castles I had built for Frankie toppling to the ground.

It was Sir John! In a flash I remembered that the fortnight was over, the fate of the mine was sealed. He had come for Frankie's answer.

What would that answer be?

[*Frankie's answer, among other things, is recorded in next Tuesday's issue.*]

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A Case of Exchange.

Telling of a Red Sunshade, a Bull, and a Picture.

"THIS," said David Musgrave, R.A., as he sat, his battered straw hat cocked over his nose, and the smoke curling up in blue spirals from his pipe—"this is what one may call real enjoyment, with nobody to know one and come bothering round."

He was sitting just where the uplands slope away from the plantation—sketching. Presently, with a few last finishing strokes, he closed his book, and raising his eyes, looked about him.

A girl was approaching across the green slope of the meadow, a dainty figure in white, with a red sunshade upon her shoulder.

As he watched her, thinking how well the note of colour told against the green background, he saw her suddenly pause to look behind her, and then come flying towards him, dropping the sunshade as she ran. She was close upon him when she tripped and fell, and looking beyond her David Musgrave became aware of a great black bull that had checked its furious career to gore and worry the red sunshade.

Without hesitation, therefore, he leapt forward, and catching up the girl in his arms, fairly ran with her towards the gate, nor did he stop until they were safe on the other side, and looking back saw the bull stroll complacently off with the wreck of the red sunshade upon his horns.

David Musgrave turned to where the girl stood trembling beside him, and laughed reassuringly.

"Rather lucky for us that he stayed to pay his respects to your sunshade."

His companion was silent for a moment, and then stretched out her hand to him.

"Oh, thank you," she said earnestly, "thank you more than I can ever say. I don't know how I came to fall, but I was so frightened I thought I should have died when I heard him thundering behind me. He is a prize bull, you know," she continued, "they usually keep him tied up, he is so dreadfully fierce."

As they walked Musgrave had leisure to note the masses of sunny hair that had escaped their fastenings, the big grey eyes that peeped at him beneath dark lashes, and the lithe activity of the graceful, girlish figure.

"Don't you think we might sit down for a little while?" he said, seeing how her hands still trembled. "You see," he continued, "I feel quite—er—quivery, don't you know!"

"You hardly look it," she said with a smile, her eyes upon his bronzed face, "but still, as you say so, and as I most certainly am, why——" As she spoke she sank down at the foot of a tree and rested her back against the bole.

"Do you know," pursued Mr. David Musgrave, seating himself beside her with a matter of fact sort of air, "that really and truly I have a kind of affection for that bull?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand!" she said with a note of indignation in her voice.

"Well, you see," he explained, "if it had not been for him I should not be sitting here with you, for which alone I shall owe him the gratitude of a lifetime!"

"Then your gratitude is easily earned."

"I don't know," he demurred, "if you knew how fearfully—er—lonely—yes, lonely I felt sitting there all by myself."

"You are a stranger to this part of the country?" she asked after a pause.

"Yes!"

"And an artist?"

"Yes," he repeated, "that is, I paint things, you know, and that reminds me, I should like to paint you."

She glanced away across the meadows, all golden with the afternoon sunshine.

"Father collects pictures," she said irrelevantly, "he has a lot of David Musgrave's."

"Really!" said her companion.

"Yes, and he's awfully proud of them," she continued, "though I can never understand why, because I think Musgrave's pictures are awful things, so—so—splashy—don't you?"

"Well—no," he replied, "to be perfectly candid with you, I rather like them—splashes and all."

"Oh, I suppose he's clever enough," she admitted.

"Undoubtedly!" said Mr. David Musgrave.

"Still, I don't like his work one bit. 'Impressionism' doesn't appeal to me."

"I'm rather sorry for that, you know," he said, with covert smile.

"Why?"

"Oh, well, you see, I paint rather like him—in a way."

She flushed suddenly.

"But you—you are not—who are you?" she demanded.

"Brown is my name," he replied mendaciously, "and," he added, stretching out a sunburnt hand and wrist, "brown is my nature."

For a moment she doubted, until seeing how calmly his glance met hers, her fears were allayed, and rising presently they strolled on together over the golden meadows.

"I was rather afraid I had 'put my foot into it' just now," she said at length, pausing beside a creeper-covered gate.

"Which after all wouldn't have been a very serious matter—it isn't so *very* large, you know," he replied, glancing down at the little tan shoe, which immediately hid itself. "No," he continued, "my name is Brown, and I want to paint you."

"And mine," she said, "is Gwendoline Bladon, and—and—if you want to, so very much——"

"When?" he asked quickly as she paused, "and where?"

"Oh!" she answered lightly, "that is for Chance and the Fates to decide," and with an airy wave of the hand she turned and was gone up the path.

"Fresh as the morning," he said to himself as he walked slowly back to the inn where he had taken rooms under the name of "Brown"—"with wonderful eyes and glorious hair, most certainly I must paint her!"

Thus it was he haunted the lanes all next day—but without success.

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However, on the third day, chancing to pass the paddock-gate, he spied her in the orchard beyond, and paying small heed to the notice warning off trespassers, approached her, unheard upon the grass. She was sitting in a low chair beneath a great, gnarled old apple tree, reading. Upon her head was a big white sunbonnet that was pushed back so that he could see the red glory of her hair.

He paused a moment with an eye only for the delicate colouring and wonderful harmony of the tints.

"Just the thing," he said to himself, "if I only had a canvas here!" Then he stepped forward and lifted his hat.

"Good morning, Miss Bladon," he said.

The girl started and looked up.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Brown!" she replied, "How you startled me, and what are you doing here, of all places?"

"Chance and the Fates have sent me to claim your promise."

"But"—she hesitated—"in this old sunbonnet?" and she made a gesture as if to remove it.

"No—no!" he cried, laying a restraining hand upon her arm—"it is just perfect—just as I want you."

"But supposing anyone sees us—what will they think?"

"Pooh!" he answered, "just let them think what they like—only promise to sit and wait until I fetch a canvas and things, and I'll begin at once—now promise!"

Gwendoline promised, whereupon without more ado he turned and fairly ran back to the village in his eagerness.

In less than a quarter of an hour he was back again, yet as he laid his hand upon the gate he paused, for a tall young fellow clad in immaculate flannels was lounging upon the grass beside the low chair.

Mr. David Musgrave seldom let anything interfere with him, thus it was that his pause was but momentary. The next he had opened the gate and approached them, an easel and canvas under one arm, and a much-battered paint-box beneath the other.

"I'm very sorry, but I—I really can't come," she was saying.

"But you promised to come to the regatta," returned her companion, "and besides"—here he paused as his eyes encountered the figure of David Musgrave.

The girl's cheeks flushed as the two men exchanged glances, and she rose.

"Let me introduce you," she said—

"Mr. Brown—Mr. Wilson."

"Delighted!" said Musgrave, R.A. alias Brown—"lovely weather we're having!"

The tall young fellow bowed stiffly without answering, while Musgrave ran on pleasantly about the crops—the long-continued drought, and the possibility of rain, busying himself the while upon settling his easel.

"What does all this mean?" asked Mr. Wilson at length, looking from the severe face of the artist to the flushed cheeks of the girl.

"I told you I was going to have my portrait painted," she replied, with a note of hesitation in her voice.

"Which was perfectly true," said Musgrave, unstrapping his stool.

"But you promised to let me row you to the regatta?" continued Mr. Wilson, paying no heed to the last remark.

"My dear sir," put in Musgrave again, squeezing some rose-madder upon his palette, "if I may answer for Miss Bladon, I should say—with pleasure—upon some other occasion!"

The tall young fellow in boating flannels scowled for a moment, and opened his lips as if to speak, then, raising his hat, turned upon his heel and left them.

"I should not be surprised," said Musgrave, as he began painting with strong, firm strokes, "if our friend has gone away with his soul possessed of a bitter anger towards me, because, you know, it certainly was rough on him."

The which surmise was quite correct, for Mr. Wilson, having reached his house, was at that precise moment busied upon a letter to Sir George Bladon, in which the words "low artist fellow" occurred with a singular frequency.

Mr. David Musgrave was a quick worker while the fit lasted, and it was upon the third evening of the "sitting" that he sat putting on the last few finishing touches to the wonderful face that looked out from his canvas.

"Yes, I think it will do, you know," he said, looking at it through half-closed lids.

"And what shall you call it?" asked Gwendoline.

"Well, I think of naming it 'The Long Sought,' or something of that kind."

"'The Long Sought,'!" she repeated, "what a very strange title!"

"But a very true one," he answered.

"But what does it mean?" she asked.

"Ah! that is what few will understand," he answered, and there was a long silence, during which his brush hovered lightly here and there.

"Our friend, Mr. Wilson, is an excellent young man," he said at last.

"You think so?" she answered listlessly.

"Yes; but he has one fault—jealousy."

"Nonsense!" she said, glancing at him with heightened colour.

"Perhaps you are right," he answered, "in which case it is surprising how very different we are—he and I."

"Of course you are," she said decidedly; but how do *you* mean?"

"Oh, well, I am jealous—fearfully jealous, you know!" Somehow as he spoke her eyes drooped, and she changed the subject abruptly.

"I—I think if you let my father see your picture—he would buy it," she said.

"But it is not for sale," he answered.

"Not for sale!" she repeated.

"Certainly not!" he said decisively. "Nobody shall ever possess that picture but myself, because—as I told you—I really am fearfully jealous, you know."

There was a long silence.

"This is my last night in Bramblemere," he said, at last.

"I am afraid I can never express all my gratitude to yo for saving me——"

"Pardon me," he interrupted, "it would be the easies matter in the world."

"How?"

He had risen and stood beside her; for a moment he hesitated, and then lightly touched the great red rose on her bosom.

"Give me this!" he said.

He watched the little foot tapping the grass nervously, and then very slowly her hand crept up, and with a half-shy gesture she drew the rose from its resting-place and held it towards him.

"Gwendoline," he said softly, as his fingers closed upon hers, "I want the picture, but, Heaven knows, I want you a thousand times more—much more than I can ever tell you!"

Her head drooped, and her face was hidden in the great sun-bonnet; but he lifted it, and reading the look in the shy eyes he guessed her answer, and stooping, kissed her.

A moment later a voice reached them, an authoritative voice, at the sound of which Gwendoline started.

"Why, there's father!" she exclaimed, and surely enough he appeared, walking towards them with his hands beneath his coat-tails—a sure sign that he was put out.

"Father," she cried gaily, "I'm so glad you have come in time to meet Mr. Brown."

Sir George bowed coldly. "My dear, I should like a few words in private with—ah—Mr. Brown."

"But I want to tell you——" she began.

"I said in private, my dear," he interrupted.

She turned to Musgrave and held out her hand. "Good-bye!" she said, softly, and left them together.

"Now, sir!" began Sir George; "what the dickens is all this, eh?"

"Well, some people might call it a portrait, Sir George."

Despite himself Sir George's eyes wandered to the easel, and, fixing his glasses, he examined it for a moment in surprised silence.

"By gad, sir!" he exclaimed excitedly, and then remembering himself, coughed, and turned his back upon it.

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"Now, sir," he repeated, "what the dickens do you mean by painting my daughter—you—an utter stranger?"

"My dear Sir George," replied Musgrave easily, as he collected his "goods and chattels," "why do people paint at all?"

"That, sir, is no answer; and are you aware besides, that you are trespassing?" cried Sir George.

"If my address would be of any service?" began Musgrave.

"Certainly not; ah, of course not—I have no wish for any unpleasantness; ah, I suppose," he hesitated, as Musgrave turned away, "that you would—ah, that is—you are willing to sell that picture?"

"I'm sorry, but it is not for sale, Sir George."

"Then, sir, permit me to wish you a very good evening."

"A cool, self-possessed young rascal!" said Sir George, as he watched the artist out of sight; "but, by George, sir, the fellow can paint, all the same. Brown," he repeated; "now I wonder?"—and he hurried to the gate; but Musgrave had vanished.

* * * * *

The Academy was crowded as, a week later, Sir George led his daughter round the rooms.

"Not much of a show, my dear!" he was saying; "seems to me they get worse and worse every year—hey! though—stop a minute, there's a fine bit of colour, and, by Jove!—surely—turn it up—No. 287," he cried, in sudden excitement.

Gwendoline glanced casually at the picture alluded to, and then stopped suddenly, as she saw her own face looking back at her from beneath a great white sun-bonnet.

Sir George snatched the catalogue from her unconscious fingers, and turning over the leaves, read:

"No. 287. 'The Long Sought,' by David Musgrave, R.A."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "and Wilson called him a 'low artist fellow'—the idiot!" So saying Sir George stepped up to the picture to view it more narrowly.

Gwendoline stared after him for a moment, and then turned and sat down in a quiet corner to think. Her hand, lying upon the seat-back, was clasped suddenly by strong fingers, and looking swiftly up, she found the subject of her thoughts beside her.

"Are you angry with me?" asked Musgrave softly.

"Well, I don't quite know; why did you deceive me about your name?"

"Oh, it was just a fancy of mine while I was in Bramblemere, and then—well, I fell very much in love, and thought it would be best to keep up the idea—'love for love's sake,' and all that. I meant to tell you all along, but Sir George came too soon, and after that, I thought I would just let him find out for himself."

"But, you know," she said, after a little while, "I don't like David Musgrave's pictures a bit."

David Musgrave laughed. "What does that matter," he answered, "so long as you love David Musgrave?"

As he spoke Sir George joined them.

"Father," said Gwendoline, smiling, "I think you have met Mr. Musgrave, and—and I have promised to marry him!"

"Why, then," cried Sir George, shaking hands heartily, "you had better come down with us to Bramblemere, Mr. Brown, and don't forget to bring your picture, and we will make it a matter of exchange, eh?"

Jeffery Farnol.

"Is it true that your bride is very hard of hearing?" "It is. Why, when I proposed to her I had to shout so loud that all the neighbours ran out and congratulated me."

FATHER (to son): "My father never gave me money to spend on horses, opera tickets, late dinners, and the like." Son: "Oh, yes, but you forget that I come from a more aristocratic family than you did."

MRS. DE JAR: "Is there a lunatic asylum near here?" Mr. De Jar: "I believe so." "Do they take people on their own recommendation?" "My stars! How should I know? Why?" "Oh, nothing; only to-day I got hold of a package of my old love letters."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

August 26.—To-day's children will have a favourable year for business; should speculate and advertise; a better year for health.

Young girls will find love affairs very interesting, they become engaged or marry.

The day is good for buying and selling, dealing with jewellers, visiting, and for marriage.

A child born here will be industrious and persevering, it should go into business on its own account.

August 27.—An unfavourable birthday; much travel and change. Beware of law.

Girls need care in love affairs; long journeys separate lovers.

The day is evil for letter-writing and signing papers. Defer travelling, and beware of thieves.

A child born here will be unsettled, crafty, and unfortunate. Will be very extravagant, and difficult to manage.

August 28.—A quiet year. Those in employ may expect promotion. Changes in the home affairs.

Not a good year for love affairs, and girls born between noon and 1 p.m. will have trouble and anxiety.

The day is one to keep quiet on. Ask favour near 2 and 5 p.m.

A child born to-day will be best in the employ of others.

August 29.—Trouble in business and domestic circle. Clerks and teachers are rather fortunate.

Girls born between 4 and 7 a.m. are rather favoured in love matters, but those born near 10 p.m. meet with disappointment.

The day is good for entering examinations, and dealing with literary people.

A child born this day will be unfortunate in business; will be clever, and have an active brain, but lack self-confidence.

August 30.—A doubtful year for business; keep cool, and beware of mishaps and law; insure against fires.

Young girls born from 6 to 8 p.m. must place little confidence in lovers.

The day is unfavourable for most things; guard against accident in the early morning.

A child born here will be persevering, but headstrong and hot tempered; rather fortunate in business.

August 31.—Business will need close attention this year. Do not lend to friends. Pleasant events in domestic affairs.

A favourable time for love affairs; girls born near 10 p.m. become engaged, or marry.

A child born to-day will be free and generous; unfortunate with a business of its own; the mind will be quick and original.

September 1.—A quiet year to those whose birthdays occur to-day.

Young girls must have a care in love affairs; attentions from married men; beware of strangers.

The day is good for letter-writing, visiting doctors, and military men, and for dealing with shipping agents.

A child born here will be fairly successful; will attract the opposite sex, and be fond of the water. **Asturel.**

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The Line of the Heart.

By R. Norman Silver.

"You'll Have Heaps of Clients."

"If anyone gets me to read another palm to-day, Phyllis, dear, I'll be—I'll be bothered! I'm sorry I ever learnt. But there, what's the use of threatening? Not a soul can take my place, unless we send round to Bond Street for a professional and pay an extortionate fee; Mr. Carteret—your brother—says probably ten guineas for the evening. That would be a pity, wouldn't it?"

"It would, indeed, Lady Grasmere," was the shy response, "especially when the bazaar is nearly over and you have made such a lot of money with your readings. Three hundred pounds, Diana was telling me."

Lady Grasmere, a tall, smartly-dressed woman in early middle life, smiled with a certain cheerful gratification, as she looked out across the small tea-table by which she and her companion sat, into the broad gallery of her historic town house, with its lofty painted roof and high windows on either side. Through the latter there streamed the yellow sunbeams of a radiant London afternoon, to fall upon dainty spring toilettes, fair faces, open purses, and unimpeachable masculine costumes, hemmed in by rows of gay booths, laden with costly trifles, rare flowers, delicate antiques, cobweb laces, and all the wonderful and expensive fripperies of a West-end charitable bazaar.

"They've a deal left in their pockets yet, Phyllis," she observed, "so I suppose I'd better forget I've a headache and go back to my sybil's sanctum."

Phyllis Carteret hesitated: "I'm—I'm not sure if I could help you in any way, Lady Grasmere," she said, "but I know a little of palmistry. One of dad's gamekeepers married a gipsy, and she taught me, as she called it, to tell fortunes—the line of life, the line of the head, the line of fate, and, above all, the line of the heart. I'm afraid, though, I should be dreadfully nervous."

"My dear," cried Lady Grasmere, "you are a treasure, and I'm only sorry that Mr. Carteret didn't bring you before our last day. But I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll whisper it about that a real and expert palmist, a lady of Eastern birth, has consented to give, incognito, a few consultations. You'll have heaps of clients, every other person in Society believes in palmistry. Even Ernest—you remember my cousin Ernest Merivale, the explorer—owned to me recently that he wasn't quite a sceptic, and he's not superstitious by any means. I must send you some of my special friends and we can laugh at them afterwards."

The amateur palmist recoiled. "Oh, please, Lady Grasmere," she begged, "I'd rather you didn't let a soul know. If I felt that I was going to be laughed at or—or get someone else laughed at—I don't think I could do it."

"Then I'll keep the secret most religiously," she was promised hastily; "and now, you stay here a while before joining me at my den. You recollect it? The tiny Oriental tent at the top of the gallery; slip in quietly at the back. I will rake up a wrap or two to disguise you with; half an hour hence you will be quite a sensation."

A twinkle in her shrewd grey eye, Lady Grasmere hurried away, just as a youthful figure, dark, boyish, slender, dropped into a seat by Phyllis Carteret. The resemblance between them was pronounced, save that Phyllis' sensitive features bore an expression merely of gentle gravity, those of the new-comer being both proud and melancholy.

"I'm dashed if I can stand it any longer, Phil," he murmured; "fancy, Diana and I had planned—that is, I had planned and Di had practically agreed—to have a cup of tea together as soon as the crush was over. Well, it is all over, and who do you imagine carried her off from under my very nose—Ernest Merivale, confound him!"

"My dear Austin," was the decisive answer, broken, however, by a deep, though girlish sigh, "they are engaged—you are only a very ungraceful and persistent intruder."

Her brother winced and evaded the point.

"I wish Di hadn't taken the bookstall with me now," grumbled Austin Carteret. "Merivale has been acting as a volunteer assistant, and of course because he was nearly eaten by cannibals in Central Africa and wrote it up in two fat volumes, everyone crowds to see him. I hope he goes back to Africa and that the cannibals polish him off in reality!"

Phyllis flushed. "Austin," she said, "Mr. Merivale doesn't in the least deserve such a horrible destiny. He is very kind and clever, and, if people don't flatter him, as brave as he is handsome. But I'm sorry for him, all the same."

"I like that!" retorted her brother; "isn't he going to marry Diana Urquart, and isn't he as rich as Crœsus? Poor Di, I grant you, not poor Merivale."

"He is going to marry someone who doesn't love him," replied Phyllis slowly; "any man who does that is to be pitied."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Austin; "it's a brutal thing to do, and I sincerely trust he may suffer for it!"

His sister paled. "You are not fair, dear," she protested; "you know Di won't let him guess the truth. They have been almost betrothed since childhood; there had been a cruel old feud between the families and their fathers wanted it healed. It was a shocking mistake, but Mr. Merivale cares for Di, and she keeps silence out of pity."

Austin clenched his fists impotently. "And all the while she loves me," he muttered; "she can't say she doesn't. Phil, Phil, why didn't Merivale fall in love with you? He used to be no end fond of you when he came visiting us on his college vacations, though you were in short frocks and the nursery. You'd have been far more suitable for him; Di's too quiet, too reserved—he doesn't understand her, really; I do. Now you'd have been an ideal wife for Merivale; you'd have coaxed him, petted him, bullied him, interested him—why, Phil, Phil!"

Phyllis Carteret had turned away her head and was twisting intently a simple ring or two on a finger of one slender hand. Austin had caught a betraying sound, low and suppressed, yet strangely suggestive of a sob. He drew closer to her, confused and startled.

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"I—I say, Phil," he stammered; "I'm—I'm awfully sorry, I am, indeed; I didn't dream that you—you——"

His sister pushed back her chair and rose.

"Lady Grasmere is waiting for me," she said, and her voice quivered; "do get some tea, there's a good boy—because you're crossed in love, you needn't starve yourself, need you?"

She laughed—a little faintly—and slipped into the thronged gallery without, before he could gain a glimpse of her face.

"Beware of Silence."

"Is it quite true, Lady Grasmere, or are you only hoaxing everybody?"

The querist was young, blonde, graceful, exquisitely gowned. She had slipped across from a picturesque stall—a lath-and-plaster copy of an eighteenth century bookseller's shop, designed for the Grasmere House Bazaar by a famous scenic artist—to the Oriental tent in which, for three days, Lady Grasmere had officiated as an unprofessional exponent of the fashionable craze.

"I am a diplomatist's wife, Diana," was the laughing reply; "and you won't get a syllable more out of me than I think proper. As for my substitute, she consented to act on the express condition that she was allowed to remain unknown. But this I will tell you, she learnt her palmistry in the true gipsy school, and not from any of your modern professors. Go and consult her yourself, if you're all that curious."

Diana Urquart hesitated on the threshold of the shadowy little place. Bright as was the late afternoon, it was closely draped with heavy, incense-scented stuffs and lighted dimly by lamps whose ruby and orange facets winked like jewels in its recesses.

"I don't say that I believe in palmistry the least bit," she rejoined, with affected indifference, "but I surrender to the foible of my sex—inquisitiveness; the bazaar funds will profit, that is one comfort."

She shrugged her pretty shoulders, raised a curtain, and passed into the tent. Lady Grasmere smiled mischievously.

"That was a splendid idea of mine," she murmured; "it is wonderful what charm a scrap of mystery has for human nature."

Unconscious of this philosophic reflection, Diana had entered the screened sanctum of the unknown palmist. Upon a species of divan, vaguely illuminated by the hanging lamps around, and swathed concealingly in silken wrappings, sat Phyllis Carteret, so veiled and transformed that not her most intimate friend could have recognised or even suspected her. Her fingers had been deprived of their rings, and, together with her wrists, slightly browned. Lady Grasmere was an excellent stage manager.

Diana laid a sixpence and a half-sovereign upon a low Moorish table before the divan.

"You—you are our new palmist, are you not?" she said, embarrassed in spite of herself, by the seriousness of her surroundings; "do you mind reading my hand for me? I don't usually attach much importance to such things, but Lady Grasmere tells me you are not an ordinary authority."

Phyllis gasped silently beneath her veil.

"Good gracious! Diana!" she whispered; "what am I to say to her?" She started involuntarily—a strange and arresting thought had sprung into her brain. She had no time to reconsider the idea—Diana was holding out a dainty jewelled hand; Phyllis pretended to examine it.

"I—I see," she said, rendering her fresh, girlish tones hoarse and quavering in order to suppress the one remaining clue to her identity, "that you are passing through a serious crisis—a crisis in which your heart is conscious of a divided duty. Beware of silence—silence towards one who loves you but whom you do not love. You may yet be happy—your heart-line is clear and even, except at the beginning. You seek to love where you deem you should, your heart pities yet rebels. Have a care lest you ruin three lives, your own, his who loves you, and his whom you love."

Phyllis was amazed as the words fell from her lips. Like many other women who do not dream of it, she was a born actress, and her excitement lent her inspiration.

Diana Urquart stood as if she had been turned to stone. A superstitious awe seized upon her, she felt chilled and alarmed. The subdued light, the swathed figure, the mystery surrounding the palmist—all increased the impression that had been made upon her. She laughed, struggling to regain her equanimity.

"I—I—how quaint!" she faltered; "really, you have given me quite a delightful thrill. You won't object to my not taking it too seriously, will you? Thank you, and good-bye."

She scarcely knew what she was saying, but the words served to cover her hasty retreat. Lady Grasmere glanced at her quizzically as she emerged, but could ask no questions—she herself was the centre of a chattering group, intending visitors to the unknown palmist.

Drawing a deep, almost convulsive breath, Diana went back to her own stall. There was a throng in and about it, partly attracted by the mimic shop, with its small-paned windows and hanging sign, partly by the chance of seeing Ernest Merivale, the Central African explorer and Society "lion." Chattering good-humouredly to his persecutors, the latter was busily autographing copies of his own book for one purchaser after another. As her eyes fell upon his spare, athletic frame and tanned features, an idea came to Diana Urquart. If the Sybil's warning were true for her, it must be true for Merivale—it must be written in his hand also.

Reaching the side of her betrothed, Diana motioned the explorer out of the group. He extricated himself tactfully—Diana was wondering how she might get him to try the necessary experiment, yet her heart misgave her as she realised what a blow disillusionment would be to the gay, contented man before her.

Austin threw his arms about her, and would have spoken, but checked himself, and stood up stiffly. Instinctively Diana followed his gaze—it had fallen upon Ernest Merivale.

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"Ernest," she said, "I want you to do something for me—and at once."

Merivale looked at her questioningly. "I am all obedience, dear," he replied; "issue your commands—you will find me, as ever, your slave and adorer."

"Don't be foolish," interrupted Diana, almost coldly; "listen, you must go and have your hand read by the new palmist your cousin has unearthed. She is supposed to be a real sorceress, and I was induced to patronise her, with somewhat puzzling results. Consult her yourself, and then come and tell me what she says."

Ernest Merivale knitted his brows. "I am not sure, Di," he responded, "that I wish to pry into the future or to be made a fool of, according as one believes in palmistry or not. However, I will go and consult the oracle and inform you of her pronouncements."

He nodded, smiled, and strolled off. Diana gazed after him, half-inclined to recall him. A voice spoke to her suddenly—a voice pleading and reproachful; it was that of Austin Carteret.

"Di," he said, "aren't you tired of all this bustle? Let us have a breather in the conservatory, and I will get you an ice or some claret cup. You were going to have some tea with me, you know, only Merivale cut me out."

Diana looked at him, but lowered her own eyes under the boyish ardour of his glance.

"You are incorrigible, Mr. Carteret," she murmured; "very well, I should be glad of a moment's respite—my head is in a whirl."

She laid her hand on his offered arm, and they left the gallery together.

"I am Enlightened at Last."

"Di, Di, don't you understand that you are condemning yourself to a life of deceit? You, who are as honest as the day!—You won't be able to keep it up, Merivale will find you out, and break his heart over it. That will be three hearts broken—yours, mine, and Merivale's."

Austin Carteret flung the end of his cigarette on to the warm, damp, tiled floor of the Grasmere House conservatory, and stamped upon it viciously. The white fingers that lay in Diana Urquart's lap were interlacing themselves nervously, and her head was averted. A sudden shiver ran over her, and she looked quickly at the boyish figure lounging by her on the garden-seat.

"How strange!" she exclaimed, "do you know, I have heard almost the very same words within the last ten minutes—from a mysterious palmist Lady Grasmere has discovered. She warned me against spoiling three lives—my own, that of the man who loves me, and that of the man I——" She checked herself, blushing deeply.

Austin seized her hand. "Diana!" he said, "what a wonderful thing. But you might have finished it—you were going to say, 'The man I love.' Yes, you were, Di, and it's true—you do love me, though you are promised to Merivale."

His companion strove to rise, but he clasped her fingers appealingly.

"Forgive me, Diana," he murmured; "it's the last time I shall dare to tell you so. You've drifted into this engagement and drifted on in it till you daren't face disillusioning Merivale. You're making a frightful mistake—your palmist was right, though how she managed to read it all in your hand, I can't guess. But since you've decided to see it through, you must. I shall get abroad as soon as possible."

Diana's red lips set abruptly, and she freed her hands with a despairing gesture, to cover her wet lashes. Austin sighed.

"There," he said, "I've driven you to tears—I am an unlucky beggar. I'm sorry I raised the old question over again. You won't be bothered with me much longer, that's a comfort." And he sprang up with a certain masculine irritation. Diana clung to him.

"Austin!" she sobbed, "don't talk about going away, I can't lose you, I can't. Oh, you know I love you, but I have been a coward to Ernest all this while, and I daren't confess to him now."

She stopped, struck by a thought. "I—I forgot!" she added; "I sent him to the palmist, the one that warned me. I wanted to see what she would say to him, Austin, if she would only tell him that he is living in a fool's paradise, that the woman he is to marry doesn't love him! Oh, but he wouldn't believe it, if I told him so myself he would think I was jesting. Austin, Austin, what shall I do?"

She hung upon him with a kind of desperation—beneath her cold, proud exterior Diana Urquart concealed both the simplicity and the inexperience of a girl.

Austin threw his arms about her, and would have spoken but checked himself, and stood up stiffly. Instinctively Diana followed his gaze—it had fallen upon Ernest Merivale. Gravely, a trifle scornfully, he surveyed them.

"So," he said, "there is something in palmistry, then, unless the mysterious lady in question was bribed to tell me a particularly unpleasant truth. In any case I am enlightened at last, though I admit I should not have credited certain ominous hints had I not happened to come in search of my betrothed wife, and find her, in the embrace of—a friend."

Austin Carteret stepped forward. "Merivale," he answered huskily, "Di and I have always cared for one another—she—she tried to do as—as her dead father wished, and was going on trying. I—I had just made a last and practically futile appeal to her. I—I was really saying good-bye; I propose leaving England shortly.

Merivale's face changed, and he laid a hand on the speaker's shoulder.

"I beg your pardon, Carteret," he replied; "I have been a blind fool. Diana—Miss Urquart, I very nearly did you a great wrong. And yet you might—you ought to have told me the truth! However, you are free—employ your freedom as you choose."

Diana bowed her head, wounded and confused. "I—I was cowardly," she faltered. "But I happened to see the palmist out of curiosity, and she—she warned me against spoiling three lives by silence. I asked you to see her, wondering what she would tell you. It is very, very strange, and yet——"

"Yet she has done you a singular service," said Ernest Merivale, somewhat bitterly. He paused, a subdued hubbub had penetrated to them, and the conservatory was rapidly filling with a thin smoke.

"Fire!" he exclaimed; "Heavens, and among all that flimsy stuff." He took a rapid stride in the direction of the gallery, but halted—a thicker cloud of smoke had rolled in.

"Get Diana out by the door on the further side of the conservatory," he said, authoritatively; "it leads directly to the hall—there is danger this way." And before they could stay him he had disappeared in the pungent haze.

The atmosphere of the gallery beyond was increasingly dense, yet he could perceive that it was apparently empty, except for a leaping medley of flame and smoke. The fire had darted from stall to stall with lightning speed—visitors and stall-holders fleeing before it to the exits at the bottom of the gallery. As he stood a wall of flame sprang up behind him, cutting off his departure through the conservatory, and sweeping round on his right to hem him in. Already the room was roaring like a furnace.

He made for a window that stood in a bare recess, clear of the stalls, and smashed it open. The current of air drove the smoke back, and he saw that a feminine figure lay prostrate in the recess. He caught it up (noticing that it was slight and girlish, and wrapped in voluminous silken folds) and climbed through the sash on to the stone sill. Below him was a drop of twenty feet, down a narrow well of almost windowless walls, to a glass roof, over some hall or courtyard. A disappointed ejaculation burst from his lips.

The girl in his arms was reviving—a fold of the wrap blew aside and he beheld her face.

"Little Phil Carteret!" he cried, "she here—poor child, what a fate!" He steadied her on the shallow ledge as she

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sought to stand erect. She recognised him and comprehended their position at the same time.

"Oh, Mr. Merivale," she murmured, "how terrible! And you have risked your life for mine. I did try to escape, but suppose the smoke overcame me."

"Not at all," he told her calmly, "I discovered you when I was bolting for my own. And a bad bolt I seem to have made for both of us, Phil. To fall or jump on to that roof would mean death, and the gallery itself is a furnace. Let us try to attract attention."

They joined their voices in a resolute summons, but the crackling of the wooden fittings in the long room behind drowned them.

"Courage!" said Merivale calmly, "we will hold on as long as we can. We will pretend it is only birds-nesting—you and I went nesting once, Phil, we used to be good chums before I took to running about the world."

"I'm not frightened—very," faltered Phyllis; "but, oh, Mr. Merivale, I wish you'd forgive me the meanest thing I ever did; I can't bear to think how you'd hate me if you knew."

She raised an end of the silken wrap she had around her, over her ordinary dress, and showed it to him. He saw that her hands were stained a conspicuous brown.

"I was the palmist," she said, "the palmist who told D. that she mustn't marry you, and that you mustn't marry her."

Ernest Merivale gasped. "You!" he exclaimed; "you! But why—why—?"

Phyllis looked away. "Austin and Diana have loved one another for years," she murmured, "and I—I knew it."

Merivale sighed. "You only tried to play the good fairy Phil," he rejoined, "and my eyes needed opening. A moment ago, before Austin, I set Diana free. Circumstances conspired to drive home your hints. You have nothing to reproach yourself with."

The girl at his side made a regretful gesture. "I can't let you believe that," she said, "not—not now. I wasn't acting from any noble motive—I wanted to part you and Diana—I—I was jealous."

He stooped and kissed her gravely, then allowed her to swing off, and lowered gently.

"Phyllis!" cried Merivale, amazed, "my dear little girl—" He broke off to change places with her, gleaming, tawny tongues were licking towards them from the windows on their right. In doing so he trod on the loose extremity of her silken wrap.

"Eureka!" he ejaculated, and released it from her shoulder—it was wide and long—some six or eight yards of oriental stuff. With skilful fingers he knotted it here and there to contract it into a species of cable, tied a loop in it, and slipped it round her waist.

"I will lower you carefully," he said, "to the ledge below. Quick, there is no time to lose." He helped her to swing over the sill—their heads were close together for an instant.

"Poor little Phil," he whispered, "listen, the rope may not bear my weight. Let me tell you something in—in case of accidents. When I was a stripling about your father's house I used to promise myself that when you were old enough I would try to win your love. You were only a child then in reality, but I loved you. I proved false to my boy's love. Phil, if I live I will let you come back to it!"

He stooped and kissed her gravely, then allowed her to swing off, and lowered gently. Phyllis' feet touched the ledge below—she loosed the impromptu cable and he drew it up—aflame at the middle. One of the licking tongues of flame had ignited it, a moment later half of it dropped into the well beneath.

A scream burst from Phyllis' lips—his last chance of escape had gone. The scream was interrupted by the crash of glass and the sound of hatchets busily plied. The end of a red and double ladder appeared through the shattered panes and splintered beams of the roof below—a brass helmet, a manly visage, and the end of a hose-pipe followed it. Fate had changed her mind—Ernest Merivale was saved.

* * * * *

The stalwart heroes of the fire brigade never knew at how critical a period in a certain romance they had decided to make a flank attack on the blazing gallery, and with that object in view had broken through the courtyard roof, to find a distracted young lady on the ledge of a cornice, and a distinguished African explorer on a lofty sill above.

But Phyllis Merivale can never forget their timely arrival or cease to be one of their most generous patrons. Twice a year, on the anniversary of her wedding, and on that of a certain eventful day in May, the men of a particular fire-station near Piccadilly, dine with Ernest Merivale and his wife. Two of the latter's friends are usually there—Mr. and Mrs. Austin Carteret.

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No Wonder.

A young woman married a man who told her he was an "architect's assistant." She became disconsolate upon discovering next day that he assisted the architect by carrying bricks up a ladder in a hod."

Splendid List.

Parke: "Have you got a good list of names to select from for your new baby?" Lane: "Rather! My wife has kept a record of all the servant girls we have had during the past twelve months."

Quite Gratis.

Irate Parent (catching his clerk kissing his daughter): "Now, now, young man, I don't pay you for that kind of work." Clerk: "N—no, sir. And I don't propose to charge anything extra for it."

No Disadvantage.

Gentleman (to house agent): "The great disadvantage is that the house is so damp." House Agent: "Disadvantage, sir? Advantage, I call it. In case of fire it wouldn't be so likely to burn."

The Way of Some Women.

"Grace and Minnie have quarrelled, and are both miserable." "No, they have made friends, and are perfectly happy again." "How do you know?" "I saw them both crying together."

A Necessary Question.

Fond Father: "In giving you my daughter, Mr. Wildwed, I pass into your keeping the dearest thing I have on earth." Mr. Wildwed (anxiously): "How much does she cost you a year, may I ask?"

Complimentary.

Servant: "Oh, miss! The grocer's young man chucked me under the chin and kissed me!" Mistress (indignantly): "What impudence! I'll go to the door myself next time he calls." Servant: "Oh, miss, it'll be no use you going!"

It Would Have Been Good.

The little ones will keep on saying things. Six-year-old Mabel is industriously engaged in "cleaning out" a preserve jar which her mother has just emptied. Four-year-old Bobby looks on at her a while, and then blurts out: "I say, sis, don't you wish you could turn it inside out, so's you could lick it?"

Anticipating Troubles.

"Why do you order ten dozen handkerchiefs? What use can you have for them all?" asked a married lady of a young friend who was buying her trousseau. "There is no telling. Perhaps my husband will turn out badly, and then I'll want them all to dry my weeping eyes. Men are so unreliable nowadays," was the sad response.

A Much-needed Institution.

Mrs. Rusholme (of Lonelyhurst): "I'm so glad that the village council have decided to have a regular uniformed police force, like the city." Mr. Rusholme: "Quite an unnecessary thing, my dear, in a quiet, rural place like this." Mrs. Rusholme: "How can you say so, George? You know how impossible it is now to get a cook to stay with us!"

Making Certain.

"Great Scott! what are you writing your name in indelible ink on the cat for?" "Going to send her to the laundry, and I want to be sure she won't come back."

The Test.

Mrs. Workday: "Oh, I do like to see a strong, determined man." Mr. Workday (straightening): "So do I, my dear." Mrs. W.: "John, the coal scuttle is empty."

Then the Shopman Collapsed.

"Yes, sir," said the assistant, briskly, "we have lace of all kinds. Would you like to see Valenciennes or point lace?" "It's a shoe-lace I want," explained the customer.

A Guilty Conscience.

Teacher: "You have named all domestic animals save one. It has bristly hair, it hates a bath, and is fond of mud. Well, Tom?" Tom (shamefacedly): "That's me."

The Terrible Printer.

A dancing-master, in renewing his solicitations for patronage, wished to express his obligations for past favours, when the printer, by mistake, made him say, "Most respectfully offers his shanks."

Infant Solicitude.

A little girl, who had great kindness of heart for all the animal creation saw a hen preparing to gather her chickens under her sheltering wing, and shouted earnestly: "Oh! don't sit on those beautiful little birds, you great, ugly thing!"

A Little Mistake.

He: "You say there are no flowers for the dinner table. Where are the chrysanthemums I sent home?" She: "Oh, George, don't speak so loud, you might hurt Bridget's feelings; she didn't understand what they were, and has cooked them in milk."

The Modern Servant Girl.

She: "The play was excellent, except for one thing." He: "And what was that?" She: "The time extends over three months, and it shouldn't have been more than a week." He: "I'd like to know why?" She: "Because the same servant girl stays through it all."

The Innocent Girl.

"What nonsense all this is about men getting on their knees when they propose," said Mrs. Parslow to her dear friend. "My husband didn't do any such absurd thing when he asked me to marry him." "He did when he proposed to me," said the dear friend, without thinking.

A Different Matter.

She: "Oh, I am in an awful fix! I lost my diary in town yesterday. Just fancy some horrid person getting hold of it and reading it through." He: "Ha, ha! Well, that is a good joke. Had it your name in?" She: "No; but it had yours." He: "Great Scott! You had better advertise for it at once."

Could Prove a Lullaby.

"My wife will bear witness," said the prisoner at the bar, "that at the very time I am accused of entering Mr. Smith's premises I was engaged in walking the floor with my infant child in my arms, endeavouring to soothe it by singing 'Rock-a-bye, baby.'" "The prisoner is discharged," remarked the magistrate. "He can prove a lullaby!"

Height and Depth.

"Do you ever think, George, dear," she said, and her voice was soft and low, as befitted the perfect beauty of the night, "how closely true happiness is allied with tears?" "I don't believe I ever do," replied George. "Yes," she went on, looking up into his face, "when one is truly and wholly happy there is but little to divide a smile and a tear." "That's a fact," said George, "but I never thought of it before. There's nothing but the nose."

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WINNIE'S FAILURE.

A Charming Little Story of a Hospital Probationer.

"I SHALL know the result of my probation term to-day," said Winnie Thompson to herself. And a chill of fear crept over her at the same moment.

She felt that the verdict would be unfavourable. She had tried hard to fulfil her duties as a nurse-probationer, but she was conscious of many shortcomings. Yet it might be that she had just scraped through, as some of the nurses phrased it, and she would be allowed to continue, with a chance of realising her ambition.

She had longed to live a life of helpfulness, and the career of a nurse appeared to her as the only one in which that ambition could be fully realised. What scope was there in the sleepy little country place where she had lived since birth? Only the humdrum duties of household work.

The summons to the matron's room came about eleven o'clock in the morning, and Winnie's heart gave a great jump when she received the call, although she had been expecting it all the morning. She could picture the calm, inscrutable countenance of Miss Halifax, the matron; she had tried to read that face several times, in the hope of gaining some clue to the judgment which Miss Halifax was forming of her capabilities, but she had not succeeded. She imagined the quiet voice, without intonation expressive of the least emotion, telling her that the decision was—what?

Winnie entered the matron's apartment in response to the formal invitation that followed her own timid knock. Miss Halifax was seated at her table, writing imperturbably; she glanced up at the probationer's face, finished the sentence which she had begun to write, and then turned her attention to Winnie.

"It is my duty, Miss Thompson, to inform you of the result of your probation term," she said in her clear, cold voice. "I do not think that you are the kind of girl who need to be led to the main point through a lot of useless preliminaries, so I propose to waste no words. You have not satisfied our requirements."

She knew it at last; the verdict which she had expected had now been pronounced, and there was nothing left to be done but to return to the humdrum life of her home at Midfall and try to forget her ambition. The blow was a hard one, even although anticipated, and Winnie's face went a shade paler.

Perhaps Miss Halifax observed this, for a more gentle look came into her grey eyes.

"It is not usual to give to probationers a full explanation of the reasons that have led to their rejection," she said, with just a trace of warmth in the ordinarily cold voice, "but I feel that something is due to you, exceptionally. You have not failed as many others have, through sheer incapacity; we recognise that you have worked hard and have shown ability to a fair extent. The fact is, your physical qualifications are not sufficient; you are not strong enough for the life you would choose. That life is a hard and very wearing one, and you would break down under the strain. It is better to recognise the fact now, than to go on and collapse at the very time when great reliance was being placed on you. It is easy to conceive that such a contingency might mean disaster in some serious cases."

It was quite a long speech for Miss Halifax, and Winnie understood that the matron was unbending to her as she never did to others.

"It is very kind of you to put it in that way, Miss Halifax," she succeeded in saying. "But I fear that I have been only a great failure. It is hard for me, as I—I did so hope to be——"

A lump in her throat prevented the utterance of the rest of the sentence. The tears came to her eyes and she could not see distinctly, so perhaps she was mistaken in thinking that Miss Halifax gazed at her with pitying sympathy. The impulse of the moment caused Winnie to sink on her knees and bury her face in Miss Halifax's lap, where she gave vent to her feelings in tears. Had anyone glanced into the room at that moment, the intruder would assuredly have refused to credit the evidence of her senses.

"Come, come, my dear, you must not think that all the world is a blank because a cherished ambition has not been realised. Only by experience do we mortals learn that every failure brings in its train fresh duties and responsibilities—that is, fresh opportunities. If you have failed in this, your failure will open up other paths of work."

"Oh, I'm not afraid," rejoined Winnie, rising and drying her eyes. "I have looked at you, Miss Halifax, and have so desired to follow the career which you have chosen and in which you have succeeded."

Just the trace of a flush appeared on the countenance of the matron at these words, and a slight quiver of the lips was visible for a second; then she was calm and self-possessed again.

"This life was not the one I had chosen," she replied in the same quiet voice. "It was adopted as the result of a failure. You say that I have succeeded in it. That proves what I have been trying to tell you!"

"If my task here is ended—as it is," said Winnie sadly, "I had better leave as quickly as I can. I have not much to pack, and there is a train at 2.30. Can I leave in time for that, Miss Halifax?"

The matron bowed and extended her hand for a farewell salutation. Winnie went to the dormitory and packed her things. After a hasty dinner and an equally hurried leave-taking, she departed to catch the train for home. The nurses were sorry to lose her, but none were able to spare the time to accompany her to the station.

She sent a telegram to her father to announce her home-coming, wondering how he would take it. And what would the people of the village think of her as a failure?

She sank into deep thought as the train sped along and was oblivious of all that was going on about her. She gradually became conscious of the fact that a baby was crying rather a lot in the corner; arousing herself from her meditations, she discovered that the only other occupant of the compartment was a young countrywoman, of weakly appearance, who was endeavouring to pacify the cross child.

Winnie's fondness for children was a matter of common comment, both at home and in the hospital, and she had spent the last week of her probation in the children's ward.

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She saw that the mother was looking tired and ill, and physically unable to keep the infant quiet.

"Let me have the baby for a little while," said Winnie. "I think I can manage the young gentleman. You don't feel well, do you?"

"No, miss," answered the woman. "I always feel giddy and sick when I go anywhere by train. And I don't think I am very good at managing babies yet. He's my first, and I haven't had any experience of children, never having any little brothers or sisters. Oh, dear!"

The poor traveller, relieved of her burden, placed her hand to her forehead and looked like fainting. Winnie held the baby in her lap by means of one hand, while she drew a small packet from her bag with the other.

"Put one of these lozenges into your mouth, it will do you good. That's it. Now try to have a sleep in that corner and you will be refreshed when you wake up. I'll undertake to amuse the boy."

With a few words of thanks the poor woman lay back in the corner and closed her eyes; she was satisfied that Winnie knew something about children, and she marvelled at the fact that the boy was as "good as gold" with his new friend.

When Winnie's fellow passenger awoke she felt very much better, but she willingly permitted Winnie to hold the baby till she reached her destination. Winnie, who was going further, relinquished the baby with a feeling akin to regret.

"It was very good of you, miss," said the mother from the platform. "I'm thinking you'll be making some home very happy!"

Winnie laughed a trifle sadly, and the train moved out of the station. Her own home would not be a very happy place for her or through her; for was she not returning as a failure? Her father met her with the dog cart. She felt a little awkward, expecting to find him somewhat angry at her rejection, but he appeared much pleased to see her.

It was rather cool and a drizzling rain was falling. Winnie noticed that his cough was worse than it had been while she was at home.

"Yes, Winnie," he said, in reply to her question, "my cough is more troublesome than it was. Can't seem to shake off this bronchitis. Oh, yes, they do pretty well at home for me, but you see Carrie is only a girl, and she can't do things as you used to, or like your poor mother did when she was alive. Oh, I don't say as the cough is anything much!"

"I'll make you some of that broth, you know, dad," she cried, a peculiar pang going through her. "We'll soon have you all right."

How she blessed that dry course of lectures on bronchitis! Then there came into her mind a vague thought that she was to find her sphere of helpfulness in filling up these gaps, here and there, where no one else was handy; it did not appear to offer much scope, but it was better to be useful occasionally, as with that baby, than not at all. Occasionally? Why, the world was full of such occasions, they were always presenting themselves, and she would find enough to do!

"You remember Alec Royce?" said her father, interrupting her reverie. "Well, he's back again in the village—you know we are agitating for a charter, because Midfall is big enough to be a town now. Where was I? Oh, Royce! Well, he is back now; passed his legal examinations and taken up his father's business. The old gentleman intends to retire and hand it all over to Alec."

She had temporarily forgotten Alec Royce; they had been good friends before he went away.

Arriving at the old homestead, she was welcomed with delight by her younger sister and the two boys, younger still. She was soon "at home" in all senses of the expression.

It was past eight o'clock when Winnie sat down by the small fire that had been lighted in order to make the apartment more comfortable on this chilly autumn evening. Her father sat on the other side, enjoying his pipe after the bowl of broth made by Winnie, and his cough was certainly less troublesome. Carrie came to Winnie with a book in her hand.

"I'm so glad you've come back, Winnie. This algebra has worried me and I can't get the solution of this problem. I suppose it ought to be easy, but I don't see through the things so well now I haven't get you to help me."

"But you have got me to help you now!" laughed Winnie, and it was a happy laugh.

She soon had the problem neatly set down on paper so that Carrie could do it and understand it. Then the brothers wanted assistance. And the home itself had a more cosy appearance owing to the embellishing touches she had given it. By her side, on the table, was a note from Alec Royce, saying how glad he was to hear that she was home again, that he hoped she was home for good, and that he would give himself the pleasure of calling upon her the following day.

Winnie toyed with her pencil and meditated. She had been told that she was capable of making home a happy place; she looked about her and a new joy filled her heart. Like many others, she had failed to recognise that home offered quite a large field for the scope of usefulness and helpfulness. Failure brings fresh duties and responsibilities—that is, fresh opportunities. The words came back to her very vividly now, and she realised the truth contained in them. Taking up a half-sheet of paper she wrote—

"First failure × opportunities."

"Whatever is that?" inquired Carrie in surprise.

"That," replied Winnie, laughing and kissing her sister, "is an equation I have worked out this very day!"

Before Carrie could ask the meaning of this remark, enigmatical to her, there came a knock at the door, and Winnie saw the tall, handsome figure of Alec Royce enter.

"Hallo, Mr. Royce!" exclaimed Mr. Thompson heartily. His tone betrayed mild surprise, but that passed unnoticed. "I'm pleased to see you here again," he went on, shaking the young fellow by the hand. "I thought you were coming to-morrow, but the sooner the better. You haven't outgrown the room since you used to come—how long is it ago, Winnie?"

But Winnie was glad to evade answering that question by shaking hands with the visitor and offering him a chair. And the visitor was equally pleased to slip out of a reply to the remark about his not making his visit till the following day.

"It seems like old times to see you here once more—Winnie," he said earnestly, as he took the proffered seat. He hesitated before pronouncing her name; he was going to say "Miss Thompson," but he chanced it, and said "Winnie" as in the old days. "How are you getting on? Your father, when I met him on the way to the station, told me you were coming home for—for good, I think he said."

He wondered if she would think more of him now that he had passed his exams, and had taken up his father's business; he had had rather ambitious notions at one time, believing that there was not enough scope there for real usefulness. Winnie, on her side, was wondering if he would think less of her when he heard that she had been a failure.

"I intend to stay here," she mustered up courage to tell him. Then, gaining more courage as she looked into the honest, kindly eyes, she continued—"I have learnt, by failure in one direction, that there are opportunities in plenty everywhere, even in the most unlikely places, for useful work if one looks for it."

Alec Royce gazed at her intently, and her eyes dropped

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"How warm you have made it here!" exclaimed Alec. "I have had rather a heavy day, and my head feels a trifle confused; let us have a look round the garden."

He rose and held out his hand. Winnie accepted the invitation without clearly understanding the reason. The younger chilldren looked amused at the notion of looking round the garden in the dark, but their father, trying to appear very grave, told them—when Alec and Winnie were gone—that *they* would be able to see a great many things in the dark which they couldn't see now, as soon as they were as old as Winnie.

"Seems as if that portrait of Winnie that I showed him the other day has made him want to see her before to-morrow," mused Mr. Thompson, a smile gradually spreading over his countenance.

"Winnie," said Alec Royce to his companion, "I must call you by the old name. Winnie, people who are in earnest, as you are, only fail when they try to do something for which they are not fitted. Winnie, isn't it possible to find a suitable occupation here? Is it not a worthy occupation to fill the position of helpmeet to——"

"I thought—that you were not coming—till to-morrow!" cried Winnie in desperation.

She guessed the avowal that was coming; she could not decide whether she desired to hear it or not, and, in her attempt to put it off, she made the very observation that hastened it.

"I couldn't wait till to-morrow, Winnie!" he declared, halting and standing in front of her. "I couldn't wait! And if you had not returned soon, I should have gone to London to tell you that I want you! You must come to me!" He took her in his arms. "Tell me," he pleaded more gently, "that you want me, too!"

Winnie opened her lips to say that she was not sure about it, but a sudden thrill told her that she would be speaking falsely. She laid her head on his shoulder and murmured:

"Yes, I want you, Alec!"

"But what about father and the children?" asked Winnie suddenly, as they were retracing their steps to the house.

"We shall live next door to them, which means that you will find so many opportunities for usefulness in the two houses that you yourself will require some assistance. Isn't that sufficient for you?"

And they both laughed joyously.

"I am glad I went away, though," said Winnie, "for it taught me to understand and secure the happiness within my grasp, but unrecognised till now."

G. Merriam.

A Riddle and its Answer.

He: "Why is justice represented as a woman?" She: "Because her work is never done."

Could Give Testimonials.

"Have you ever loved another, Tom?" said Miss Gush to her intended. "Certainly," replied he. "Do you wish written testimonials from my previous sweethearts?"

Clearing Weather.

Tramp (to buxom farmer's wife, standing in the porch and looking up at the sky): "How's the weather this morning, ma'am?" Farmer's Wife (turning suddenly and catching up a pail of suds): "Clear." And the tramp cleared.

What the Penny Saved Her.

Mother: "I gave you a penny to be good yesterday, and to-day you are just trying to show how bad you can be." Willie: "Yes, but I am just trying to show you to-day that you got the worth of your money yesterday."

Fatal Handwriting.

"Do you believe in this talk about discovering a man's character from his handwriting?" "I do," replied Mr. Hasbin Swift, with a sigh. "Ever know of its being tried?" "Yes, and with fatal efficacy. The experiment is most successful when the handwriting is read aloud in court."

Your Editor Chats.

A large number of those who are now readers of *Short Stories* were not readers when the present serial started, and possibly did not think it worth while picking up the story half way through. Such readers will be interested to hear that another serial story will begin in the course of a few weeks.

This story is one which I have had some little difficulty in securing. Of course, every Editor believes that the serial story which he has got is better than anybody else's, and that a story like it has never been written before. I won't go so far as to say this in my case, but I will say that all my readers who anticipate a treat in the way of fiction when they look forward to this new serial story, will not be disappointed.

A new serial story depends for its success upon two things—1. That the incidents depicted shall be of such nature, and in such quantities as to hold the attention of the reader and arouse his or her interest from the first to the last. 2. That the story shall be written in such a simple and concise way as to enable the reader to see clearly the dramatic incidents which the author himself sees in his mental pictures.

In both these respects our new serial is very striking. It is crammed with incident, but not in such quantities that it cloys or tires the reader, and it is written in a bright, clear, fresh manner, without being so sparkling that it unduly exhilarates.

It is, in point of fact, a mental feast—a feast of fiction.

When you have had an opportunity of dipping well into it, you will agree with me that your little favourite, *Short Stories*, is not only keeping up its standard, but is even improving!

And now, as to this week's competition. Once again I am going to ask you to get your wits together, and to construct for me a sentence of not more than twelve words, each word containing only such letters as can be found in the two words "Short Stories." The reader who sends me in the most sensible sentence on some topic of the day, under these circumstances, will receive one of our well known *solid silver pencil-cases*. As is our custom, we will award ten consolation gifts, which shall consist of pretty little rolled gold hearts, and rolled gold charms. Post-cards only please, marked "Topic," and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C. These must reach us not later than the first post on Tuesday morning, September 2nd.

Below will be found the names of the prize-winners in the "Reverse" competition. The first award of a silver pencil-case goes to Donald Pope, 5 Vernon Place, Birkenhead, while consolation gifts go to the following—J. Jones, 5 Worcester Place, Swansea; Miss M. Ryan, 21 Abbott's Road, East Ham; T. R. Morris, 27 Richmond Road, Oxford; J. J. C. Robinson, 60 Sherrard Road, Forest Gate; J. S. Ryan, 21 Abbott's Road, East Ham; H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, S.E.; Mrs. Robinson, 60 Sherrard Road, Forest Gate; D. G. Jelley. 85 Ermine Road, Ladywell; D. E. Jones, 69 Beechfield Street, Mount Pottinger, Belfast.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum from which she escapes, only to be murdered by Revelle. "Accidental death," however, is the verdict returned.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

The rumour proves to be true. Alec had indeed managed to escape from the prison, and taking a boat had pulled down the river, after purloining some sailors' clothes from an empty barge. Just when he is thoroughly exhausted, however, he is run down by a sailing barge. His boat is smashed, but Alec is rescued and taken on board. The barge proves to be the *Mary Ann*, bound for Gurlston Bay. Arrived at its destination, it is hardly moored to the pier before Esther, who is taking a walk, arrives at the pier to watch the unloading.

Shortly afterwards Revelle saunters up, when suddenly Esther catches sight of Alec in the barge. With great presence of mind she leads Revelle away from the spot before he discovers whom she has seen. Late that night, after everyone has gone to bed, Esther contrives a meeting with Alec in the drawing-room of the house in which she is staying. The two lovers are clasped in each other's arms when a man's footsteps are suddenly heard outside the door, and a minute after Revelle rushes into the room. He passes Esther without seeing her, and gives chase to Scarsdale. When he returns he has sprained his ankle and missed his man.

Crump now decides to burglariously enter Revelle's house at Warham and search Revelle's belongings. Aided by his nephew, Police-constable Wilton, who engages the butler's attention, Crump gets into Revelle's dressing-room and begins his search. He discovers a portmanteau with a false bottom. In this he finds a paper showing that Revelle and a parachutist named Balderini are one and the same man, also some letters from his wife, Vance, but no trace can he find of information regarding the stolen diamonds.

The morning after Esther's meeting with Alec, she is strolling by herself along the cliffs towards the celebrated Gurlston caves. It is here that Alec has taken refuge. Suddenly she loses her footing in the fog and slips over the edge, just managing to stop herself falling to the bottom by clinging to a ledge. But Alec has heard her scream, and rushes to her assistance. He has just secured a rope round her waist and round a tree on the edge of the cliff when Revelle arrives on the scene.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE CLIFFS.

REVELLE had caught sight of a man lying half-way over the edge of the cliff, the rope about his waist made fast to a tree behind him. For the moment, his face was invisible.

Another step forward, and the whole situation was revealed to Revelle. He could see a woman on the crumbling ledge below, a rope about her waist also. Her grey face upturned. He caught his breath with a sharp hiss, and reeled, momentarily unnerved.

Esther Mansfield!

She had become more to him than he himself had realised. Godless selfishness was the key-note to his character; but, after himself, she represented more to him than anything else in the world. An overmastering passion for her had grown up within him. His damaged ankle was forgotten. He sprang forward, meaning to go to the assistance of her rescuer; yet, for all the intensity of the moment, conscious of a feeling of jealousy. His eyes were fixed staringly on the would-be rescuer, who, at that instant, shifted his position a little, as he strained down with his outstretched hands.

Alec Scarsdale!

With telegraphic speed the explanation of the mystery of the previous night flashed through his brain, and with it a wild wave of hate. It was followed by a horrible inspiration—an inspiration how to be quit of his rival for ever, and how to put Esther under a lasting obligation to him.

It had been a matter of seconds, all this. The devil had been at Seaton Revelle's elbow to prompt him, as he had prompted him that stormy night when the balloon was skimming over Avesham Common.

And action followed hard upon the inspiration. Revelle's hand sought a pocket, whipped something from it. Limping, but moving swiftly, he reached the tree to which the rope was made fast.

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"One moment now, beloved!" whispered down Scarsdale. Then a hoarse cry.

The rope that held Esther's rescuer had been deliberately cut!

Scarsdale shot headlong forward, over Esther, down!

A piercing scream of agony from Esther; then oblivion—merciful oblivion! But the rope round her waist held fast, and a moment later, went strainedly taut. Slowly, jerkily she was being dragged up to the top of the cliff; but it was more than one man's task, and the rope was beginning to fray against the sharp edge.

Revelle glanced wildly round. A couple of coastguardsmen were racing along the cliff towards him.

"For mercy's sake, hurry up!" he shouted.

What had been impossible for one man was possible for three. A few moments later, Esther, unconscious, was lying on the turf, Revelle bending over her.

"Get to Gurlston Hall, one of you," he cried. "Tell them to send along a carriage. Don't alarm them! Say that all is well now!"

One of the men hurried off. Then Revelle, supporting Esther in his arms, turned to the other man.

"Good Heavens!" he whispered. "Awful! There was another fellow—he had made himself fast to the tree by a rope—he was straining over, trying to reach down to her when I sighted him—then, before I could get to him—awful! the rope broke—he went over headlong. Oh, my God!"

He dashed a hand across his eyes as if he were trying to blot out some horrid sight.

"He can't have had a chance. The rocks——"

"It's an awful drop," cried the coastguardsman, hurrying to the edge and going down on his knees, "but it's deep water below."

He was peering down; but he could see nothing.

"Look here," he cried. "I'll get down to the caves, on to the ledge."

He hurried away. The moment he had disappeared, Revelle's arms tightened round the unconscious Esther. He pressed a burning kiss on her white lips; then, having laid her gently on the ground, sprang to the tree. A swift glance round, then he had whipped out a pocket-knife, and was fraying the end of the rope, the end that had the appearance of having been cut through cleanly; but when he had done, he had altered all that.

When the coastguardsman returned, Revelle was again supporting the still unconscious Esther in his arms, a strained expression on his white features. The man shook his head.

"I'm afraid that it's all up!" he said, in a low voice. "There was just a chance; but there's no sign of anybody. Who was he? What was he like?"

"A stranger," answered Revelle hoarsely. "I didn't even catch a glimpse of his face. Thank Heaven, at last!"

A carriage was rolling over the turf towards them. It came to a standstill. John Mansfield sprang out.

"Oh, my child!" he sobbed. "My Esther!"

It was only as they were bearing her to the carriage that she opened her eyes. There was a wild, strange look in them.

"Alec!" she whispered. "Alec! Oh, the mist, the gathering mist!"

Then she gave a low cry, and started to babble incoherently. There was a look of mute agony in her father's eyes as he glanced at Revelle.

Would her reason survive the frightful shock?

Revelle helped to bear her to her room. She was in a high fever when the doctor arrived, and raving deliriously. Again and again she cried out that he was innocent. Then she seemed to be living through those frightful moments on the crumbling ledge. Then she pleaded to those who watched beside her not to keep Alec from her.

It came as a stunning shock to the laughing merry party that came back from Reefe Castle, the news of the ghastly accident, the news that Esther Mansfield was suffering from brain-fever, hovering between life and death. It was only when the men were gathered together in the smoking-room, talking in whispers, that Revelle, looking a broken man described what had happened. Who was the man who had gone over the edge of the cliff? If it were someone who lived in the neighbourhood, surely he would be missed before long, and his name known?

One man in the smoking-room knew his name well enough. And a suspicion of whom perhaps it might have been had flashed through another man's brain.

Gerald Phipps knew that Alec Scarsdale had been in the neighbourhood. Was it possible that he was the unknown man? If so, what a ghastly tragedy! It was only a surmise, a suspicion; but it haunted him.

A great gloom was over the house. Presently the men melted away out of the smoking-room, all but Revelle. He sat in an easy-chair, his head resting on his hands, his attitude that of a man broken down by grief. Nor was it acting! Something akin to remorse was gnawing at his heart; but he was not thinking of the man whom he believed that he had sent to his death, but of Esther. And with remorse, there was a leaden feeling of failure. In her delirium, it had been Alec, Alec, always Alec! His white, refined hands opened and shut. Passion had made a slave of the man who had prided himself on his self-control and his mastery over his emotions. It was passion, jealous passion, that had mastered him, momentarily carried him away on the edge of the cliff, an almost mad longing to be quit for ever of his rival. And he was quit of him now, he told himself, and yet—again the white hands opened and shut. He seemed to hear again those delirious babblings. Alec, always Alec!

And his white hands went on opening and shutting, those murderous white hands of his!

You may murder a man, you may murder a woman, but you cannot murder love!

Revelle looked up as the door opened. John Mansfield entered with tottering footsteps. He sank down in a chair, and clasped his forehead.

"Revelle," he whispered, "she keeps asking for him in her delirium. Is it only the wanderings of her poor mind? But she says that it was Scarsdale who saved her? This—this is more than I can bear!"

And the old man broke down utterly. There was a long silence. Revelle's hands were still opening and shutting.

"'Only let me know,' she cries," choked the grief-stricken father at last, "'only let me know that he is not dead! I can bear it if they take him back to prison. He is innocent, and we are going to prove his innocence—but only tell me that he is not dead!'"

A grey shadow stole across Revelle's white face.

"We are going to prove his innocence!"

He had been telling himself that she was forgetting. Had she been living a lie all along? Was he no nearer to her now than when he started? The thought was a knife-stab into his vanity as well as into his heart.

"We are going to prove his innocence!"

Proof of Scarsdale's innocence meant proof of *his* guilt.

And "We!" Was there another or others?

The white hands continued to open and shut. Perhaps what had happened that day had unnerved him. It was not often that he was conscious of a sense of fear. But it was upon him now, inspired by that one-syllabled word "We."

"I had hoped," he said, in a low, strained voice, "that she was beginning to forget him!"

"I had hoped so," choked out John Mansfield, "but she hasn't, and, for her sake, I'd give my right hand for proof of Alec Scarsdale's innocence. Oh, God! Her life is hanging in the balance, Revelle. It might make all the difference!"

Revelle rose to his feet rather unsteadily, shook the banker's hand in silence, then left the room. He made his way back limpingly to his friend's house. Letters, that had been forwarded from The Firs by Railton, awaited him. Mechanically he opened them, one after another—they were, most of them, rather pressing demands from creditors for money.

"Yes," he muttered irritably. "As soon as my ankle's really better, I shall have to bring that matter of the Normanhurst jewels off. Confound it all, worries never come singly!"

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CUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

Our Powerful Serial.

Then he lapsed again into a state of gloom.

* * *

Had he struck the water aslant, the life must have been knocked out of him; but in that awful drop Scarsdale had circled completely round, and plunged into the water feet foremost. He reached the surface, half-stunned, more dead than alive. It was instinct rather than consciousness that made him strike out towards the rocks at the base of the cliff. An in-rolling wave lifted him up and carried him forward on to a rock. He clutched hold. The water receded. He dragged himself up a little, too numbed, too battered even to think. Presently a stone, crashing down and striking the rock to which he was clinging, seemed to awaken him. He glanced up, still panting frightfully for breath. High above him, dark against the whiteness of the cliff, he saw an indistinct figure being drawn up, then disappear over the brow.

He knew that Esther had been saved!

How, by whom, he did not attempt to reason. She was saved! He closed his eyes, still too numbed for any acute sensations. For a few moments he clung on to the rock, still panting as though he would never recover his breath, the upper half of his body rising and falling convulsively. The rock to which he was clinging was close up to the base of the cliff, and some little way from the ledge of the caves. When the coastguardsman had approached the edge and glanced about him, the clinging, dripping figure had been invisible to him, screened by the rock that was unapproachable from the ledge, except by boat.

She was saved! An indistinct voice seemed to be murmuring the words in his ears. He opened his eyes and glanced dazedly about him, still panting. To reach the ledge meant a swim. He closed his eyes again. He felt weak, helpless as a child, as if all the strength had been battered out of him. The rope must have broken. Well, that mattered not now. Esther was saved! His brain for the time was incapable of grasping, realising more than that, and, for the time, it sufficed. He shifted his position, turned over on to his back. The rock slanted. He fixed his feet against a projecting crag. There was no need to cling on now with his arms. The position was more restful. Then, gradually his brain began to work more normally, and, with that, came agony. He lived through those awful moments atop the cliff again. Yet still the thought that Esther was safe was paramount. Someone must have come along the cliff, almost at the moment that the rope broke. God be thanked for that! But what of the shock? Oh, Heaven, what of the shock?

He opened his eyes again. There was a glare in them.

Then it occurred to him that he must have been seen. Men would be coming to look for him. He glanced across at the ledge. It was precipitous save in one place where steps had been roughly hewn, work of the old-time smugglers. The rope was still wound about his waist. He untied the knots. The rope must have broken; but he mechanically glanced at the end. The strands had all the appearance of having been severed cleanly through with a knife!

A curious, thoughtful expression passed over his ashen face. He wound the rope round his waist again. An unnatural calm seemed to have come over him. He slipped off the rock into the sea, and struck out for the ledge. When he gained it, he clambered up and made his way into one of the caves. Having unwound the rope, he concealed it beneath some small stones in a corner. Scarcely had he done so, when the sounds of voices reached him. It must be searchers—coming to look for him!

But did they realise that they were looking for an escaped convict?

Since his escape from Wrackam prison, he had seen no newspaper, or he might have known that it was generally believed that he had been drowned in the Thames. The voices were those of searchers who were coming to look for a dead, not a living man.

Scarsdale glanced round the cave. It was not the one in which he had spent the night. There was no tunnelling leading to caves beyond. He was in a trap. Footsteps were sounding on the rock. It was too late to slip out, and in elsewhere. He took advantage of the only place of concealment the cave afforded, a fragment of rock, once part of the roof, that had fallen near the entrance. He crouched down behind it. The search-party, composed mostly of coastguardsmen, halted just outside the cave.

"Mr. Revelle—that was the gentleman's name; he's staying along with Mr. Winter—said the rope gave before he could get to him. He didn't have time to see much of the poor chap; but his clothes gave him the look of a seafaring man. He went over head first. He must have struck the water with a force enough to knock the life out of him. You see, the cliff hangs over a bit, and he'd fall clear of the rocks at the base. No, we'll have a look round for form's sake; but I'm afraid we shan't learn anything till the tide's run out, even if we do then—poor chap! He saved the poor young lady's life—at least, we hope it is saved. I'm told that she's terrible bad!"

Then the party scattered. No one thought of looking in the caves for the body of the man who had fallen from the cliff into the sea.

Scarsdale still crouched in his place of concealment. Revelle, always Revelle! So he had been the eye-witness of the "giving" of the rope!

"Giving!" It had been cut through! A fierce, mad hunger for revenge had seized Scarsdale when the words had reached him; but it was only momentary. What had followed had driven it from him. Revelle, revenge were forgotten.

"He saved the poor young lady's life—at least, we hope it is saved. I'm told that she's terrible bad!"

What was revenge, what was freedom compared with the life of the woman he loved!

And her life was in danger. Oh, but he must know more. And yet—he thought of his freedom now! To endeavour to find out meant risking it. To be captured meant to be torn from her irrevocably, dragged back to prison, where no news would reach him for months.

How was he to find out how it fared with Esther, and convey to her the news of his salvation from death? He was experiencing an agony more acute than he had ever previously suffered!

After the searchers had left the ledge he crept out, his wet clothes clinging coldly to his limbs, a wild, strange-looking figure, on the haggard, unshaved face the expression and the lines of an old man. The frightful experience that he had been through had strained every nerve fibre in his body. Time only would tone down the memory of it all.

He told himself that he could do nothing till after nightfall; then, somehow, he would, must find out how it fared with the woman he loved!

A FRIEND IN NEED.

When Gerald Phipps left the smoking-room, he had sauntered out of the house. He was—to use his own expression—feeling frightfully cut up about Miss Mansfield. He alone knew the solution of the mystery of the previous night, and since his interview with her that morning he had conceived an immense admiration for her. As he made his way up the road leading to the cliffs, he was again wondering if by any chance the unknown man who had saved her life could have been the escaped convict of the clandestine meeting of the night before. Had they perhaps arranged some subsequent meeting? He shook his head.

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"By Jove, but, if that were so, it would be most frightfully tragic!"

When he reached the scene of the disaster, a group of men and women was gathered round the tree, from which the rope had been removed. One or two folk, who counted not giddiness among their physical failings, were standing on the brink of the cliff, staring down. The young 'Varsity man paused for a moment, then passed on, and made his way down to the caves. The wind was rising. Seeking shelter behind a boulder, he sat himself down, and lighted a cigarette.

"By Jove!" he muttered, staring thoughtfully in front of him. "But this has cut me up awfully. Awfully splendid of her to stick to that fellow through thick and thin, good and bad report, and carry herself so pluckily. There must be a tremendous amount of fine stuff in him. I wish to goodness that I could have done something more to have helped her, I do, 'pon my word! And now this ghastly business! It's too ghastly for words!"

The grey shadows of evening were creeping up above the level of the horizon. The boulder that gave him shelter shut out all view of the caves behind him.

"She's a most awfully sweet girl, and I hope to Heaven that she will come through all right. Well, I suppose everybody will be clearing off to-morrow?"

A strange-looking figure was creeping out of one of the caves behind him. It moved towards the edge, and came to a standstill beside the boulder.

"Oh, God! Only to know!"

The words were spoken aloud in a strained, hoarse voice.

With a start, Phipps leant forward, and glanced round the boulder.

Not two yards away stood a man, hatless, his rough clothes shrunken. His hair was streaked with grey, his emaciated features furrowed like an old man's. His hands were clenched. He was staring out at the sea, all unconscious of anybody's near presence. There was a world of unmistakable tragedy in the man's attitude, in his expression. For many a day after, that figure haunted the young 'Varsity man.

"Esther!"

With the utterance of the name the brown hands had come together in a convulsive clasp.

A thought had already flashed upon Gerald Phipps, and he now knew, felt as certain as if the man himself had told him, that this was convict 35, Alec Scarsdale! And this actual glimpse of him had revealed to him in a moment, far more realistically than any newspaper account could have done, what the man had, and was suffering! He meant to help the fellow, do for him all that lay within his power.

"I say—er——"

Scarsdale started at the sound of the words spoken almost at his elbow. He took a backward step, a hunted, desperate glare conjured up in his eyes. His hands were clenched and ready to strike. Phipps had risen to his feet. He thrust his hands into his pockets by way of assuring the other of his pacific intentions.

"I say," he went on, "you needn't get flurried, don't you know. I—well—er—I mean to say that I haven't the slightest intention of giving you away!"

The sincerity of the rather incoherent speech was obvious. Scarsdale's hands relaxed.

"You know me?"

"I fancy so. You're Scarsdale!"

"Yes!"

"Was it you who saved Miss Mansfield's life—who went over the cliff?"

"I went over the cliff!" answered Scarsdale hoarsely. "You know her! For God's sake tell—tell me how she is? Quick, don't look at me like that, man! Tell me!"

"She's ill, very ill," was the low, quickly spoken answer, "but bear up, man! Not so ill that there's not hope."

Scarsdale reeled.

"And," went on Phipps rapidly, "and, as soon as she's—she's able to understand things, I'm going to see that she

All Colours and all Classes.

It is really amazing how far and wide an article travels when once the British public sets upon it the seal of merit. It appears from an interview with the manager of the Bile Bean Co., that orders are now daily received from the cold wastes of Siberia, from the burning plains around Khartoum, from the icy north, and from Equatorial Africa; from parched lands, and from the cool sea shore. Only yesterday orders were received and executed from the following widely distant places: Boulogne, Bombay, Trinidad, Barcelona, Morocco, Essequibo, Calcutta, Madras, Allahabad, Assam, Constantinople, Middleburg (Cape Colony), Foxton (New Zealand), Belgium, Malta, Ontario, Lucknow, Jamaica, St. Johns (Antigua Island, West Indies), Cape Town, and Lausanne.

As an example of the widely removed races and classes who daily use Bile Beans, the manager pointed out that two boxes drawn indiscriminately from those about to be posted were addressed—one to a poor native worker on the Slave Coast of Western Africa, and the other to a member of the British Government's Intelligence Department at Khartoum.

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learns that you're safe. I'll see to that! But, look here, people may be coming down on to the ledge at any moment. It's not safe to talk here. I know my way about the caves. Let's get into them!"

But Scarsdale had not heard the last part of the speech.

"As soon as she's able to understand—what do you mean?"

"She was delirious—when I left Gurlston Hall. But come into the caves. Don't give way, man; while there's life there's hope!"

"And I can't go to her!" whispered Scarsdale. "Can't be with her!"

He struck his forehead in his agony. Phipps took him by the arm.

"Come into the caves."

Scarsdale had found a friend—a friend who had been won over to his side by Esther.

It was quite dark when Gerald Phipps returned to the Hall. Under his buttoned-up coat, wrapped round his waist, he carried the portion of the rope that Scarsdale had taken with him over the cliff. His boyish face wore an expression of suppressed excitement. His first act was to ask after Esther. He was told that the fever still raged, that she recognised no one. Then he hurried away to his room, and locked away the piece of rope. Dinner, that evening, was a silent, sad meal. John Mansfield was not present. Most of the guests had already arranged for their departure on the morrow. When the gentlemen retired after dinner to the smoking-room, Phipps did not join them. He retired to his bedroom for a short time. When he emerged, he was wearing a loose "Raglan" overcoat, the pockets of which had rather a full look.

When he left the Hall, he again made his way up the hill towards the cliffs, a cigarette between his lips, endeavouring to bear himself unconcernedly. Between his bedroom and the front door he had encountered no one; but had anybody witnessed his departure and his return, some hour and a half later, he might have remarked upon the fact that, whereas Gerald Phipps had left wearing an overcoat, he returned without one.

Some quarter of an hour after his return a man, wearing a "Raglan" overcoat remarkably like that worn by the young 'Varsity man—when he left the Hall, passed down the road leading from the cliffs. When he reached the gates of Gurlston Hall, he slackened down, quickened again, as if undecided between two courses.

She was lying there, hovering between life and death. Only a stone's throw away, yet he must not go to her!

Scarsdale, wearing the clothes that Phipps had smuggled out of the house, money now in his pocket sufficient to carry him to London, came to a standstill.

It was folly, mad folly, to stop!

For Esther's sake—so the young 'Varsity man had told him—he must not refuse money; must get away and try to keep his freedom. It was right, theoretically, but when it came to the carrying out, terribly hard!

Scarsdale still stood motionless, as though a magnet riveted him to the ground.

To have to leave, not knowing!

He was moving again now; but not forward—across towards the gates.

It was madness to linger in that neighbourhood after what had happened only the night before. Phipps had begged him to go direct to the station. He was in the right; but the carrying of it out was terribly hard!

He reached the gates. Only the night before he had held her in his arms. He seemed to feel again her burning, loving kiss on his lips, and now she was lying in there——

He reeled like a drunkard! Dying perhaps, dying!

FACE TO FACE.

"It's been an eventful night and day, Revelle; but in both cases you've figured as the hero. It's most grievous about poor Miss Mansfield!"

Dinner was over. Winter, the friend with whom Revelle was staying, was a bachelor. Coffee and liqueurs had been served, cigars lighted.

Revelle was not looking himself as he stirred his coffee listlessly.

"Sympathy," went on his host, "is always hard to express in words; but you know that you have mine. We must hope for the best, old chap!"

Like many others, he had believed that an engagement between Revelle and Esther was only a matter of time.

Revelle drank his coffee and rose up.

"I know you'll excuse me," he said, "if I go round to the Hall; but the suspense is almost more than I can bear. I can't endure to be away from the place for long."

"Of course I should come with you, but I asked some fellows to drop in to-night for a game of billiards after dinner."

Not long after Revelle was walking limpingly towards Gurlston Hall. He had spoken the truth when he said that he could not bear to be away from the place for long. His suffering was real.

As he neared the gates he caught sight of a shadowy figure leaning upon one of them, its back turned to him. There was something indefinably suggestive of strain about the figure. He knew that, in consequence of the affair of last night, the police were keeping watch on the place, and it occurred to him that the man might be a detective.

It was only when Revelle was close upon him, so close that he was about to ask him to allow him to pass, that the man turned round with a little start as if just at that moment he had heard the sounds of Revelle's approach.

As he was in the act of moving away quickly, Revelle stared curiously into his face.

Simultaneously both men stopped dead.

Recognition had been instantaneous and mutual.

It was not often that Revelle exhibited signs of fear; but a look of terror flashed from his dilated eyes.

He was staring into the face of the man whom he believed he had removed from his path for ever.

Esther had driven all other thoughts from Scarsdale's mind, but there had been many a moment in the past, on the parade ground, in the cell, in the quarry, when he had prayed that it might be granted him to meet face to face the man who had so irreparably wronged him. That moment had come! His face was white and rigid as marble.

After having been torn from the woman he loved, degraded in the eyes of the world, after more than a year's soul and body breaking imprisonment, after what had happened, only that morning a-top of the cliff, Alec Scarsdale at last stood face to face with Seaton Revelle.

A moment of motionlessness and silence that seemed an eternity, then all the passion and hate, so long pent up, burst their dam, and, flooding the soul of the man who had been so frightfully injured, made him mad!

With a snarl like that of some animal, Scarsdale flew at Revelle's throat. The impact almost bore Revelle to the ground.

"Help!" he gurgled out, as a grip of iron tightened round his throat.

The two men seemed to become one.

But the gurgling cry had penetrated through an open window to the ears of a number of men who were smoking and talking together in low voices.

"That sounded like 'Help!'" cried one of them, springing to his feet.

There was a rush from the room.

Outside, when they reached the gates, they could see two figures in the middle of the road swaying together. They

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ASTHMA

WHY ? ? is it generally thought that there is no cure for **ASTHMA, CHRONIC BRONCHITIS, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, EMPHYSEMA, BLOOD-SPITTING, HAY FEVER,** and other Lung Complaints.

BECAUSE ! ! the usual treatments only confine themselves to combating single symptoms instead of attacking the root of the disease.

BE SURE THERE IS ONE

ABSOLUTE LASTING CURE.

Sufferers will receive post free,

FREE OF CHARGE,

particulars of the famous WEIDHAAS HOME TREATMENT when applying to THE PAUL WEIDHAAS HYGIENIC INSTITUTE, 16 T.A. Buckingham Rd., Brighton.

Mr. Weidhaas has tried the Treatment on himself, after having been given up as incurable, and cured himself, and had them practised it for over 19 years in many thousands of special cases. Many having suffered for over 40 years have been cured by his Treatment (in some instances even at the age of 70 or 80 years), after having been

GIVEN UP AS INCURABLE.

No interference with daily occupation if you suffer from **COLD FEET.** Send description of complaint, and mention this paper. Read the following Testimonial, one out of thousands received:

ASTHMA (8 Years' Standing) CURED.

Mrs. A. Buck, in applying for the Treatment for her son, said: "My boy, as a child, had croup, and when he was about 6 years of age he had whooping cough very bad. When the fits of coughing came on, sometimes blood used to spurt out of his mouth and nose, but since there has never been any blood in any way. When he was about 8 years of age he began to notice there was a tightness and wheezing if he ever exerted himself or got excited. From 12 to about 13½ years he had Asthma very bad. No sleep all night. I used to have to sit up with him. He could not lie down. Sometimes I have had to take him to the window to get breath, for he seemed at times as if he must be suffocated. The doctor used to give him some medicine, but nothing seemed to do him much good. Sometimes it comes on now if he gets a cold or over-exerts himself, or through a sudden change of weather from cold to heat. It comes on like a cold and he goes to bed and goes to sleep for about two or three hours, and then wakes up feeling very tight on the back and chest, and wheezing and shortness of breath."

W. BUCK (From a photo).

After a full course of the treatment, the patient writes, with a letter of thanks from Mrs. Buck: "I have been a great sufferer at times from Asthma. Often when attacks come on I could get no sleep for two or three nights, and often could not lie down, but had to be propped up with pillows. But I am very thankful to say that I am quite cured after 6 months of your wonderful treatment. I am sure I do not know how to thank you enough for all you have done for me in restoring me to health.—W. BUCK, 19,083 F., South Nutfield."

(Full address on application.)

The Director is prepared to pay

£1,000

to any Charitable Institution if the above is not a genuine extract from the patient's own letter. The original may be seen at the Paul Weidhaas Institute by any bona-fide enquirers.

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PACKETS OF 18 1/- FOR **KAPUTINE** THE SAFE REMEDY **HEADACHE** CURES IN 10 MINUTES.

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Packets of 18 doses 1/-. Samples 1d. of all Chemists and Stores, or post free from KAPUTINE Ltd., HUDDERSFIELD, for 12 stamps. Refuse dangerous substitutes. DEMAND KAPUTINE the SAFE Remedy.

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PUREST OF THE PURE. Sold Everywhere.

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DO YOU WANT A GOOD CYCLE?

Write for my Lists. I deal only in the **Best Coventry made Cycles,** and by contracting for thousands annually, I **BUY CHEAPLY** and **SELL CHEAPLY.**

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TINS 3d. 6d. 1s-BELLOWS 9d.

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NO MONEY REQUIRED.

Sell the thimbles at **2d.** each, making 4/- altogether, which forward to us, and we will send you at once the Guaranteed Timekeeper or other Presents of High-class Jewellery you have earned, and which you can select from our list sent with the "Sell-at-Sight" Thimbles, and we will also tell you how you can make a regular income of **£2 10s. per week.** Write to-day and we send to-morrow.

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HOME NOTES

(No. 450)

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SHAW'S GIFT This Handsome Blouse Free

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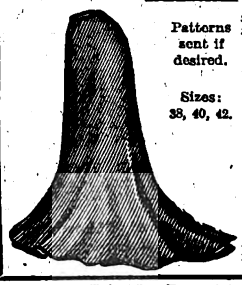
SILKETTE BLOUSE with a Detachable Collar, equal in appearance to silk, and wearing twice as long.

These skirts are cut in the very Latest Fashion.



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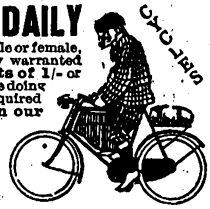

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Gets the Hair Back.

Puts the Hair Right.

Keeps the Hair Right.

WHO SAY SO.

COMMANDER T. WOLFE MURRAY, R.N.

"Trobridge, Crediton, June 18th, 1902.

"I have found 'Tatcho' of distinct benefit to my hair."

MAJOR-GENERAL KEATE.

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"I find the Renewer excellent, and better than anything I have ever tried in the course of a long life. I could not have believed that any preparation could do so much good in so short a time."

LADY SYKES writes:

"Mayfair, W.

"I can honestly recommend 'Tatcho.' It has really entirely renovated my hair."

PRINCESS EUGENIE CRISTOFORUS PALŒLOGUE writes:

"Belvedere Hotel, Kensington, W.

"I would not be without it on any account."

MRS. BROWN POTTER.

"I use only 'Tatcho.'"

A 4/6 FULL SIZE BOTTLE of Mr. Geo. R. Sims' "Tatcho" is supplied to enable you to test its value at the NOMINAL PRICE of 1/10 at all Chemists', Stores, and Hairdressers', or direct, carriage paid, from the "Tatcho" Depot, 81 Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn, London.

Sold by all Chemists and Stores throughout the world, in bottles at 1/-, 2/9, and 5/-.

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could hear their fierce panting for breath, the scuffling of their ever-shifting feet.

It was a short, but frightful struggle. As they darted out through the gates, they saw one of the two men forced down on to his knees, the whiteness about his chest proclaiming him to be in evening dress.

"Murder, help!" cried out one affrighted man, as a sickening thud told of a merciless blow driven home.

The man on his knees rolled over, the other plunged away into the darkness—Alec Scarsdale! His brain was reeling; he knew not what he was doing. He seemed another being, something beyond, outside himself. He was temporarily a madman! It was not cowardice that made him run. It was all inexplicable. In after years he could never quite recall all that had happened on that terrible night. The events were veiled in a hazy mist.

Some darted off in pursuit; others bent over the unconscious man in the road.

"Great Heaven!" gasped out a voice, "Seaton Revelle!" The cries of his pursuers rang out behind Scarsdale; but he seemed endowed with the strength of madness. The cries were becoming fainter; he was outdistancing his pursuers.

But, in consequence of the mysterious affair of the previous night, a couple of constables had been especially told off to patrol the neighbourhood of Gurlston Hall. They were stolidly tramping up the high-road when distant cries reached them, to be followed by the sounds of footsteps racing towards them.

"Quick, mate," cried one of the constables, "there's something up. Look out! Here he is! Stop him!"

Scarsdale bounded out of the darkness.

One of the constables flung himself upon him. Scarsdale shook himself free, and sent the man flying to the ground. But the other constable was upon him. He had whipped out his truncheon. It whirled through the air and descended with a crash.

Scarsdale rolled over on the road, stunned!

It had been but a brief spell of freedom—a tantalising, maddening glimpse of light about to be followed by a darkness more hopeless, more opaque, than before.

The evening papers of the next day blazoned forth the news that the notorious convict 35 had been recaptured, telling how by an extraordinary coincidence he had encountered the man who had originally unmasked his villainy, and had savagely attacked him. And the world read and wondered. But there was nothing in the papers, as yet, of how the recaptured convict had saved a woman's life, for it was not yet known, except to three persons, that it was convict 35 who had fallen from the cliff through the "giving" of a rope.

CRUMP THE CONSOLER.

"Will you please give this card to Mr. Mansfield, and ask that I may be allowed to speak with him on a matter of great importance!"

The footman glanced at the name on the card. It was "Penworthy."

"I don't suppose," he said, "that Mr. Mansfield will see you. Perhaps you don't know that Miss Mansfield is lying here terribly ill with brain fever!"

"Oh, but I do!" said the homely, sad-faced little man, who was standing in the porch of Gurlston Hall. "Oh, but I do! Will you please do as I ask you?"

"Well, just wait here, please!"

Crump sat himself down on a chair in the hall.

"It is all very dreadful!" he said to himself sadly, "very dreadful indeed!"

He took out a coloured pocket-handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"It is, I know, presumption on my part to intrude myself on an occasion like this. The dear child has her father with her—may God bless her—may God be pleased to spare her life!"

The coloured handkerchief failed to intercept a tear that fell to the floor.

John Mansfield was crossing the hall. Crump rose to his feet.

"Penworthy," said the banker, in a broken voice, "you can't have got my telegram—I have wired for you. My poor child in her delirium called for you. When she recovered consciousness she asked for you. You—you are a great favourite with her!"

"She is conscious now?" whispered Crump.

"Yes!"

(*The sequel to Scarsdale's fight is recorded next Tuesday.*)

OUR NEW SERIAL.

"Out of Great Tribulation" is now nearing its close, and we hope to announce particulars shortly of the extraordinarily novel and striking story which is to be its successor.

Your Old Friend Captain Kettle

RELATES STILL MORE OF HIS MARVELLOUS ADVENTURES IN

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN KETTLE.

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Please send me a copy of "Further Adventures of Captain Kettle," for which I inclose the sum of 8d.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Lovers' Quarrel.

"HOPELESS" has been in love for three years with a girl, and up to three months ago she appeared to return it. They then, however, had a quarrel, since which there has been coolness. She has now become very friendly with a girl, and never gives him an evening. The other day she told him that "she had not the same feeling for him as previously, though she still felt a little liking towards him."

* * * *

"HOPELESS" had better leave the girl alone for a few months. This will soon show whether the attitude she has taken up represents what she really feels towards him. Such affairs as this are often settled after the parties have consented to refrain from seeing each other for a while. What has happened is evidently that the quarrel has removed from "HOPELESS" the glamour he once enjoyed in the eyes of his sweetheart. Quarrels too often have that effect. That she still confesses to liking you suggests that there is really some hope for your getting back to your old relations. But let a month or so elapse and re-enter the fray armed with your most attractive demeanour, and watch for yourself whether or not your reappearance is a happiness to her.

A Pitched Battle.

"H. T. E. B." is in love. He does not claim this as an original situation, because a friend of his is also that way inclined. The curious part of it is that both are in love with the same girl. But while the girl always smiles sweetly upon, and talks intimately with "H. T. E. B.," she does not appear to care particularly for the other fellow. He (the other fellow), however, appears to regard himself as a sort of Lord Protector of the girl, and severely jumps on her (metaphorically—they are not yet married) if she shows any partiality for anyone else.

Between all this the girl does not get much amusement, for while "H. T. E. B." has not as yet dared to ask her out because of the other fellow, the other fellow never takes her out anywhere. All the while the girl wants a holiday badly. Should "H. T. E. B." offer his services as escort?

* * * *

Seeing that the other fellow is not engaged to the girl, and apparently does not stand very well in her estimation, "H. T. E. B." would seem to have as clear a field for operations as is given to most men. He should certainly offer to take her somewhere, if she really is in need of it, and the refusal should be in her hands. A man cannot lose anything by showing himself anxious to please a girl. If the other fellow has anything to say in the matter, he is open to the obvious reply that she is not in any way bound to him, and can accept any invitation she likes. As to the final assault and capture of the position by "H. T. E. B.," he should proceed on the ordinary rule that "all's fair in love and war," and if he sees any way by which he can outdo his rival, it is his affair to see to it. As I have said many times before, there is an old proverb about "faint heart," which "H. T. E. B." should repeat to himself when in doubt.

The Old Love.

"T. R. F." fell in love with a certain girl two years ago. They then had a misunderstanding, and parted. A few months back they met again. He thought she would have been cold to him. Instead of this she greeted him in the most friendly way, and was most agreeable. He saw her often afterwards, and she was always amiable. But try as he may, he could not get her to renew his previous intimacy. When he suggested it, she told him not to speak of such matters. Do I think her love is the same as before, or that it has died away?

* * * *

Probably "T. R. F.'s" friend is a sensible girl with a nice disposition, who simply feels friendly towards him, in spite of their old misunderstanding. Evidently she no longer feels deeply towards him, or would have shown it by some renewal of their old relations. He had better cultivate her simply as a friend, and in time will soon learn whether or not she has any love remaining for him.

Arms and the Girl.

"F, S." writes: "On which arm should you escort a lady?"

* * * *

This all depends where you are. If on the left-hand side of the street in which you are walking, give her the arm furthest from the kerbstone. If you are taking her downstairs to supper, give her the arm nearest the wall, as the lady should walk on the inside. At a dance, give her your left arm, as most ladies like to cling on with their right arm. If you are in a remote country lane or by the silent sea shore (and are on pressing terms with the lady) I believe the right arm generally goes round the waist best.

America for the English Girl.

"ENA" is, she tells me, an attractive and accomplished girl, but as yet has not met any man in a position to make her happy. She has two brothers in St. Louis, U.S.A., who are doing well in business. They want her to go out and join them there. Do I think it would be a good place for an English girl to reside in, from the point of view of matrimony, or, failing that, for making an independent living?

* * * *

I certainly think "ENA" might with advantage go out there. An attractive English girl is certainly likely to be appreciated by the natives of the Southern States, and possibly "ENA" would soon meet with the right man. As to her making an independent living, the opportunities for women in America are supposed to be much greater than in England, and with brothers already there, probably "ENA" would find the task of getting work much easier.

The Young Lover.

"M. N." is a young man of eighteen earning a very small salary. He is, however, greatly enamoured of a young lady about three or four years his senior. Shall he declare his love now or wait till he is in a position to marry the lady of his heart?

* * * *

If "M. N." is sufficiently philosophical about the matter to ask my advice upon it, he should certainly see that it is far better to postpone any proposal of marriage. As to whether or not he should declare his love, that must depend on how he feels. Most men would find, that, if they were really in love, they must declare it, let the consequences be what they may. "M. N." is evidently not one of these men, for he has the good sense to hesitate. Let him carry that good sense further, and devote his mind to getting on in the world. That is the main problem for a youth of eighteen.

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and we will forward you catalogue, and if we are able to accept your order we will send on the machine at once, or as soon as it can be built, without a penny more. Machines can be seen at the address below, where critical inspection is most cordially invited. All communications must be addressed and remittance made out to—

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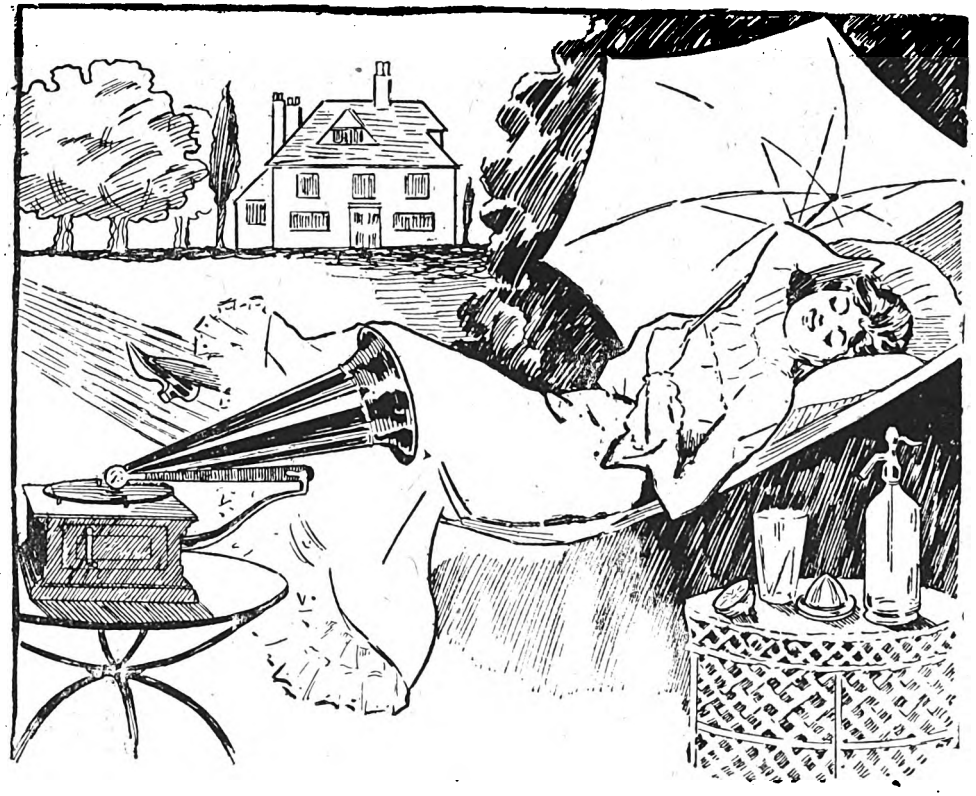

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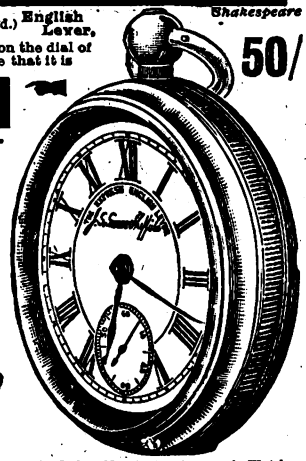

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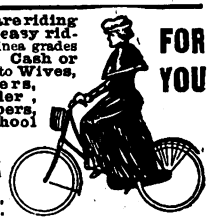

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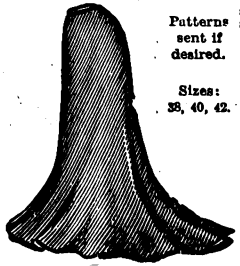

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Short Stories

No. 714.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending September 6th, 1902.

The Mystery of Trebarven House.

"Help! help! help!" The cry rang out upon the still night air, and I reined up my horse sharply and listened intently. For hours I had been driving across what seemed in the darkness an almost interminable expanse of moor, and the silence of the night had been absolutely unbroken until that cry fell across it. The sound was blood-curdling, fearful, coming as it did upon the stillness and loneliness of the great moor, and I could not refrain from shuddering a little as I sat listening intently for what was to follow.

My horse pawed the ground impatiently; the sound of his hoofs upon the road seemed positively thunderous in the surrounding quietness that could almost be felt.

No glimmer of light showed from the sky, the day had been heavy and sultry, black clouds covered the heavens, and a storm brooded over the land. The air was breathlessly warm, and the moisture it contained made me realise that I could not be far from the sea, though for many miles I had been aware that I had lost my bearings, and was driving on in the vague hope of coming upon a human dwelling-place before the storm broke.

"Help!" The cry rang out again, and I strained my ears to catch the direction from which it came.

"Help!" Once more the word was borne to me, but more faintly, and coming from a little further to my left than I had at first thought.

The voice was that of a woman, and a woman evidently in great fear or danger, and, without a moment's delay, I scrambled from my dog-cart, tied my horse (as well as the darkness and my lamps would allow me) to the rough fence that bordered the road, and then dashed off in the direction from which the cry had proceeded.

Striking across the fence, I stumbled over the broken ground, my progress necessarily slow because of the holes and mounds, not to mention the clumps of gorse and tussocks of heather with which the moor abounded.

Presently there struck upon my ears a sound which made me pause in my headlong career. The muffled thunder of surf upon rocks far below brought me to a sudden standstill, and I confess that I was bathed in cold sweat from head to foot, as it flashed across me that I must have been rushing pell-mell towards the edge of a cliff.

This moorland, I knew, ran parallel to the sea, and to the awful black cliffs which made the coast a terror to mariners, but I had not realised until this moment how near the road went to the edge of the cliffs, and I stood for an instant in horror-stricken dismay, listening to the terrible booming of those unseen waves hundreds of feet beneath.

"Oh, help!"

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The voice seemed nearer to me—much nearer, and it appeared to come from that black gulf which, now that my eyes had grown more accustomed to the darkness, I saw yawning only a few yards ahead of me.

Could any human being possibly be there—over the cliff edge, in the yawning chasm which had the sea for its bottom? Could the cry really have come from those depths? I crept cautiously on; and, just as I was nearing the verge of the abyss, a flash of lightning illuminated earth and sky and sea.

Yes; and sea!

Far, far below, almost at my very feet, I could see the black water tossing and foaming over the blacker rocks, and fretting itself against the smooth, black cliff that went sheer, sheer down into the churning waves.

Beyond, stretched the wide expanse of ocean; above, was the stormy midnight sky; around me on every hand the dreary moorland; and on a tiny spar of rock, that jutted halfway down the precipice, I saw, in that moment's flash of light, a woman's form.

Throwing myself flat down upon the short grass on which I stood, I peered down into the blackness.

"Tell me what I can do to help you," I shouted. "I am a stranger, I do not know the country hereabouts; are you far down?"

In spite of the roar of the waves, my voice carried to that jutting rock, and a woman's voice replied:

"I cannot hold on much longer! I could reach a rope; I am not too far down for that."

A rope? I did not go for a driving tour carrying ropes with me, and on all that great moor I had not passed a human habitation since seven in the evening. An idea suddenly struck me.

"I will come back quickly!" I shouted down again. "Wait for me."

Then, I tore back over the moor, told aright by my horse's pawing hoofs, snatched my carriage rug from its place; by the light of the lamp knotted my coat to the rug, and was preparing to tear open my Gladstone and find other articles of clothing to lengthen the chain, when I heard the rumble of wheels, saw the gleaming of lights, and a second later a motor car was rushing by. I hailed its occupants loudly, almost screaming to them to stop, and they pulled up, with what struck me was evident reluctance.

"Come and help me!" I panted. "A woman has fallen over the cliff; there is not a moment to lose!"

"Woman over the cliff!" snarled a man's voice; whilst a feminine shriek chimed in, and a gruff bass exclaimed:

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"Well! we can't let a woman stay out on the cliffs, even though there is a storm coming on!"

The last voice was plainly that of the driver, and I heard the first speaker snap out:

"You're a fool, John!" Then the trio emerged from the darkness into the circle of light thrown by their lamps, and I saw a gentleman of perhaps forty-five years; a singularly handsome woman ten years or more his junior, and a man-servant—whose appearance I liked best of all.

"I've got a rope here!" he said, "come on, mister!" and, leaving the other two beside their snorting carriage, he and I ran across the moor, and this time I took the precaution of carrying with me one of my lamps.

At the edge of the cliff both the coachman and I lay flat down and peeped over the dizzy height, and I again called to the woman below.

Her answer was very faint, but her voice was quite audible, and the man beside me exclaimed in horror-stricken accents:

"Why, 'tis Miss Mamie! Good Lord deliver us!".

There was no time to ask who Miss Mamie might be; we dared not risk a second's delay, but immediately lowered the lamp and the rope together in the direction from which the cry for help had come. Around us all was black darkness; the only relief to it in the whole wide horizon, that speck of light travelling slowly, slowly down the side of the cliff.

Our end of the rope we attached to the bent, gnarled stump of a tree against which our feet had struck; and when, after what seemed long ages, a voice from the gulf below called: "Pull me up, now!" The coachman and I tugged at the rope for all we were worth.

Never had I experienced such moments of sick suspense as those that followed, before at last we lifted the form of the woman we had rescued over the edge of the cliff, and laid her on the grass at our feet.

She was young and very lovely; these two facts at once revealed themselves to me, as I lifted the carriage lamp and looked into her face.

Her eyes, though wide with terror, were of a wonderful blue; her hair that had come unbound, fell round her in rippling waves of gold; even the whiteness of her face could not detract from her great beauty.

"Why, Miss Mamie," my companion said, "whatever has happened?"

"Don't ask me," she moaned, "it was too awful! He—— But don't ask me!" and her eyes closed wearily.

Lifting her gently from the grass, my fellow-rescuer and I carried her as well as we could over the broken ground to the road, where the owner of the motor and the lady with him were in earnest conversation.

As we bore our burden into the light, both the man and woman uttered a cry of horror.

"Mamie!" they exclaimed simultaneously, and apparently in overwhelming amazement. "What can have happened? Mamie—*here?*"

I glanced at the face of the man as he spoke, and I could have sworn that a look of disappointed malice shot out of his eyes. Yet I assured myself the next moment that I must have been mistaken, for he came forward and wrung my hand warmly, saying:

"How can I ever thank you enough, sir? This girl you have saved from an awful death, is my wife's sister—her half-sister, to be correct. How could she have fallen over a cliff on such a night? How was she here at all? Whatever the explanation is, I thank you deeply, sir, for your help!"

"Yes, indeed," put in the lady eagerly; "we cannot be grateful enough to you—Mr.——"

She paused, and I said:

"My name is Renshaw—Brian Renshaw."

"Then, Mr. Renshaw, you must come home with us at once, and allow us to offer you what hospitality we can," she cried.

Was it fancy, or did a look of annoyance, even of anger, cross her husband's face? I could not decide, but I determined on the instant that I would accept their invitation and probe a little further into the mystery of Miss Mamie's accident.

She, meanwhile, had been laid in the motor car and covered with a rug, and in a very few minutes we all set out for the house of my new acquaintances, the motor leading the way, and I following in my dog cart.

To my surprise we did not go in the direction in which the motor had been going, but in one exactly opposite, and I wondered what these strange people could have been doing on so stormy and dreary a night, apparently driving aimlessly across the moor.

My speculations came to an abrupt conclusion when, after driving for about a mile, we reached a house standing quite alone upon the moor.

Here we all descended, and it was my privilege to help the coachman carry the senseless form of Miss Mamie into the building. A little involuntary shiver ran through me as we entered the stone hall, there was something so sinister, so forbidding, so grim in the whole aspect of the place.

A woman servant came forward and conducted us upstairs to a bedroom, where we laid our burden on the bed, and left her to the charge of the servant, a harsh-featured creature, to whom I took an instant dislike.

In the passage outside the room I whispered to the coachman, who struck me as being the most friendly and kindly person I had yet seen belonging to the establishment, "What is the name of this house, and of that young lady?" I nodded towards the room we had left, "and of the master?"

"The master's name is Jones—plain Jones," he said with a grim smile, "but Miss Mamie, her name is Trebarven—she's a Cornishwoman. The house——" He broke off abruptly, as a step sounded on the stairs, adding hurriedly under his breath:

"I wouldn't stay here long if I was you, mister."

* * * * *

"And now that you have had a night's rest, Mr. Renshaw, would you like to see our queer Cornish abode?"

It was my hostess who spoke, smiling down the breakfast-table at me, and looking wonderfully handsome in the morning sunshine that flooded the room.

"I should immensely like to see it," I answered. "You are most curiously situated here. I seemed to look sheer into the sea from my window."

"Yes—yes, sheer into the sea—sheer into the sea," chimed in my host, a smile creeping over his features, that gave me a most unaccustomed and unpleasant sensation down my spine. "Overbalance yourself there and you'd never be heard of again," and he laughed so strange, so diabolical a laugh that I glanced at him nervously. I noticed a look of apprehension in his wife's eyes, and the thought shot into my mind that the man could not be quite sane.

However, the next instant he was talking easily and pleasantly, and I derided myself for my ridiculous fancies. No one could have had a more kindly and attentive host and hostess than were Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and yet I had an uneasy sensation of being constantly under supervision, and of living in an uncomfortable, almost weird atmosphere.

My inquiries for Miss Trebarven were met by polite assurances that she was recovering from the shock, that she had explained that the accident had happened because she missed her way in the darkness and fell over the cliff—that their anxiety about her was diminishing—and so on, and so on.

But I did not feel altogether satisfied, though why, I could not explain even to myself, and I fear I took but scanty interest in the tour of the place upon which my host insisted on taking me.

There were evidences of wealth and luxury in the house and its surroundings, but the whole establishment gave me a

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sensation of dreariness and remoteness which impressed me unpleasantly.

We seemed to be at the very end of the earth—as indeed it was, for the house was actually built on a promontory of land surrounded by the sea on three sides, whilst on the fourth stretched the boundless moor.

I was longing to see again the lovely girl I had helped to rescue on the previous night, and it was this longing alone which prevented me from bidding the Jones farewell and taking my departure. But something stronger than I was impelled me to remain, and Mrs. Jones cordially urged me to do so.

I did not like Mrs. Jones. Handsome as she was, gracious as were her manners, hospitable as she appeared to be, she reminded me too much of some kind of beautiful reptile to be altogether congenial. For her husband I entertained a mingled feeling of repulsion and fear, of which I was heartily ashamed, yet which I could not shake off.

It was late in the afternoon of the day after my arrival when I at last saw Miss Mamie Trebarven again, and then I met her by chance upon the stairs.

She looked like some pale and beautiful ghost as she came slowly down, dressed in a soft, white evening gown, her big eyes full of an indefinable fear, her cheeks as white as her dress.

When she saw me a tide of crimson flamed over them, her eyes dilated a little, she put out her hand and touched my sleeve.

"God bless you!" she whispered, "you saved my life. God bless you!"

"I hope you have recovered from the shock?" I said. "How did it all happen? It was a merciful thing I was driving by. Did you slip over?"

"Hush—don't let them hear you talking to me;" she whispered again, looking fearfully round her. "You must not stay here. Go—go at once—why did you come?"

Her manner was so strange that I began to think that I had come into a household of lunatics, but the earnest gravity of her eyes forbade the thought, and making up my mind that she was overwrought after her accident, I replied:

"I came because your brother-in-law and sister kindly invited me. I am taking a driving tour, had lost my way, and was thankful for shelter last night. I am doubly thankful now for having lost my way, and found you!" My voice dropped as I said the words. How could I help saying them, with that lovely face so close above me—those beautiful eyes looking wistfully into mine.

"Hush!—Oh, hush!" she cried, "You must not stay here. Go away soon. Last night was no accident—it——"

Before the sentence ended she had left my side and sped up the landing again, and I heard my host's voice in the hall speaking to his wife.

They had just emerged from the library, and were talking in low, earnest tones, quite unconscious of my proximity.

"If that failed there are other means," Mr. Jones was saying, "but why did you ask this infernal, prying fellow, Renshaw, to stay on? He may see too much!"

"Not he!" his wife's voice answered. "I think I am clever enough to—do as I have done before," and she laughed a low laugh that made my blood run cold, "and I intend to help you get rid of her!"

I heard no more, but turned and ran swiftly upstairs again, and as I stood in my room looking out over the sea, a strange resolve took possession of me.

"I shall stay here for a few days," I said to myself. "Here is some mystery, and I believe *she* is in danger."

There was only one "she" in the world for me at that moment. I had always hitherto scoffed at those who spoke of love at first sight, but now I knew that they only spoke truth, for my whole heart had gone out to Mamie Trobarven. I loved her better than my life.

She was one of the party at dinner that evening, and both Mr. and Mrs. Jones were assiduous in their inquiries about her feelings, and questioned her closely as to the cause of the accident.

"How came you out so late, dear?" her sister asked, fixing her gleaming eyes upon the girl's white face.

Mamie's blue eyes dilated, her lips quivered.

"I—you knew I went to see poor old Granny Hale," she said.

"Yes, of course I knew that"—Mrs. Jones' voice was very smooth—"but I thought you would have been home earlier. Hubert and I were so anxious at last that we drove out to find you."

Remembering the pace they were going when I met them, and their apparent surprise at recognising Mamie when we carried her up from the cliff, I doubted this statement.

"And you missed your way and slipped over the cliff?" Mr. Jones here interrupted, in so authoritative a tone, and with such a glitter in his sinister eyes, that I could not wonder when the girl faltered out—whether it was the truth or no:

"Yes—yes, that was it, I—I missed my way and slipped over."

The subject was then changed, but throughout the meal I noticed how often my host's eyes seemed to hold Mamie's as a cat's flame holds a fascinated bird, and a deadly fear appeared to oppress the poor girl.

When dinner was over we returned to the drawing-room, through whose open windows we could see the sea stretching up to the moonlit sky.

My hostess talked to me—talked as I have seldom heard a woman do—brilliantly, charmingly, gracefully, with a fascination of manner and voice as delightful as it is rare.

A man would not be human who had not yielded to its subtle charm and to her rich beauty, and I felt that I had greatly misjudged her in supposing that *she* could possibly have a hand in any mysteries or nefarious schemes. Besides, was she not Mamie's sister? The sister of my fair, sweet love, who sat a little apart, looking out upon the moonlight, which threw an unearthly radiance over her loveliness.

What then was my amazement when, as I handed her a bedroom candlestick before she went upstairs, she whispered under her breath:

"For God's sake go. Danger is all round you!" There was no time for more. Mrs. Jones was beside us again, and Mamie was saying "Good night," with downcast eyes.

But what did her warning mean? What was the secret of the strangeness I felt all about me, yet could not define? And what danger could possibly lurk here for *me?*

* * * * * * *

The next day passed without incident, though I was over on the watch; but for what I was watching I had no idea. Only I was convinced that some mystery wrapped me round. I had an uneasy conviction that Mr. Jones was not altogether sane, and I observed two other facts which did not tend to reassure me. One, that I was never allowed to be alone with Mamie for a single instant; the other, my friend the coachman had disappeared from the scene, and that all my inquiries about him failed to elicit any but the vaguest replies.

My hostess became daily more fascinating to me, but though I involuntarily admired her, she repelled me, the more so that I saw she, in some way, frightened her sister.

With the latter I was more and more deeply in love every day, and the bare thought of leaving her was impossible to contemplate. My host and hostess daily pressed, nay, urged me to remain, and sometimes I dared to hope that my feeling for Mamie was returned. Her eyes would occasionally meet mine with a wistful expression in them that seemed to mean more than mere friendliness.

One night as I was preparing for bed, a faint knock sounded on my door, and the next moment a note was thrust under it. The note read as follows:

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"Please be warned. Go to-morrow, for my sake. Beware of my sister.—Mamie."

This extraordinary document I at first put down to my poor love's over-wrought nerves, then I began to believe that something serious lay beneath it, and to ponder upon the advisability of acting on the warning it contained.

But I have never been a coward; I could not flee from an imaginary danger, and, above all, I could not leave the girl I adored! And, after all, I reflected, what possible harm could come to me—a strong, vigorous man in the prime of health and youth?

I was soon to know the truth.

Before dinner that evening, as I sat alone in the library, Mrs. Jones entered, dressed in one of her most superb evening gowns, and with a charming smile, said to me:

"Mr. Renshaw, I have an immense favour to ask of you. I have heard you say you are accustomed to handling locks; the lock of my bureau has suddenly gone wrong. Would you help me with it?"

I willingly followed her, and she ushered me into a tiny octagonal room in which I had never been before.

A bureau stood in one corner, the rest of the furniture consisted only of a chair and table. Hardly was I inside than I heard the door shut sharply behind me, and looking round I found I was alone! Almost at once a small panel was slid back in the door and Mrs. Jones' beautiful face appeared at it, full of a mocking malice and diabolical wickedness.

"Never was a fly so easily caught!" she said, laughing fiendishly. "Did you think we kept you here, and pressed you to stay, for your pleasure? We have found out since your coming that you are rich, Mr. Renshaw. You are not the first man who has sat in that room, and waited for his doom. The floor is a sliding one; presently I shall touch a spring, the floor will slide from under you, and you will find yourself dropped quietly upon the rocks three hundred feet below—unless——" she paused, whilst I looked round me blankly—"you sign that paper on the bureau, promising never to say a word of what has occurred here, and unless you write a cheque, payable to me, of ten thousand pounds. Your cheque book is there, you have fifteen minutes to decide."

The panel was closed. I was alone. Like a caged beast I glared round me. The door was locked; of the four windows in the room three looked out across the sea, from the fourth I could see the gate, the drive, and the road over the moor. Means of escape there was absolutely none. The room jutted out from the rest of the building, and was built directly over the seething water and sharp rocks, hundreds of feet below. It was easy enough to believe in the sliding floor—the deadly fall—and then——

Yet to lend myself to this hideous system of blackmail went against every instinct.

I paced the floor restlessly, revolving scheme after scheme in my mind, to reject them all.

Five minutes passed! I looked at the paper on the table, and at my cheque book, evidently purloined from my room. Then I heard a low sobbing breath outside the door.

"Are you there?" Mamie whispered.

"Yes, my darling," I said with unfaltering voice.

"I tried to warn you," she answered, "I tried——"

Her voice died away, I could hear her descending the stair and in another moment Mrs. Jones' face appeared at the panel in the door.

"Have you decided?" she said, with again that awful smile.

"I will not sign your paper nor the cheque," I said firmly.

"Very well," she sneered, "in a few minutes more you will know what those rocks feel like. You——"

She broke off suddenly, I heard her steps descending, and then she returned swiftly.

"There is a pleasure in store for you," she cried. "My husband is going to give my sister a treat. He is going to send her for a drive in the motor car, and—and you will see what you will see. Perhaps she will join you on the rocks. Watch."

With fast beating heart, and in an agony of terror at her sinister words, I rushed to the window overlooking the entrance, my own danger forgotten in my horror at the ominous tone in Mrs. Jones' voice.

There, drawn up at the door, I saw the motor, snorting and puffing impatiently, and there beside it, her face ashy white, stood Mamie. Mr. Jones was tying her arms with cords, talking rapidly the while, and gesticulating wildly. I could see that Mamie was pleading with him unavailingly, and I tore impotently at the wooden sill craving to go to her help.

Next I saw Mrs. Jones come out upon the drive, and join her husband in taunting her sister. Some of her words of hateful jeering were wafted up to me.

And then a most unforeseen thing happened. Without a second's warning Mr. Jones began tearing from Mamie's arms the cords he had placed there, and rapidly transferring them to his wife's. Madness gleamed in his eyes, madness rang in his laugh, madness was in his voice, as he cried:

"Not Mamie, but you! We will see—we will see. Come along!" Heedless of her cries, her remonstrances, her shrieks, and of Mamie's endeavours to prevent his action, he forced the wretched woman into the car, fastened her in securely, mounted himself, and in another moment they whirled away along the road. My eyes watched them with a stare of fascination, and what was my horror when, a few yards from the gate, I saw the madman turn the vehicle sharply over the grass and in the direction of the cliff. In his wild efforts he overbalanced himself and fell headlong to the earth, but the machine dashed on, on, on, and I could see how the woman inside it shrank back and shut her eyes, that she might not see her awful advancing fate.

At headlong, ghastly speed the car tore over the grass, to the cliff's edge, tottered, swayed for one instant, and then vanished for ever into the depths below!

* * * * * * *

Mamie rescued me from that awful doom, fetching a man to batter in the door and let me out; and Mamie has been my wife for a year, but I cannot even now let her speak of all these horrors. Trebarven House, it transpires, had been hers, as also a large sum of money, coveted by her sister and her sister's husband. They had made more than one attempt on the girl's life, one of which had been to thrust her over the cliff, from which I rescued her. They had also tried to use her as a decoy for their nefarious schemes, but in this they failed, and Mrs. Jones put forth all her own fascination to entrap rich men to the house, and rob them, as they had tried to rob me. Without a doubt long years of wickedness had rendered Hubert Jones insane, and his sudden fall from the car in that culminating moment of madness brought what was the merciful release of death.

John, the coachman, who had been skilfully convoyed away lest he should help Mamie and me, is now in our service; the grim place by the sea and moor was sold, after we had pulled down the octagon room and its sliding floor. The woman who lies beneath the rolling waves, the man who is buried in a distant churchyard, can trouble us no more—with them has died, too, the mystery of Trebarven House.

L. G. Moberley.

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Mrs. Major.

The Girl who Loved a Grey-haired Soldier.

"Did you notice how well and happy Mrs. Major looked?"

That question rose to the lips of many of the people of the village of Saxton as they wended their way homewards from the church after the morning service. The carriage containing the Major and his young wife had passed the straggling groups of church-goers one by one and had been lost in the direction of Hatley Manor.

"Mrs. Major?" queried a relative from another part of the country, turning to his sister-in-law, who had made the remark. "Do you mean that lady who has just passed us in the carriage? The girl—I mean the young woman—who sat in the pew by the side of that elderly, military-looking gentleman with the grey hair? Why do you call her that? She isn't——"

"Yes, she is!" interrupted the other. "She is his wife, and a happier couple you couldn't find all over the Eastern counties, or anywhere else. That's as true as the gospel you've heard preached this very morning. They say it's curious how they came to be married, and I'll tell you what they say when we're having dinner."

The good woman's brother was not the only person who was surprised, interested and moved by the story of the marriage of Beatrice Davenport and Major Hatley, the distinguished officer, now on the retired list. Some people had said, on hearing the announcement of the forthcoming wedding, that snow and roses did not go well together, but time had falsified their predictions in this instance, and had those people known more of the inner mystery of the match, they would have refrained from making the gloomy prophecy.

Major Hatley and Mr. and Mrs. Davenport had been friends together before the marriage of the Davenports, so the Major was a welcome visitor to their house whenever he chanced to be in England. During the first two years of their married life they saw very little of him, as the young lieutenant was away on active service, but he came to see them immediately on his return. Little Trixie was then about a year old, and surprised everyone by holding out her baby arms to the officer after a short scrutiny. From that time they were good friends, and as she grew older her liking for the officer appeared to increase. So confidential did they become that Trixie, at the age of three, informed him that she would marry him when she was old enough, which sent the young officer into a fit of laughter.

Trixie looked a little hurt, so Lieutenant Hatley smoothed his face and said gravely: "Very well, little woman! I'll marry you. Make haste and grow up!"

The child's fondness for the bronzed officer became quite noticeable, and the remark made by her was told as a good joke, but the little girl repeated the statement several times at short intervals during the next six months. Then Lieutenant Hatley's regiment was ordered to Afghanistan, for a time the child made inquiries for her friend, but gradually the old association seemed to fade away, and the incident was forgotten by Mr. and Mrs. Davenport.

The years went by. Lieutenant Hatley became Captain and Major, and returned with his regiment to the old country. He had not heard much of the Davenports during his stay in the East, and he was unable to trace them at first, but he at length met Mr. and Mrs. Davenport by accident on a Rhine steamer during a tour on the Continent.

The meeting was a pleasant one for both sides, and, when cordial greeting had been exchanged, the Major asked:

"And what about my little friend, Trixie? She is getting to be quite a woman now, and has forgotten me, I expect?"

"She is studying at a German High School for Girls, and she will go to a Parisian school to finish," replied her mother with a touch of pride. "She is turned fifteen now, you know, Major. But you are wrong to suppose that she has forgotten you. She asked after you when we saw her the other day, and was glad to learn that you had attained the rank of Major."

"Oh, she hasn't forgotten you, Dick!" chimed in Mr. Davenport. "Are you home for long?"

"I am having a short holiday," responded the soldier, "but I shall be off again soon, as I expect to receive an administrative appointment in Egypt. I am sorry not to have the opportunity of seeing my faithful friend, Trixie," he added with a smile, "but that is a pleasure that must be reserved for a future occasion."

They spent a day or two together, seeing some of the sights of the Rhine district, and then the Major returned to England. A week later he was off to Egypt, to remain there for four years.

Those four years made a great change in Trixie. She was nineteen, and a charming specimen of budding womanhood. She had been presented and was "out," and her father and mother were anticipating with that pleasant fear peculiar to such circumstances, that their lovely daughter would be demanded of them by some eligible member of the highest society.

However, Trixie passed through six weeks of the season without meeting anyone who could capture her maiden heart; she refused two offers, each of which would have given delight to Mr. and Mrs. Davenport. In one case she would have had a title.

"They do not appeal to you, my dear?" asked her mother, when she learnt of the second refusal. "Well, we do not wish to lose you, and you must not accept anyone if you doubt the prospect of happiness with him. There is time enough."

"I shall not leave father and you, dear mamma!" declared Trixie softly. "I shall not marry at all, I believe."

"Ah!" exclaimed her father, who had entered in time to overhear the last remark. "Wait till Mr. Right comes, and then we shall see! I say, what do you think?" he continued, addressing both ladies. "I've had a letter from Hatley, he is giving up his appointment and is coming back to take up his residence at Hatley Manor. The people there will be glad to have the place occupied; it's so much better for them. It is a great pity that so many of our country seats are unoccupied. But the strange part of it is—our new home is only five miles away from Hatley. So we shall see the Major pretty often, I suppose."

Trixie's cheeks were a trifle more rosy as she listened to the concluding words. Suddenly her father turned to her.

"You will see your old friend again, Trixie. How long is it since you saw him? Nearly sixteen years! He asked after you when we met him on the Rhine, you remember? He will require an introduction to you now, for he won't know you. I wonder if you would recognise him?"

"I saw his portrait, father, when we were at the Ryles. I think I should recognise him by that," answered Trixie with an awkward laugh.

"Ryle saw him in Cairo three months ago," pursued Mr. Davenport, "and he tells me that the Major's hair has grown quite iron grey. Let me see! He must be forty-five

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or forty-six. Well, I'll write and tell him where our place is and that we shall *all* be glad to see him!"

So Major Hatley came home, the Manor having been set in order for him and servants engaged. His first visit was to the Davenports, where he saw his former small friend and companion in the form of a beautiful young woman, tall, graceful, charming. He was a man of the world, but it took him a second or two to recover himself sufficiently to make a remark.

That was the first of many visits; being old friends, as well as neighbours, it was but natural that they should visit frequently.

Trixie went out for drives and walks with the Major as with one whom her parents could trust to take care of their daughter without arousing criticism, and so the time spent in the country passed agreeably enough.

"You ought to marry, Dick," said Mr. Davenport one day, while discussing a cigar. "That's a fine old place of yours, and it wants a mistress to complete. I consider that you are not keeping up the reputation of the Manor, and are depriving some woman of a good husband by remaining single. Why don't you look about for one?"

Major Hatley was silent for a while. When he spoke his voice had just a trace of sadness in its tone.

"I daresay you are right," he said, "but the difficulty would be to find a woman who would take me and whom I liked."

"Well, well," laughed Mr. Davenport, "there is a wide field for selection, and you have time enough to look about!"

The subject was then changed, Mr. Davenport congratulating himself on having given Dick something to think about.

The Davenports and the Major went to London for the winter, but the Davenports returned to the country before the Major went back to the Manor. It was during this extra sojourn in London that an incident occurred which had the effect of changing the course of two lives. The Major met old Colonel Wallis, who had been his superior officer at one time in India, and the latter asked a favour.

"It's like this, old fellow," said the Colonel familiarly. "My boy, Arthur, is quite in love with Miss Beatrice Davenport. He's a good lad, and he will have a fair amount of money when his uncle dies, his great-uncle I ought to say. You know all about that affair, Hatley, it ought to come to me, but I rather offended the old boy, and he's going to give it to Arthur. It's all the same. Well, Arthur wouldn't be a bad match for Miss Davenport. But he wants a good opportunity, he couldn't get a real fair chance among all the fellows who crowded about her. That is why I come to you."

The Major did not quite see the drift of the conversation, but his old comrade's words were making him think.

"So," went on the other, "I thought I would ask you if you would invite him to stay with you for a fortnight. I know that the Manor is not far from the Davenport's country house, and that you are always seeing them; that would throw Arthur into her society, and he would have the field almost to himself. At the same time, the fact of his being with you would act as a recommendation with Miss Davenport."

"I don't think I have much influence over Miss Davenport," protested Major Hatley.

"Oh, haven't you!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Why Arthur says that she thinks an awful lot of you. Those were his very words. She is always mentioning you in some connection or other, and you could influence her more than her own father. 'The Major' she calls you, and it's always something about the Major, so Arthur says."

Colonel Wallis waited for Hatley to extend the invitation, and this, arousing himself from the reverie into which he was again falling, the Major did.

"Let him come to me and stay as long as he likes!" he cried heartily. "I am ready to do a good turn to your son or to you for the sake of old times, Wallis. I cannot guarantee the result, of course."

"Of course!" echoed Wallis. "But you can get a good word in for him, no doubt. I'll send on to the lad, but he won't be able to go for at least a fortnight. When do you return, Hatley?"

"At once!"

"I thought you were not going till the end of the week. Well, Arthur will write to you."

As Major Hatley went home he mused on this request.

"It will be best, after all, to see her settled. He's a good lad, I know, so I hope he will make her happy. I wonder what made me say I was going back immediately? Still, it will be as well as stopping here. I can put a word in for young Wallis before he comes. Ah, me! *He* hasn't grey hair and moustache!"

The Davenports were surprised and pleased to see him back earlier than intended. Trixie welcomed him warmly, and the Major thought of his promise. How should he introduce the subject of young Wallis? He wondered if he could begin the conversation by reminding her of her childish remark—"I'll marry you when I'm growed up!" and then lead on to Arthur. He and Trixie and her parents had joked about that remark several times during the first weeks of their renewed acquaintance at the country seat, but lately that joke had been studiously avoided.

He declined to shelve the matter till the following day. On the next day he met her half-way through a wood that lay between the Davenport's home and Hatley Manor. She was looking more charming than ever; her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright and sparkling, her dainty form showing to advantage in a dainty dress, a comfortable-looking jacket and a becoming hat.

"I have wondered of late," he said, going boldly to the subject as they walked side by side, "why you have not accepted some young fellow for a husband. I am sure that you had a good selection."

"I don't want 'some young fellow for a husband,' Major," she replied, quoting his own words.

He looked at her curiously; there seemed to be some ambiguity as to her meaning. Why had she quoted the words uttered by him?

"It would be better than some old man—some man with grey hair—would it not?"

"I—I really," she began, hesitatingly. Then, observing that his eyes were fixed on hers, she blushed prettily. "Major," she said simply, "I suppose it would be regarded as very unwomanly, but I am going to do it. I told you as a child that I would marry you when I was big enough, and I am still of that opinion!" She held out her hand. "Do *you* think I am big enough yet?"

Major Hatley asked himself if he could believe the evidence of his ears and eyes. He realised what he had felt but had tried to hide from himself, namely, that he loved this girl as passionately as man could love. Yet, was it fair to her?

"I am grey-haired, Trixie," he said gravely, but taking her hand as if he feared that she would agree with him and draw away, "and——"

"I like it!" responded Trixie. "I have not changed my mind since I was a little girl. If you think I am now 'growed up,' then I am ready."

The Major felt rather ashamed of his promise to Arthur Wallis not having been kept, but he wrote frankly to Colonel Wallis, and his explanation was accepted just as frankly.

Thus it came about that Trixie became "Mrs. Major," and the union has been blessed with the greatest happiness.

Geo. Day.

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A JAPANESE IDYLL.

A Sad Love Tale of a Geisha Girl.

THE early morning sun was bathing the peaks of Okinawa with the roseate tints of its blushing dawn, as the white hulled yacht *Irene* steamed into the little bay of Hisomai, cutting the azure wavelets with many a foaming splash as she passed between the headlands, which shelter the entrance of this natural harbour.

Cecil Mavesleigh stood on the bridge of his yacht conning the rapidly-approaching shore through his glasses, when turning to the man who stood beside him, said carelessly: "So we are before Temple, after all, Conyers!"

Conyers smiled.

"Barely surprising, is it? The *Irene* steams five knots faster than the *Yaiskic;* besides, old man, you know that Temple can hardly ever tear himself away from Hong Kong under a month."

The angry churning of waters astern lessened, to finally die away as the throbbing screws came to a standstill, and the *Irene*, its brass fittings refracting the beams of the early sun, hove to, a quarter of a mile from the shore.

It was late in the afternoon before Cecil Mavesleigh and his chum Geoffrey Conyers landed on the white shingle beach, against which the tiny wavelets broke in mimic fury, and proceeded to walk through the little township of Aosima. The quaint houses peeping from among high trees, and their quainter inhabitants, both pleased and charmed Cecil Mavesleigh as he strolled along, to finally halt at a tea-house on the banks of the tiny river Vensi, which debouches into the bay of Hisomai.

Sheltering themselves from the sun's still powerful rays beneath the tea-house's spacious verandah, they proceeded to inform the obsequious Chinese proprietor that a cup of tea would prove refreshing. The Celestial beamed approvingly, and waddled off to execute the order with as much celerity as his corpulence admitted.

In due course the tea was brought, not by the Chinese proprietor, but by a Geisha of such exquisite beauty that Mavesleigh dropped the cigar he was smoking in amazement. Even the blasé Conyers surveyed the dainty little Japanese with approving eyes as she placed the fragile cups on the table beside them. Mavesleigh stroked his moustache thoughtfully, and then said, smiling, in perfect Japanese:

"I had no idea that Japan contained so pretty a Geisha!"

The little tea girl glanced covertly from beneath her long lashes at the handsome face turned to hers; then a blush stole over her cheeks.

"There are many such as I," she said modestly. "Many far prettier! Tea-house proprietors always choose those who are not ugly of feature to wait on their patrons, and to amuse them. . . . They come more often, if the Geishas are pretty," she added naively.

Mavesleigh smiled amusedly.

"Deuced good idea!" he remarked under his breath. Then added aloud: "How do you amuse your patrons?"

"I dance and sing. All who come here say that none can dance and sing so well in Okiawa or any of the Loo Choo islands as O Kiki San." There was a soft ring of pride in her voice as she made this statement, then looking straight into his clear blue eyes, she added shyly: "Perhaps you would like to be amused?"

"Emphatically!" he replied promptly, delighted with her naiveté.

"Shall I dance?"

"Yes, please—unless it is too hot," answered Mavesleigh interestedly, sipping his tea.

She was gone like a flash, returning a few minutes later with five other Geishas carrying instruments and a large mat, on which, as soon as it was spread out, O Kiki San took up a position, whilst her companions commenced to play a low, weird melody. A few bars rang out on the still, perfumed air, then O Kiki San, with a noiseless, easy grace, began her dance. Silently, with wonderful rapidity, and ease of action, the Geisha danced before the admiring Mavesleigh. Swaying lithely to and fro she alternately approached and receded from the visitors, the rapidly-dying sun illuminating the beautiful face of the dancer as she flitted from the shade of the overspreading trees into the evening glow

Faster and faster grew the measure of the dance till Mavesleigh grew dazzled, and O Kiki San appeared but a revolving figure of multi-coloured silks glinting in the fading sunlight. Spell-bound he watched her, then as the dance ceased, said softly:

"Thanks, O Kiki San!"

The little Geisha smiled as she approached the table to remove the cups.

"Will you sing to me?" he said gently.

"Not to-day," he answered. "I am tired. Another day I will, if it pleases the English lord."

"I am not an English lord," he laughed.

"Are not all Englishmen lords . . . even if only in their own estimation?"

He smiled as he gave her the three sen due, then said, rising: "You are as smart as you are pretty!"

"Were I ugly," she smiled merrily, "I should not be a Geisha here."

"And you will break many a heart before you grow much older," he continued sagely.

A gay smile flitted nervously about the corners of her mouth.

"Good-bye," she said politely, and as she watched Mavesleigh's tall figure disappear amid the trees of the garden she experienced for the first time an odd feeling of regret, and a strange longing to see him again.

Mavesleigh was strangely silent all the way to his yacht, a fact which disgusted Conyers much.

"I believe that you are in love with the Geisha," he remarked sharply to his chum, when they were on board.

"What if I am?" replied Mavesleigh irritably.

"I believe you are engaged to my cousin, Nina Howard," replied Conyers icily. "That's why. Have you forgotten that circumstance?"

"I am not likely to be allowed to do that, either by you—or her," answered Mavesleigh angrily. "However, Conyers, since you seem to evince so keen a concern in my affairs you may be pleased to know that I am not in love with 'that Geisha'!"

"Silly ass!" growled Conyers annoyedly, as his chum slammed the door of his cabin to. "How dare he fool about with Geishas when he's engaged to Nina?"

From within Mavesleigh's cabin the opening bars of a melody twanged on a banjo were drifted to his ears. It was the air to which O Kiki San had danced an hour previously.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" muttered Conyers savagely angrily chewing the end of his cigar.

The following afternoon the Honourable Cecil went ashore alone and wended his way to the garden of Ti Sung, ostensibly for tea, in reality to see O Kiki San.

"Where have you been?" was all the greeting vouchsafed by Conyers on his return.

"Ashore," replied Mavesleigh briefly.

"You've been hanging round the confounded Geisha!"

Mavesleigh grinned unfeelingly.

"What ho if I have?" he asked genially. "Are you my keeper? Shut up, old man, and let a fellow enjoy his

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wretched life! Have a lime-juice and give up trying to make a storm in a tea-cup."

Mavesleigh's geniality jarring, Conyers refused the lime-juice and betook himself to whisky.

For a whole fortnight the Honourable Cecil went ashore alone, till one evening, beneath the spreading trees, the deep shadows of which the soft glow of the paper lanterns but dimly dissipated, O Kiki San redeemed her promise and sang to him.

It was a strange, wild, love song, a passionate burst of melody sung by a soprano of rare sweetness and purity. By turns wistful, commanding, endearing and tender, it swelled ever and anon with the latent fire of jealousy to lapse again into the loving and intreating. Strange and unaccustomed to his trained Western notions, the song nevertheless enraptured him, till when the last cooing notes died away in enthralling sweetness, Mavesleigh exclaimed:

"A wild song, little Kiki! Yet it is very sweet."

"It is my favourite," she answered softly, raising her dark eyes to his.

"It is the kind of song to sing to your lover!"

"Having none," she replied gently, "I only sing it as a matter of business. I have only loved once, and I love the same man still. But he does not love me. He is as far beyond my reach as yonder star." She sighed and then added—"I would give thirty years of my life to wed him whom I love."

A fierce wave of jealousy passed over Mavesleigh.

"Who is he—this man?"

"Do you think a Japanese maiden tells the world whom she loves?" the little Geisha queried proudly. "No! I have told none that I love, save you! You are different from the others who come to this tea garden, otherwise I should not have told even you. There was another reason which prompted me to tell you."

"Which was?"

"Because I—like you!" The admission was made blushingly.

"I wish that you could love instead of merely liking me," he exclaimed moodily.

"Would you care for me—a simple tea girl—to do so?" she asked softly, seating herself at his feet and glancing shyly up at him.

"I would give the world to be that—man you love!" he answered passionately. "Kiki! My darling, I know that I am a beastly cad to tell you that I love you after what you have told me—!"

"Why? I never said that *he* loved me."

"Then, darling, are you so blind that you cannot see that—I worship you?"

"Ceceel!" There was a depth of love in her voice as she rose and placed her hands behind her back. "Would you be pleased to know—that you are—that man?"

"Kiki!" He started to his feet amazed, clasping her slim form in his arms as he passionately kissed her lips. The little Geisha remained passive in his embrace, her heart beating wildly, contented in the consummation of her wish.

"Kiki, my little girl," he said, stroking her hair with a loving touch. "Is it really true that you love me?"

"True?" The dark, soulful eyes were raised to his, a wealth of love lighting their liquid depths. She nestled closer into the incircling arms, pillowing her head on his breast. "Ceceel, are you so blind, then, that you cannot see it? And you, dearest, you love truly? Not merely transitorily, but really?"

"What is your opinion, Kiki, on that score?"

Silence answered his question, broken only by the soft sighing of the night breeze through the overhanging trees.

"Well, darling?"

"I would speak as I wish it to be, Ceceel, therefore I am no judge! But I am happy in the thought that you love me—oh, so—so happy!"

She sighed contentedly, her soft breath caressing his cheek, and then said gently: "Oh, Ceceel, my darling, should your love grow cold, it would chill my heart to death!"

"Why should my love grow cold?" The question was softly posed.

"They say that man's love is like the restless wave, ever changing," she murmured.

He was about to indignantly deny this aspersion on the sex when the Chinese proprietor's voice was heard calling for O Kiki San.

"Good-bye, my darling!" he whispered. "The time will soon come when no one will have the right to call you from my side."

"Oh, that you may never change!" she answered, kissing him almost fiercely. The next instant she was gone and Mavesleigh strolled down towards the beach.

The dinghy was waiting for him, grounded on the beach. Silently he sat in the stern sheets, and taking the yoke lines in his hands, noticed for the first time the riding light of another vessel some two cables' length away from the *Irene* on her port quarter.

"What boat is that, Haversby?" he asked the sailor pulling stroke.

"The *Yaiskie*, sir—Come in two hours ago."

A muttered imprecation burst from between Mavesleigh's lips as the dinghy breasted the wavelets with a long, swinging stroke towards his yacht.

Conyers was in the smoking-room when he entered it, calmly smoking a cheeroot.

"What, ho!" he exclaimed. "Well, Mavesleigh, the *Yaiskie* has come, with your *fiancée* on board."

"The dickens!"

Conyers laughed gratingly. "My dear boy, you're not civil to my cousin, 'pon my word, you're not," he remarked easily. "As you are at the locker, man, mix me a whisky. I suppose you've been fooling about that artful little minx, O Kiki San?"

Mavesleigh turned round on his chum, his face livid.

"Look here, Conyers," he cried hoarsely. "You are presuming too much on our chumminess. By Heaven, you are! I love O Kiki San, and by George, you'll have to be civil when you refer to her, or there'll be a rumpus! I've given you due warning, now mind!"

Conyers' face clouded.

"Did I understand you to say that you loved her—that miserable girl?"

"Yes!" shouted Mavesleigh furiously, bringing his fist down with a terrific crash on the smoke-room table. "You did! Now what have you to say?"

"Much," replied Conyers coldly. "You are engaged to my cousin, Nina Howard."

"Well?" retorted Mavesleigh passionately. "That engagement is off!"

"Like the cold goose at Christmas, eh?" snarled Conyers. "You pitiful fool! You rank idiot! Might I inquire how you are going to silence Rimmelheim and Jacobs if you are not going to marry Nina? Is this Kiki an heiress, too?"

Mavesleigh paled, then strode up and down the cabin.

"I also notice that you are utterly indifferent as regards breaking hearts!" sneered Conyers.

"I should not break Nina's heart! She wishes to marry me, because my brother is on his death-bed, and if she marries me on or after his decease she will wear a countess' coronet.

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Such brow garnishments possess peculiar attractions to America and Americans."

Conyers shrugged his shoulders placidly.

"In exchange you have the dollars," he replied coldly. "However, you wrong her in making that assertion. In my opinion, Maversleigh, you, to speak plainly, have acted like a cad both to her and the Geisha girl."

Conyers expected an outburst of fury, a torrent of invectives, but he was disappointed.

"You are right, Conyers," Maversleigh muttered hoarsely. "I have!" He opened the smoke-room door and strode out alone on to the murky deck.

"I must marry Nina," he mused savagely. "I must, or else die in poverty, and fail to keep my word with those infernal Jews, curse them! I should be a rich man to-day if it wasn't for Rimmelheim and Jacobs! I have been a cad to make love to Kiki, poor little girl! Conyers was right there, and it's deuced hard to admit it! Yes, there's no help for it! I must marry Nina, and enjoy all the fruits of a loveless marriage."

For an hour he paced up and down, then leaning over the taffrail gazed sadly across the little township of Aosima, dimly outlined in the silvery sheen of the rising moon.

"Oh, Kiki, my darling!" he murmured despairingly, "Must I leave you? You, who are my only love!"

The following evening the Honourable Cecil Maversleigh once more visited the tea-garden, and once again his eyes revelled in the beauty of the little Japanese, as Kiki, with a flush of pleasure mantling her cheeks, came to him, placing with nimble fingers a sprig of mimosa in his buttonhole.

"I thought that you were never coming, Ceceel," she said caressingly, as they sauntered down a secluded alley.

"Am I so late, then?" he queried awkwardly.

"Oh, so late! At least, it seems so to me," she replied, smiling up at him. "When one loves, even a minute's wait seems an eternity."

He felt his cheeks flame red with shame.

"Did you think I should leave Okinawa without saying good-bye to you, my darling?"

The hand resting on his arm trembled convulsively. He started shamefacedly like a criminal detected in his crime.

"You are leaving Okinawa?" she exclaimed dully.

"To-morrow," he replied, bracing himself together for the ordeal. "And I shall never return!"

"Never return!" she echoed wildly. "Ceceel, what is to become of me?"

"You will remain here in the tea-garden, I suppose."

He turned his head away, swallowed a lump in his throat and added, "And be the sweet little Geisha to—to others—as—ah, God!—as you have been to me!"

"But, Ceceel—Ceceel, my darling! I love you so!" she cried wildly. "You cannot have the heart to leave me here!—I love you so!"

"And I—Do I not love you madly, Kiki?" he exclaimed fervently. "Oh, Kiki!—my darling!—my love!—I must wed another far less beautiful than you. I am ruined and must recoup my losses. I must marry this woman, for I pledged her my word, long before I saw your sweet face—but you have to all eternity my heart! And I must part from you, Kiki, and leave you who are my life, my all!"

"Ceceel! Ceceel!" she cried feverishly, raising her tear-blurred eyes to his, while her soft, shapely arms stole gently round his neck. "She cannot love you as I do! You love me better than you do her! Forsake this lady, darling, and forsaking her, love me alone! I cannot spare your love to another."

"You do not understand our Western customs, my little Kiki," he cried tremulously. "You do not realise the light in which I stand! Yes, my darling, you are right when you say you love me better than she does. She only desires my future coronet. Had I not that, she would not want to marry me!"

"Give it to her, then," she said naively, smiling through her tears. "Then nothing will stand between us."

He smiled, despite his misery, at her innocence.

"It cannot be," he cried despairingly, kissing her passionately. "I must go from you, my love, never to return! I have sold myself and must stand by my bargain now."

"Ceceel, you cannot be so cruel!"

"Kiki, Kiki! Cannot you see how miserable I am? Don't make this parting harder than I can bear!" he cried hoarsely.

"Not that!" she cried passionately, sinking on her knees at his feet. "Ah, Ceceel, not that! Not parting! I will be your servant, your slave—only take me with you."

She kissed his hand passionately, then continued with her voice trembling with passion. "I will be so good, my love! So quiet! I will never worry you with my love! I will stand by and see you kiss and love another without a murmur! I will be dumb as long as I can see you from afar! Ceceel, my darling! Do not shake your head—take me with you. I love you so!"

"Oh, Kiki, my own, it cannot—cannot be! I shall have to love and cherish that dollar woman I am to marry. If you were nigh"—he turned away his head—"that could never be.

"Oh, Ceceel—Ceceel, don't—ah, don't leave me here to——"

He raised her from the ground, stopped her pitiful pleadings with a passionate kiss on her quivering lips, and then fled from the valley to the beach.

"To the yacht," he commanded, seating himself in the dinghy. "Now then, men, pull!"

The morning dawned clear and bright on the bay of Hisomai, when Aosima awoke into activity. The tiny wavelets broke on the shingle beach with a caressing hiss among the stones, lapping against the body of a Geisha which the sea had cast up.

Far away on the horizon westwards, two streaks of smoke against the azure heavens marked the positions of the *Irene* and the *Yaiskie*. From mouth to mouth the news flew through Aosima, that a body was on the beach, and soon the chattering townsfolk recognised the dead as O Kiki San.

In her hand she clasped with a terrible grip the gold locket which, on being opened, revealed a portrait of Maversleigh. Such was the finish of a Geisha's dream!

A year elapsed before a yacht once more steamed into the placid harbour. Half an hour after it had anchored, a yachtsman landed, wearing a deep band of crape round his cap, and a faded sprig of mimosa in his buttonhole.

He gave his name as the Earl of Kinfusis, and Aosima knew ere an hour was out, that he was travelling to forget the loss of his wife.

Meanwhile the Earl had gone to the tea-garden of Kung Li, and had inquired for O Kiki San.

The Chinaman smiled simply.

"Piecee girlee die, allee samee dlown herself," replied the Celestial placidly. "You oncee piecee fond of O Kiki San, eh? Velly nicee girlee, sell plenty tea."

Cecil Maversleigh staggered like a drunken man, then sinking into a chair, gasped hoarsely.

"Too late! Ah, Heaven, too late! I have indeed parted from my darling for ever!"

And a tear, which he had the manliness not to be ashamed of, stole down his cheek.

Tristam K. Monck.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

THE STORY STARTS HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin, with Fluffy's help, stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, and during this interview Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Frankie left the room; but I stayed, and, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope, overheard Hope (who turns out to be Kinross' cousin) tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. I told Frankie what I had overheard.

On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston informed Frankie that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with a man from Jamaica who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored. She persuaded me, much against my will, to engage Hope's attention by making love to him, while she herself purchased the Jamaica man's silence. He agreed to be silent for the sum of £1,000 to be paid before noon on the following day. I had to go to Fluffy's chambers to get the money. It was past midnight, and while negotiating with Fluffy, Percival Hope burst into the room. Fluffy saved the situation by telling him that I had come to get money to pay my debts, whereupon Hope immediately advanced me £1,000.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. He and Kinross arrived with Casellis at Pont Street, and Casellis was asked to say what he knows of Frankie's dark past, but, instead of disclosing any unpleasant facts, he swore that she was a perfectly innocent woman.

Several other witnesses were called, but Frankie scored over each one in turn. Thus baffled; Hope left, and Kinross formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived.

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Sir John Gets His Answer.

Sir John came slowly up the hall. He struck me as looking very ill. There was a stoop in his shoulders, usually erect; his head hung, he seemed crushed. Usually the most courteous of men, he did not return my greeting—hardly seemed to hear it.

"Your cousin's not at home, they tell me," he said at last. "I'll wait for her return, if you don't mind."

As he spoke he grasped the handle of the drawing-room door, and, before I could prevent him, entered.

As I have said, the drawing-room was the first of three reception rooms. They led one into the other, curtained archways taking the place of doors. Frankie and Lord Kinross had retired into the third and last of the series. Sir John stationed himself in the first. His proximity to the other two was closer than I cared for, at any moment they might appear. And then——

"Won't you come into the morning-room, Sir John?" I asked in a faint voice. "It's quieter there, and you look tired."

"I am tired—too tired to move. I want to rest, but——" he passed his hand wearily across his forehead. "I've so many things to think of. Will your cousin be back soon?"

I shook my head, I could not trust myself to speak.

"She is well? Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Nothing," I returned. "Don't you think it would be wiser for you to go home now and call again this evening? It's wretched to wait for a person, and—and Frankie may keep you waiting a long time."

"It doesn't signify, so that I see her at last." His manner was so strange that it alarmed me.

"What is the matter?" I asked, trembling. "Have you had bad news in the City?"

"Yes, very bad."

"Is it—is it the Carnegie Gold Mine?"

"Yes, the company's bankrupt, the shareholders ruined, the directors disgraced." He roused himself from his apathy, and spoke quickly, sharply, so that I dreaded he might be overheard.

"It was a fraud from beginning to end," he went on, working himself up. "The mine was worn out, as the company promoters knew quite well. The whole thing was worked to cheat the public. They read the prospectus, and, gulled by its glowing account of the 'Carnegie,' bought the shares. The money they paid, save for a few thousands, went into the pockets of the promoters, who were also directors of the company. Directors!" he sneered. "Cowards, cheats! When I went down to the office this morning not one of them was there! On the Continent, gone yachting, anywhere rather than at their post. For three hours I stood a mark for the shareholders' rage and abuse. God knows, I'm sorry for them! I've stripped myself of every penny to mitigate their loss, but my few thousands seem as nothing."

"But the other directors, won't they help to pay back the shareholders?"

"Not with a penny. They even sold what few shares they held a week ago when the market was up. They are not legally responsible, and therefore can wash their hands of the matter."

"Then why should you give up your money? What have you gained from your connection with the Carnegie?"

"Dishonour—nothing else. Yes," as I strove to contradict him, "I say dishonour. I knew nothing of mines, nothing of companies, nothing of the concern that, like a fool, I pledged myself to direct. I gave my name as guarantee of the good faith of what has proved a fraud, a cheat, a lie." His voice rose with passion, then broke into a low, hoarse whisper. "A lie," he gasped, "and I put my name to it."

He leant forward, hiding his face in his hands.

I watched him, fear and pity at my heart. His pride shattered, his will weakened, he sat a broken and a ruined man. And she, the woman who had done this thing, remembering what he had been and was now, could bear to see him, would smile and talk—the ripple of her laughter came through the curtains. I caught my breath. If she should come now, she and her lover, and Sir John should see them!

Desperate with fear, I fell on my knees beside him, and urged him, incoherent in my terror, to go home—at once, this minute.

He glanced up quickly, something of the old look came into his face at the sight of my distress.

"I've upset you," he said kindly. "It was very selfish of me. But you mustn't worry, I'm not ill. I shall get through all right. Come, don't look like that. Poor little girl, you're frightened." And he put me gently in a chair.

"It was a big blow at first," he went on quietly. "But it will grow easier to bear. I reproach myself terribly, but"—he paused—"I wanted money very badly." He was talking as much to himself as to me, arguing the case aloud. "You see," he smiled sadly, almost apologetically, "she can't bear the thought of poverty. She is so fond of nice things and pretty frocks and jewels. Who can wonder? Nobody could expect a woman like that to go without, and——" he broke off short, and turned towards me. "Don't you know at all when your cousin will be back? I want to tell her what has happened. You know how things are between us? Yes, I thought so. You can understand, then, how much I want to see her, to hear her say that, after all, it doesn't matter very much if I am poor, it will only mean a little longer waiting. We shall have to wait, Cynthia, but she won't mind it. It will be a long time. I shall have to start from the bottom of the ladder, and—and I'm not a young man. But she'll wait. I'm not afraid of that. But—I wish she'd come. I'm tired now, worried, depressed; but it will all vanish when she comes. All will be right when I see her."

It seemed to me he glanced towards the curtained archway. I fancied he was going through.

"No, no," I gasped, strangling a scream, "not there!" I rushed and stood in front of him.

His face changed, surprise deepening into suspicion.

"What is it?" he asked sternly. "What are you hiding?"

By this time I was past all self-control. I could only wring my hands and incoherently beseech.

Sir John put me aside, marched towards the archway, and drawing back the hangings, passed through. He paused a moment, and stood as if expectant—listening.

Across the stillness came the sound of voices. I recognised the tender mocking thrill that Frankie always practised on her lovers. Sir John seemed to recognise it too. He started, and crossed quickly to the threshold of the inner room, where Frankie and Lord Kinross sat.

The curtains were half drawn. A graceful figure in her slim white frock, Frankie leant timidly—her eyes downcast—against her lover. Through the open window the sun fell on her golden hair, her fair face and tender eyes. She drooped towards Kinross like a tall, white lily.

The figure at my side stiffened, silent and grim, with a face of stone; not a muscle relaxed, not a sigh escaped him. But when the other far less tender lover caught her in his arms, with a swift movement drew her face to his, eagerly kissed her eyes, mouth, and hair—when, I say, he saw that other do these things, the great heart of the man beside me failed.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

(Continued.

With a low, hurt cry he staggered forward a few paces, only to fall at last senseless, helpless at my cousin's feet.

I don't remember just what followed. I turned faint, and hid my face. When I looked up again Sir John was lying on the sofa with a strange look on his face, a rigidity about his figure.

"A paralytic seizure," said the doctor, and shook his head over the chances of recovery. We wired for Mrs. Ponsonby, Sir John's sister, and pending her arrival Lady Gaveston, efficient and severe, controlled the situation, taking the patient under her charge.

All that night I sat upon the stairs waiting in forlorn hope for better news.

Toby—steadied by the shock he had proved himself most useful—shared my vigil a few stairs higher up. Kinross, at Frankie's wish, had not remained. He was very sympathetic, and had asked no awkward questions, but seemed a touch reserved.

Towards the morning I must have dozed. I awoke to find the door wide open. I cautiously peeped in. Lady Gaveston still erect, was sleeping stiffly in her chair; at Sir John's side knelt a woman, her face hidden in her hands, weeping bitterly. It was my cousin Frankie.

"John, if you could speak to me! If you would say something. I can't bear it. I can't," she clenched her hands, gripping the rug that covered him. "Never a word, a look from him, that was not kind. Always tenderness and love. What shall I do?" she rocked herself to and fro. "What shall I do? If I'd known, if I'd guessed it would be like this. John!" she turned to him, laying her head beside his on the pillow, stroking his hair, begging him wildly, passionately to answer.

Calm and still, with a far-off look in the quiet eyes, he lay unheeding; even the woman he had loved so dearly could not rouse him, nor could her voice recall. In vain her tears, her cries, her lamentations. Too late! Too late!

Lady Gaveston, suddenly roused, turned in her chair.

"It's over late for greeting, woman," she said sternly. "This is no time for tears. Get you up," she laid her hand on Frankie's arm.

"He will get better?" pleaded Frankie. "Tell me he will get better."

Milady shook her head.

"It's not I that can tell you even a thing—you've much to answer for, Frances."

My cousin made no effort to defend herself, but went quietly out. I caught a glimpse of her face as she passed me in the hall. Tear-stained and haggard, it was like some other woman's face—not my cousin's. Could it be she had loved him after all?

SIR JOHN STRICKLAND

I pondered on the matter till I grew cold, and felt inclined to make coffee. Toby had vaunted his powers in this direction at intervals all night. I turned to wake him. To my astonishment, he was not there!

Two days later Mrs. Ponsonby arrived, and moved Sir John away. There was no change in him, nor, said the doctor, was it likely that there ever would be.

For a while Frankie seemed depressed and looked ill. Gradually, however, she recovered her spirits. Her engagement by this time was made public. She received hosts of congratulations, everyone paid her compliments, her friends and enemies alike—more or less sugared as the case might be. Among the first to call were Chesterton and Toby Ffolliott.

I had not seen Toby since he so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared in the middle of the night. I judged it was not a favourable time to ask for explanations. He looked ill and wretched, his health of late was no better than his temper.

Lord Chesterton was very nice to me. He made no actual reference to the mystery of the notes, but made me understand that whoever else might be to blame, he did not think I was. How different from Percival Hope! He had neither written nor been near me.

Chesterton went after an hour or so; Toby, however, showed no signs of leaving, but stuck firm as a limpet on his chair. I read the signs of a storm in his face, and dreaded an unpleasant scene. With great determination and bad taste he waited till the last guest had left, outstaying Kinross himself.

He wasted no time in preliminaries, but came to the point at once.

"Is it true that you are engaged to Kinross, Frankie?"

My cousin, raidant in a wonderful tea-gown of rose chiffon over silk, smiled and nodded.

"Yes," she said, "quite."

"You're going to marry him?"

"It is usual in such cases, I believe!"

Toby got up and came towards her.

"I say you *shan't*," he said doggedly. "You promised to marry me."

Frankie laughed softly.

"What do you propose to marry on?" she asked.

The boy winced. "I thought——" he stopped blankly. "I've prospects you know," he plucked up spirit as he went on, "and I shall get a larger salary each year."

"I don't propose to marry on 'prospects,' and the chance of an increase of salary," said my cousin firmly. "The case lies thus—I am poor—yes," as the boy looked incredulous, "quite poor. I've been extravagant, infringed on my capital, until there's little left. Another three months will see me at the end of my tether. I shall sink into oblivion unless—" she paused. "I must marry money," she said firmly.

"But you promised *me*," he argued wildly.

"Don't be a fool, Toby. How can I marry a man with neither money nor brains? I used to think you were clever. When I made you that promise I thought you were ambitious, that you had initiative, go. I find I was mistaken. You've changed, Toby, changed for the worse."

"And who's responsible for that?" he almost shouted.

Frankie shrugged her shoulders.

"I should say it was brandy," she answered insolently.

The boy winced and coloured to his temples.

"You're wrong," he said slowly. "It's *you*. I mean it, I'm going to tell you just how I mean it, and—you're going to listen." He walked straight up to her, his young face white and drawn.

"I wasn't a bad sort of chap before," he said. "There was nothing much to be ashamed of in my life. Now it's quite different. Day and night the horror of what I've done grips me. Do you think I can ever forget it? Ever forget I forged another man's name? Oh, I know you don't think very much of it. Forgery is quite a small thing in your eyes. But in mine—it's—it's fiendish!"

"It's manly to reproach me," said Frankie.

"It's human. I did it because—I loved you, because I thought that you loved me. Now I know that you don't care a farthing about anybody but yourself. You'd cheerfully send a man to death if his dying would pay your bills. Not a man, not a woman whose weakness you don't trade on. Not a friend, a lover, that you don't betray. Do you think I don't know? What of Mary Vernon, whose sweetheart you stole? What of Sir John——"

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"If he were here you would not dare to speak to me like this."

"Whose fault is it that he is not? I don't wonder you flinch, even you must needs feel some remorse. I saw you stand in tears beside him. Heard you confess what you had done. What is there to prevent my telling Kinross what I heard? Why should I not tell him what you are?"

She didn't seem afraid, but smiled at him with a curious expression.

Her smile seemed to madden Toby.

"You—you *devil*!" he said under his breath. "Why shouldn't I ruin you?"

He gripped her tightly by the arms, but with a quick movement she freed herself and clasped her hands about his neck. "Why?" she asked with a little laugh. "Why? Because you love me. Come," she drew his head level with her own, looking into his eyes. "Kiss me," she said.

A short, tense pause, then, with a gasp, half sob, half sigh, he kissed and clasped her tightly.

"Don't turn me off, Frankie," he said hoarsely. "I don't mind what you do, but I can't live without you." He kissed her hands, holding her tight; he begged her forgiveness, praying that she would see him *sometimes*. Yes, she might be engaged to Kinross, he wouldn't interfere. She might do anything if she would see him, and be kind.

He had no thought of honour towards his friend. His infatuation left no room for better things.

It wasn't a nice spectacle to witness. I left the room and went upstairs.

Frankie followed shortly and asked me to get ready for a drive.

"I'm going to see Mary Vernon," she said, "and I want you to come too." She made no reference to Toby, and I felt relieved at her silence. Some things are better not spoken of.

Mary Vernon was at home, and received us with her usual friendliness. Frankie turned me on to Mrs. Vernon, a little woman with a big flow of small talk, and seated herself by Mary, some short distance off.

Frankie had come to tell her friend that she was engaged to Kinross. I knew it, I felt it, and admired the courage that could face that friend's reproaches.

Mary flushed during Frankie's introductory speech, turning her eyes away.

"Answer me this," she said at last. Her voice was low, but I caught the words, Mrs. Vernon's fatuous remarks seemed to throw them up.

"Do you love Hartland? Sincerely, deeply?"

Frankie nodded.

"He cares for you, I know. He always admired you. Were you quite straight with me in the old days, Frankie? Didn't you endeavour just a little to weaken his allegiance towards me and draw him towards yourself?"

"No, Mary, never." At times her voice sank, I only caught a part of what ensued. "Showed admiration—checked him—honour to you," was all I heard.

Mary gazed quietly at her friend.

"I didn't think he was so weak," she said, "but——" she paused. "Make him happy, Frankie—and I'll forgive you—both."

My cousin was very silent as we drove home.

Lady Gaveston was waiting in the drawing-room, evidently armed for a fray.

"I gather you're marrying Lord Kinross," she remarked with a sniff—she had known it for some days.

"Yes."

"When is the wedding to take place?"

"I think in the Autumn," said Frankie deprecatingly.

"I shall not be here," said Lady Gaveston with a snap.

"You're going to leave me?"

"At the conclusion of the season, as we first arranged. I'll carry out my contract—no more."

"But Lady Gaveston——"

Milady stopped her with a gesture. "Keep your persuasions, Frances—you'll want them later. I am proof against cajolery; I stay till the beginning of August, then—" she paused, "our paths divide."

She retired with the honours of war. Frankie sank listlessly into a chair.

"I wish it were over," she said at last. "My marriage, I mean. It's such a long time coming, and—and—it's cost so much already. Even now something may happen to stop it."

"What is there to fear?"

She sighed. "Not very much, it's true. Hope won't try any more conclusions with me. Sir John"—she paused a break in her voice. "He would never wish to hurt me," she said softly.

"And Toby?"

"Oh, I've settled him. He's not likely to give any further trouble. He won't come here again just yet, I've asked him not to."

But in that she was mistaken. That evening Toby came.

Frankie and Lord Kinross had gone to the theatre. I was sitting in the drawing-room alone when he walked in.

"Where's Frankie?" he said quickly.

"Out. She's gone to the theatre, and won't be back till quite late—what is it, Toby, anything wrong?"

"I'm in trouble—awful trouble." He looked ghastly.

"Frankie's deceived me," he went on. "Not an unusual thing," and he sneered. But this time"—he paused. "She lied about the bill," he said, "lied horribly. She told me it would not fall due for three months, and by that time she would have the money."

"Well, isn't it so?"

"No, I met Nathan, the money-lender, in the Strand this afternoon. He stopped me and asked quite casually if my uncle were in England.

"'It's a matter of business,' he said. 'Sir Edward backed a bill for your friend, Mrs. Norton, at six weeks. I daresay you know about it? It falls due in three days' time. The lady's sure not to have the money, so we shall have to drop upon Sir Edward.'

"He looked at me in a strange, scrutinising way, Cynthia. I'm sure he suspects the signature is not genuine. I asked him to communicate with me before he wrote to my uncle, as Mrs. Norton was my friend, and he promised that he would. Meantime, there's only three days in which to get the money."

"Frankie hasn't a penny," I gasped, "and Fluffy is away."

"It must be got somehow," he said grimly. "I'll try my best but I've small hopes. I'll see you again to-morrow. Remember, Cynthia, if the money is not paid the bill will be presented to my uncle. He will repudiate the signature, and——. But I'll not live to be disgraced. I've courage yet to put a bullet through me. I mean it. If we can't get the money I shall shoot myself—you'll tell her."

He left abruptly, but all the night his white face and hunted-looking eyes haunted me.

"I've courage yet to put a bullet through me."

The words rang in my ears. It must not be, it should not be! But there were only three days left. Three days of grace!

(The first events of those terrible three days will be recorded next Tuesday.)

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A SISTER'S SACRIFICE.

Telling of the Love of a Crippled Girl.

"WHEN is it to be, Minnie?"

Rob Durand looked lovingly into the eyes of the girl who stood before him, and the expressive orbs drooped under the ardent gaze. Rob's heart beat with exquisite joy as he noticed this, but he attributed the movement to the wrong cause.

"I do not know, Rob," faltered Minnie Penton.

Her heart was contracted with fear; she had dreaded this moment—yes, dreaded the moment when Rob Durand, the man whom she loved with all her soul, should ask her to name the happy day! She called it the "happy day," and yet dreaded to be asked to name it! Her train of thought was interrupted by Rob.

"Then I must fix it, if you will not," he declared, placing his palms against her soft cheeks and raising her head until he could look again into those sweet eyes. The frightened expression which he detected in them perplexed him.

"Oh, Rob," she burst forth at length, "it cannot be yet! Not for a long time perhaps. I could not leave Jennie!"

"But who said——" He was about to ask why she thought that marrying him meant leaving Jennie, but she interrupted him hastily.

"I could not leave her; she would die if deprived of my care. I have tended her since mother died, and have devoted myself to making her happy, poor crippled Jennie! I could not allow one more drop of pain to be added to a cup of suffering that is now almost full to overflowing. No, Rob, it cannot be!"

"You are running on wildly, Minnie dear," he expostulated with loving kindness. "I do not propose to separate you and your invalid sister; whatever could have caused such a notion to enter your pretty head? She will live with us, and she shall not know that any change has taken place, so far as care of her is concerned. She will be as happy as it is possible to make such an invalid. I will see to that!"

She knew that he would do all he said; she had never thought otherwise, and she was ashamed of having tried to mislead him. Yet how could she tell him the truth? She must put him off in another way. Oh, why had Rob and she fallen in love?

"It cannot be, Rob dear. While my sister lives it is impossible for me to marry you. I know that you would do everything to make her happy, but she would not be happy if she knew that I loved another better than I love her. She has had my undivided love and attention so long that it would be a cruel blow to her, a blow that my love will not permit me to inflict. We must wait—wait while she lives!"

"But that is absurd, Minnie!" cried Rob impatiently. "Why, we might have to wait a lifetime! I am willing to wait a year if you like, but not indefinitely. Come, within the space of twelve months, you can gradually accustom her to the idea. Even twelve months seems a lifetime!"

He laughed gaily, bent and kissed her, feeling convinced that he had overcome all her scruples. His temper began to get slightly the better of him, ardent lover as he was, when she shook her head.

"It cannot be, Rob! I know that we may have to wait years, but we must wait. While Jennie lives, I cannot marry. I will not keep you bound; you are free, if you desire it. Let us be friends——"

"Friends!" he echoed scornfully. "I love you, and cannot be a mere friend. If you love me," he continued bitterly, "as you have told me, then you will marry me. I cannot wait.'

"I do love you, Rob," she said simply, crowding back the tears, "but I cannot marry you while Jennie lives. Don't be hard. Do I not suffer as well?"

"If you love me, you could not ask me to wait indefinitely," he replied savagely. "So that is the love you have to give me, and it is for this that I have hovered near you, unhappy during every moment that I could not be with you! Friends! No, it cannot be; you must be my wife or a stranger."

"No, no, Rob!" The words were wrung from her. "Do not go away! Stay with us, for the sake of the days we have passed together and can yet have together! Stay near me, and let us be good friends!"

"No! I should like to remain near you, for happiness will be an impossibility for me while out of sight of your dear face; but if you have no greater love for me than that, it is best that I should go!"

He turned on his heel with his usual impetuosity and strode away. She tried to call him back, but she could not utter a sound. With a moan of anguish she sank to the ground and sobbed convulsively.

Why had such a cruel fate been forced upon her? Rob had gone away, angry with unsatisfied love, forgetting that she, too, was suffering. No, not forgetting, but unaware of it. She excused him even in her sorrow. He did not know the truth; how could she tell him? How could she let him know that she could not marry him while Jennie lived because the marriage would be a death blow to her sister?

Poor Jennie had conceived a consuming passion for handsome Rob Durand, ever since the day when he had lifted her from the awkward position into which she had fallen while Minnie had gone in search of flowers for the invalid. Rob Durand had been struck with the beauty of the cripple, and he was just as much moved by the loveliness and charm of the elder sister when she returned two or three minutes later and warmly thanked him. After that, Rob Durand had called under the pretext of inquiring after the health of the invalid, but in reality to obtain the chance of a talk with Minnie. So they had drifted into love, Rob and Minnie, and the latter had suddenly awakened to the knowledge that her deformed sister had fallen in love with Rob Durand.

Minnie's grief exhausted itself, leaving a dull pain at her heart. She went to her own room to efface the marks of tears and then made her way to the chamber where the deformed girl was lying in bed.

"Has Rob been to-day, Minnie?" she asked querulously. "My Rob! I call him mine, because I love him, although I fear that he cannot love me. You don't think me foolish, I know, Minnie. It is so sweet to think of him as mine! Has he been this evening? I did not hear his voice."

Bright red spots on her cheeks indicated the intensity of her feelings. Minnie smoothed the lovely hair from the forehead of the invalid and smiled indulgently.

"Yes, he came and stayed for a little while, dear. Are you comfortable?"

It was strange to see such beautiful features in a cripple. A fall during childhood had marred the making of a beautiful woman, and she was more like a lovely child in appearance than a woman of full age, as she lay thus in bed.

"I wish I had been up to-day!" sighed the invalid. "I

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should have liked to see him. My Rob! I know that he can never be really mine, but it is pleasant to say so to myself and to you, Minnie. What did he say?"

"Oh, that he was sorry that you were not up, and so on."

The cripple was quieted until the morrow, but Minnie was uneasy on Jennie's account. Suppose Rob Durand kept his word and went away? What would Jennie say?

The next day came and began to wane, but Rob Durand did not appear. Minnie, fulfilling some necessary errands, learnt that he had left by the 2.45 train for Paris, where his sister was living, and her heart sank. He was gone! He had thought her cruel, but oh! how cruel he was to her!

"Why has not Rob been to-day?" asked Jennie fretfully.

"He has been kept away unavoidably, I suppose, dear," replied Minnie, trying to maintain her composure.

"That is the first time he has stayed away since he helped me. I don't understand it."

The next day passed, and still no Rob. Jennie was excited and irritable.

"Where is he, Minnie? Why is there no sign from him?" She glanced sharply at her sister, and Minnie's countenance betrayed her. "You know why he is not here and you have not told me!" she added vehemently.

Minnie saw that it was useless to keep up the deception; she must soon learn that Rob had left England.

"I have heard that he has gone to Paris, dear," she explained. She dared not trust herself to say more.

"Why has he gone? Minnie, I insist on knowing. Why. Ah!"—as Minnie burst into tears—"I understand. You have taken him from me! You have stolen his love from me! This is your devotion to me! You pretend to care for me, and you take advantage of your health and strength, your upright figure, to take my lover from me!"

"Jennie, don't, don't!" cried Minnie appealingly. She feared the result of this paroxysm for her sister as well as for herself.

Jennie's cheeks were burning now. She raised herself in the bed and pointed a finger with withering rage and contempt at Minnie ere she fell back in a swoon.

There was no mistaking the fact that Jennie's violent outburst had done irreparable mischief to her frail body. She changed visibly and would speak to Minnie only when occasion demanded. Minnie, in the greatest alarm, summoned a well-known physician, who confirmed her suspicions that Jennie's days were numbered. She saw the sister, the poor creature who had been deprived of the pleasure of living and condemned to constant suffering, fading from this world. Could anything save her? Only one thing offered the merest chance, and she resolved to do it. She hurriedly scribbled a letter to Rob Durand at his sister's address and posted it.

But a week went by and he came not. Jennie's attitude had changed somewhat; the softening influence that comes when the end is near was working silently. Minnie would sit by her for hours at a time, without a word from Jennie, but now and then there was a look in the eyes of the deformed Jennie that indicated a change of sentiment.

One afternoon, more than a week after the posting of the letter, Minnie was keeping her vigil by Jennie's bedside when the latter opened her eyes suddenly and cried:

"Rob is here!"

Minnie gazed at her in deep anguish; the end was surely near, and her sister had actually mistaken her for Rob! She arose to bend over the bed, but started as the door opened and Rob Durand stepped into the room.

"He has come to me!" cried Jennie, holding out a weak, emaciated arm and hand. Rob took it and glanced at Minnie.

"I understand it all now," he said softly, taking her by the hand that was disengaged.

"Yes, yes!" said Jennie weakly. "I do not mind; it is well. You are mine while I live and——"

Her eyes closed. Minnie took her sister's other hand, and thus they stood till she passed away from her life of pain.

"I did not get your letter for five days," said Rob, "for I had gone to St. Petersburg, and it was sent on. I returned at once. Can you forgive me?"

G. E. Lingen.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 2. — Mixed influences over the next year may be expected by those whose birthdays occur to-day. Unexpected changes and sickness. Have a care with servants.

Girls will find love affairs very interesting, but little confidence should be given.

The day is evil for most matters; guard against chills and mishap.

A child born to-day will be ingenious, and fortunate in the employ of others.

September 3.—An active and fairly prosperous year may be expected by to-day's children. Good for young people, clerks and teachers. Landlords and farmers benefit.

Rather quiet for love affairs.

The day is good to deal in property, sign papers, and engage servants.

A child born here will be very clever, have an active brain, and sharp wit. Will do well in business.

September 4.—Good for health, business, and finances. Some trouble over home affairs and children.

Young girls will have anxiety over lovers, but if born from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. they will become engaged, or marry.

The day is good for buying and selling, especially near noon.

A child born this day will be fortunate in most matters, and should be in a business of its own.

September 5.—The positions for those who celebrate birthdays to-day are more fortunate for girls. Aged people will find it a dull time and need care with the health.

Girls receive attentions, and, if engaged, they marry.

The day is good for changes; buying wearing apparel, and for pleasure. Beware of colds and mishap on the water.

A child born to-day will be fond of change and pleasure. Will lack self-confidence and should keep in employ.

September 6.—The year will bring many annoyances and not much good fortune in business. Guard against loss and accident.

Love affairs make little progress, and girls should beware of quarrels.

A bad day for letter-writing, signing agreements, speculating, and visiting friends.

A child born here will be improvident, sharp-tempered, and headstrong.

September 7.—A fortunate year for business; farmers, builders, and aged people are favoured. Ask favours and buy property.

Girls born near 1 a.m. and 8 p.m. receive attentions from elderly men.

A child born here will be fortunate in business; the mind will be practical, painstaking, and ingenious.

September 8.—An active year, but sickness or trouble in domestic circle. Beware of quarrelling and mishap.

Young girls will find love affairs go wrong, chiefly through third parties.

The day is good to deal with military men, visit doctors and push business. Evil for pleasure and marriage.

A child born here will be quick, headstrong and fond of pleasure. Should be in employ of others.

Asturel.

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THE LOVER'S LEAP.

Telling of a Mistake and its Sequel.

CHAPTER I.
The Introduction.

MAIDEN aunts are a peculiar dispensation. As a rule they have money, hang out hopes to a nephew or niece, wear glasses and fronts, and are rigid and requiring. They lean to theology, denounce the theatre, and view the mildest Havana as a spark from the hottest regions of profundity. Such, at all events, is my experience of the race. I had two of them. One departed, and my expected legacy merged in the second, thus binding me over to a tighter and direr state of bondage.

My aunt Euphrosyne Gorges possessed something besides her high-sounding name to raise her to the ranks of the aristocracy. She was nearly six feet high, had white tapering hands, was a twenty-fourth cousin of Lord Tatterham, and owned a lofty house in Merrion Square, Dublin.

It was here that I was admitted to play my part as slave, sycophant, and strategist, and I contrived to enact it as skilfully as I could, having only a Castle-Rackrent sort of habitation to fall back upon in the far west, if I fell out with my present prospects.

I am afraid, after all, I was a bad hypocrite. My cousin Bob Bright had ten times my gifts of diplomacy. For me, I was apt to be remorseful if I humbugged too unblushingly; and this combination of scrupulousness and subtilty was a distasteful admixture, tending to an uncomfortable state of the internal regions. Far better to have been thorough-going, like my cousin Bob. The elements for success are a cool, clever brain, unflinching courage, and untold audacity.

It may be thought that this rule can scarcely extend to the fairer sex, with whom softness and sweetness are so enticingly associated; but here affectation steps in adroitly on the scene. They can *show* tenderness, by all means; never feel it. A woman of this genius passes far in the race her delicate, shrinking sister, who blushes away her chances in life, and seldom rises to the occasion when a line has to be cast or a prize landed.

I may as well admit at once that I had not succeeded very well up to this point in one line of tactics; I made no way with the ladies. Now my aunt Euphrosyne cherished a firm theory that young men should marry and "settle" early. I was wise enough to indorse all her views when laid down to me tract-wise; but here acquiescence ended; I could not put them into practice.

One morning in the dog days my aunt had held forth to me rather warmly on some subject from behind the tea-urn, and I felt almost suffocating. I escaped as soon as possible into the garden at the back of the house. It was but a narrow strip of territory, and few flowers of the more delicate species flourished within its imprisonment. Nevertheless my aunt had made the most of it. A trellis-work entwined with roses and jasmine surmounted the walls, there was a grass plat in the centre, and a border at either side of a gravel walk well stocked with sweet peas and hardy annuals. Her crowning piece, however, was a large, waving plant which stood near an arbour in the far corner. She called it "The Pampas, Palustris, Parnassus Grass." The name I thought long, and the plant likewise. Its tall stalks, with their light puffy heads, seemed always in the way; and I didn't like it somehow. At the same time I was wholly guiltless of any premeditation as to the catastrophe which was at hand.

At this hour my aunt Euphrosyne was generally absorbed in some matutinal consultations with the cook, and I thought myself safe. I drew surreptitiously from my pocket a small embrowned case. My nerves wanted soothing and the insects smothering. Let the cost be what it would, I must have a cigar. Scarcely, however, was a light vesta ignited when a step was on the gravel walk, and with an expletive, into which I fear the word "blazes" intruded, I flung the match hurriedly away.

"George!" said my aunt, approaching, "I've some news for you."

She held an open letter in her hand, and I turned to her attentively.

"You have heard me speak of Miss Lufleigh?" she pursued —"Letitia Eliza Lufleigh—she is a sweet, serious girl, and has just come into a fortune, willed to her by her godmother—twelve thousand pounds. George, she's the wife for you! I will give you an introduction, and you can make her acquaintance at once. I have shown some kindness to Dr. Lufleigh's family before now, and I expect they will receive you as a son——"

"And heir?" I interposed.

"Don't be flippant, sir. This is a serious matter. Matrimony is an important step in life. Miss Letitia is young, handsome, and clever. In a word, she has wit, wealth, and worth. Can you ask anything more? Tell me that, sir, I beg of you." And my aunt, warm with her oration, bent enthusiastically towards her pet Pampas.

"Isn't it grand?" she murmured, and stroked it affectionately. "It's getting golden, gorgeous, quite red towards the centre," and she peered closer into its depths. "But, gracious! what's that?" and with a bound she was back to me. "Good heavens, it's on fire!"

"Sunstroke! fireflies! spontaneous combustion!" I cried incoherently.

"George, you've done it!" said my aunt, in that awful tone which seemed to thrill everything like an earthquake. "How could you? How dare you?"

"I—I didn't—I didn't mean it," I finished up, for she had seen the fib on my face. "I was lighting a match to scatter the midges. I suppose it fell somehow; the place is as dry as tinder, and——"

"Oh you wretch! And you stand there, and my Pampy in flames! The seat will catch in a moment, the house, the whole square!"

The picture was so terrible that I sprang madly to the pump, and calling all hands to aid we had presently drenched arbour, walls, walks, shrubs, and, lucklessly, my aunt herself, with a

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primeval deluge of water. Everything being either burnt or soaked, I fled to the house. My aunt's cap was done for, a new dress, and any remnant of reason the first shock had spared.

It is scarcely necessary to explain that after this escapade, I fell meekly into all Miss Euphrosyne's views respecting the matrimonial investment, and the very next day was dispatched ardently on my mission.

Dr. Lufleigh was a country doctor residing in a southern part of Kilkenny. He was the owner of two daughters, who both had the reputation of beauties. It was the elder who had become now the lucky legatee of the bequest from a deceased godmother.

"Mind," exclaimed my aunt as I left, "mind, George, that it's Letitia—not Lucy. Be clear and clever. Don't forget!"

Turning my head towards my aunt's excited face, I sang out, in a tone as eager and emphatic as her own, "Lucy, did you say? Yes, aunt, all right; never fear."

The cab was off before I could catch her distracted ejaculation; but I saw her hands uplifted despairingly, and plumed myself on the fright I had put her into. She was not, however, to be outdone by me in this way, or baffled in having the last word. As we stopped presently at the station on the line a telegram was put into my hands. It contained the single sentence, in a clear, clerkly caligraphy that made me redden instinctively—

"*Letitia*, you stupid, not Lucy, for your life."

An omnibus was at the station which was my final destination, the town itself being some little distance off. Just as we were starting a delay came. There was a rush at the doorstep, the conductor gave way, and a pile of wet garments tumbled in amongst us. There was no possible room for another occupant; but before any of us had recovered from the showerbath which the dripping garment had dispensed, a lady had taken her place—or rather *my* place—and I sprang into an awkward position, between sitting and standing, to escape receiving her in my arms. A thick-set gentleman in the corner, against whom I was thrown, was round on me in a second. He was in a muffler, and saw nothing beyond his immediate vicinage.

"What are you about, sir?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by this violence? You had better go outside, or I will call the conductor."

"I beg your pardon. This lady——" I began.

"No lady is encroaching," he broke in sharply. "It is you, sir, who are aggressive. It is you who have no seat."

It was scarcely unnatural that my prejudice should be pretty strong by this time against the cause of the commotion. I decided at once on her appearance. She was large, bony, and stern-featured, and with that disagreeable, self-asserting air which marks the spinster of a certain age, who, with no other prop to cling to, is tenacious of her "woman's rights."

A glance to one side revealed, however, an unexpected vision. The lady was blushingly young, undeniably pretty, and unmistakably shy. It was no doubt in a bashful rush that she had deposited herself anywhere to escape the awkwardness of claiming or soliciting a seat. She had evidently not forgotten my implied reproach for this procedure.

The instant the omnibus stopped she started up, drew her dress and wrappings as far as possible out of my way, and, rejecting my proffered assistance, sprang from the vehicle, disappearing rapidly down a side street.

It had been arranged that I was to put up, in the first instance, at the village inn, with the ostensible object of looking out for some fishing in the neighbourhood, and call casually with my ticket of introduction on the doctor's family. I had a rod and tackle with me, but it was a line of another kind that was to claim the most careful manipulation at my hands; so at all events had decreed my aunt Euphrosyne.

Alighting now at the only hotel the place boasted of, I ordered something in the way of refreshment; and in the interim of awaiting its appearance I set myself to an inspection of a photograph of Letitia Lufleigh with which my aunt had armed me. Viewed critically, I could not but acknowledge that the features were good; but they had a corrective in a point which I decidedly objected to; the complexion was sombre. A dark-visaged wife! I had no fancy for the possession.

My meditations having run in this vein, I made inquiries as to the locality of Dr. Lufleigh's abode, set forth, and speedily found myself ringing at his door.

I had decided beforehand that this gentleman was short, round, and rubicund; and when I saw a tall, thin man, with a squeezed-looking face and a sallow, sad complexion, I half felt that I had made some mistake.

"Dr. Lufleigh?" I murmured.

A reply in the affirmative brought aunt Euphrosyne's letter from the inner recesses of my pocket, and my companion, adjusting a pair of spectacles, read it slowly. The signature finally acted as a talisman on him. The muscles of his lean features relaxed, and he extended his hand.

"The nephew of Miss Gorges is truly welcome to my humble hearth," he said, in a tone as full as could constitutionally be managed,

Here was I, struggling ignominiously on the ground, and, worse than all, planing the stately Letitia to the same posture of humiliation.

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"Pray come into the drawing-room, and let me introduce you to the young ladies."

The instant I entered this apartment I started. The first face I saw was that of my bashful neighbour in the omnibus. She seemed to be in a chronic state of blushes, for her cheeks suffused all over now as the doctor announced her as "my daughter Lucy."

Lucy; but where was Letitia? The question was asked aloud almost as my thought framed it.

"What has become of Letitia?" demanded the doctor. "I thought she was here with you."

"So she was a moment since. I will call her, papa"; and Miss Lucy, glad to escape from my scrutiny, glided to the door.

I foreboded what the elder would be like. I had the dark colouring of her father before me; and the unerring truth of photography flashed, instantaneous as its own impressions, on my mind. I was so nervous till Letitia entered that the doctor seemed each instant about to feel my pulse, and I thought there would infallibly be a move to the surgery.

At last she appeared. Something in her aspect sent a quiver through me. She was handsome, no doubt, and I could trace a far-off likeness to the photograph. But the features looked larger and heavier in reality; and though the dull tinge I had so timorously apprehended was softened more into paleness than sallowness, there was enough, even in this milder hue, to rouse a feeling of aversion.

What between the stiffness of the one sister and the shyness of the other, my projected system of dispatch fell rather to the ground on the present occasion.

I did not take leave, however, without having received an invitation to a small party for the following evening; and, afloat on a more lively scene, possibly my own courage might rise, and the charms of the old and the coy young ladies expand in proportion.

CHAPTER II.
The Entanglement.

The hour for the entertainment having arrived, I put in a punctual appearance, and was ushered at once into a room gay with flowers and gaslight. Possibly I looked nervous again, for the doctor's hand was extended with a pulse-feeling gesture as he came forward to receive me. It changed, however, into something of a reassuring shake as he noted my brilliant shirt studs with the Gorges' arms inwrought in jewels. My eye rested quickly upon Letitia. She was in pale pink with white ruches, Lucy in a washed-out muslin; so there could be no hesitancy as to the object of devotion. I was at the side of the elder sister in a moment; I hovered about her like a shadow; she couldn't lay down her bouquet for one second but I had seized upon it, and was presenting it to her with a gracious grimace.

Miss Lufleigh was not without her womanly instincts, and she relaxed insensibly in the presence of such definite attentions. A deepening tinge came gradually into her cheeks, and this was enough to fire me at once.

"Charming colour pink is!" I exclaimed ecstatically, and ventured a nearer approach to the folds of her dress.

"Do you think so?" said Letitia calmly. "I suppose it becomes pale people."

"Pale! The most lovely tint of blush; just the hue I admire; anything deeper is so glaring and gaudy. I would not change it for worlds."

This rhapsody was without any definite subject, as may be seen, but Miss Lufleigh must have understood whereto it tended.

She rose suddenly and half averted her head.

"Do you dance?" she asked, looking towards an adjacent room where the preparations for this entertainment were commencing.

"Yes, certainly, gladly, delightedly, when I can secure a —a——"

"A partner in pink?" said Letitia, with a laugh.

The sound grated on me. What did she mean by the query? Did it bode mockery or encouragement? However that might be, I was not to be deterred now; and accepting the words as a promise I claimed her hand for the opening waltz. I was soon spinning about with her in its bewildering mazes.

"Enchanting! entrancing! ravishing! Let us pause for one second!" I exclaimed suddenly.

Certainly Miss Lufleigh had great physical powers, whatever else she might possess. We had been whirling and whirling as if we were to go on for ever, till I drew up at last with a gasp. My partner scanned me contemptuously.

"You don't care for waltzing?" she inquired, with her calm, dull face as cool as a cucumber.

"Oh yes, of all things; it is my passion!" And more mindful of the jeopardised "twelve thousand" than any considerations of exactitude, I seized her in the same breath round the waist, and before I knew where I was, or certainly where she was, I had dashed her violently against an unoffending couple, had knocked them over, ourselves after them, and had trampled her pink silk in a crushed mass beneath my feet..

I couldn't get up. Something horrible came over me. It was a sense of suffocating shame; and whenever I attempted a movement an awful rending sound—heartrending is the truer term—warned me that I was hopelessly entangled in the lower flounce of her dress.

What was I to do? The other gentleman and young lady were on their feet again in a moment, and here was I struggling ignominiously on the ground, and, worse than all, pinning the stately Letitia to the same posture of humiliation.

How we were rescued, I never knew. I had a dim remembrance of a glittering blade flashing before my eyes, of making one faint appeal for mercy, and of feeling in the same moment the too tight link that bound me to my partner suddenly severed, while I stumbled to my feet, a new-made knight of the garter, with some dozen yards of pink-and-white fabric wound about my knee. The evening came to an end for me then and there. But fortunately the politeness of my host spared me any too marked mortification. He pronounced the room too small for dancing, that he knew all along that it would be foolish and hazardous; and refreshments being ordered in, the party shortly afterwards broke up.

The pursuit of Letitia Lufleigh became a thing of terror to me after that night. But the very next post brought me such a peremptory threatening letter from my aunt that I determined at all hazards to go through with the business, to rush at a proposal which I felt sure would be rejected, and thus, by my ready obedience, secure myself at least in the elder lady's good graces, however disgracefully I might fail with the younger.

CHAPTER III.
The Proposal.

Mild weather seemed to have had a balmy influence on all tempers and temperaments. My own feelings of irritation calmed and Miss Lufleigh's stateliness softened off into graciousness. I had seen her once or twice since the evening of the waltz; and now on a lovely midsummer day I found her alone in the little drawing-room. Could anything be more propitious? She seemed to be seated here awaiting some such confession as that which hovered on my lips. However that might be, I would put her to the test now; and seating myself

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by her side I clutched convulsively at my watch-chain, as if some means of inspiration or support might be gained thereby.

Miss Lufleigh remained silent, and I began to hate her for her impassibility.

"What a lovely, enticing day!" I essayed at last; "weather which no one can resist. I am most favoured to find you in."

"I was just going out," said Miss Lufleigh composedly.

"Don't—don't go!" I broke in with a sort of wildness, and then I stopped. I ought, of course, to have dashed ahead now, but I could not.

"I thought you pronounced the day tempting," she began, as the pause lasted.

"Yes, yes, for those—for any who are free—heart-free."

"I don't understand you," she interposed.

I might have re-echoed Marlow's exclamation with a vengeance. I went on, however, in desperation.

"No wonder! How could you? Words can't, won't, express a meaning like mine. They fade and fail at a moment like this. But, dearest Miss Lufleigh, loveliest Miss Lufleigh, you must have seen and known for yourself what I feel. Be pitiful then, be——"

At last I had moved her from her composure. A sudden flush rushed into her cheeks.

"Do you know what you are saying?" she interrupted in agitation. "Do you know whom you are addressing?"

"An angel," I began.

"Mr. Gorges, if this is a jest, it is an intolerable one. Such conduct is ungentlemanlike, unpardonable."

"How? Why? Wherefore?" I broke out vehemently. "With love like mine, who can hide it? Don't turn from me! Listen to me, believe me, receive me! Be my wife, Miss Lufleigh—be my one treasured wife!"

The repudiation of all Mormon views in the emphatic "one" was scarcely called for in an adjuration of the kind. Letitia, however, had alighted most happily on another expression, which seemed to give an electric shock to her system. At the word "wife" all her features relaxed, her eyes fell till the lashes had covered them with a bewitching veil of shyness. The magic colouring of emotion grew deeper on cheek and lip, and, incited by such unexpected tokens, I followed the prescribed formula, and clasped her suddenly in my arms.

"Be mine!" I breathed; "be mine for ever! Say it, whisper it, to your George!"

She did whisper something then. It was a little gulping "Yes," and, while I trembled at all it bound me to, another murmur came from her lips. "We must ask my uncle, dearest. You will speak to him!"

"Your uncle? who's he?" I cried.

"Dr. Lufleigh, my one guardian now—the generous parent of a poor orphan!" and there was a faint sound of the stirring of some filial emotion.

"What! are not you Miss Lufleigh? his eldest, his Letitia?"

"Only her cousin and namesake," was the reply. "She is away from home now, arranging matters about her legacy."

I sprang about midway up the platform, descried a small door, pushed violently against it, and, as it yielded to forcible pressure, I fell almost head foremost into a deep, cavernous abyss.

"Good gracious!" I gasped, and with a sudden and startling rapidity I sprang up, flung my fair burden to the other end of the sofa, and stood over her in a pose of horror, my hands half clenched, my eyes glaring, and terror and menace in my looks.

My aunt's face was before me, her fierce denunciatory tones rang in my ear, and it is no wonder if they reacted mesmerically upon my motions.

"What do you mean? George, George, Mr. Gorges, what can you mean?" was the exclamation of Letitia, and I felt her grasping at my arm.

"I'm—I'm ruined!" I had all but said; but catching up the word ere I was wholly disgraced, I substituted the first that came.

"I'm too, too happy!" I cried; "this rapture is driving me mad!" and I struck my forehead wildly.

"Calm yourself, collect yourself, dearest!" and Letitia, seizing me in a more tender clasp, drew me again upon the couch. The luckiest rap that ever resounded upon a knocker released me from the fatal position. The embarrassment of a lover naturally seized me at the sound. I sprang from the sofa, gained the hall, drew back the bolt of the door, and the next instant was in full collision with Dr. Lufleigh, who stood mildly on the doorstep.

A muttered word of apology, some dim hint of a coming explanation, and I had shot past him and sped like a madman along the street.

CHAPTER IV.
The Leap.

Certainly no innocent, unoffending fellow was ever placed in a position more critical than mine. I was trapped as neatly

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as any mere tuft-hunter, and yet I could not accuse myself of the propensity. Beyond the policy of pleasing my aunt, there had been nothing mercenary in my motives. I didn't want to be married, I didn't aspire to that fragile article "a jewel of a wife," however rich might be her setting.

I could never return to my aunt bearing my present tale of misadventure, and if I did not take some prompt step I was entangled for ever. It was plain to me now that Miss Letitia had been as cunning as cool, and had but rebuffed me at moments by her frigid demeanour to draw me on the more recklessly in the end.

At the first symptom of seriousness on my part she had snatched at the reality with an avidity which showed me how tight a tussle it would take to relax her grasp. I had gained my room in the hotel, and for nearly an hour I paced it up and down in a state of growing distraction, till suddenly, fleet as a meteor-ray, a thought flashed on me. I snatched at pen and ink, drew a sheet of paper from a blotter on the table, and in a second was seated before the latter, dashing off an epistle which I felt would be all the more natural and effective the greater the dispatch used in its penmanship. I was charmed with three blots which fell on the sheet at the wind up. I scarcely read it over; the more distracted and disconnected the effusion the better, and it should have no benefit from later amendment.

It was one of those wild, desolating farewells which bespeak utter despair of the mind, and blank hopelessness as to any brighter change for the future. Returning to my secret longing for a refusal, I determined now that I had been refused, and upbraided the fair Letitia.

Never, I said, could I claim a forced affection. Her manner had too plainly shown what her feelings were, and mine were such that a renewal of my suit was impossible under such circumstances. I must at once and for ever tear myself from her presence and her vicinity; and then, rising boldly to a climax, I alluded darkly to an instant departure for some deadly region of destruction; and signed myself, with the most emphatic and irrevocable of dashes, "Yours, *in* death, George Gorges."

If she thought me mad after perusal of this missive what did it matter? I was at least free, and that point gained I could have courage to face any later embarrassments.

The letter duly sealed and addressed, I inquired about the trains on the adjacent line of railway; and finding that one left in twenty minutes, I made arrangements for immediate departure. I determined to walk to the station to get rid of company or questioning in the omnibus, and before starting I left my letter with the waiter, with emphatic instructions to have it delivered safely at the doctor's house.

Once on my route my spirits rose. I recalled with a thrill of delight the mad manner in which I had rushed at Dr. Lufleigh, nearly knocking him over.

With the vision of a like exit before him, he must certainly confirm my own assertion that I was a rejected lover. Nothing but this state (or the insanity, which was an equally convenient attack) could explain such distracted conduct. I absolutely chuckled to myself at the remembrance; and my ruminations were so engrossing that it was not till a sharp whistle broke on my ear that I recalled that the conclusive step of escape was not yet accomplished.

Then I saw to my horror that I had taken the wrong turning, that the station was on another road, that the omnibus had already arrived there, and that the engine of the train was even now dashing up to the platform. There was nothing for it but a steeplechase across hedges and ditches; and finally, when I came up panting to my destination, I was greeted by a second shrill shriek, and received the simultaneous shock of beholding the train puffing off at its best speed. Determined to foster the impression of my eccentricity, I rushed in wildly to the stationmaster, upbraided him furiously for my own stupidity, and only cooled down on the assurance that another train bound city-wards was due in an hour's time. Nothing could persuade me to emerge from the station in the interim; not even that tempting balminess of the air to which I had so touchingly alluded on a recent occasion. I sat down doggedly at the window of the one small waiting-room, watching the blank platform with the eye of a Cerberus, ready to make a pounce on the first locomotive that appeared, and take it by storm, in revenge for my late discomfiture. The driver of the omnibus had no doubt seen my escapade across the fields, and thus, should inquiries be made for me at the hotel, he would be prepared with information as to its vain result.

What if Letitia, vexed or vengeful, should send her uncle in search of me? A qualm came over me at the thought. Passionate impatience supervened, and up I got, and began such loud pacings and stampings in my small retreat that the stationmaster must have prayed as devoutly as myself for the providential arrival of the train.

An hour passed—the wretched conveyance was late. What business had it to pause anywhere but here? I would have a report drawn up to the directors; and full of my new grievance I emerged from confinement and strutted out, puffing and wrathful, towards the ticket office. The man at once popped in his head with a frightened gesture. But if I could not confront him by menacing looks, at least he should not shut out my stormy accents. These were rising ever higher and higher when an awful sight stopped them.

It was the face of Letitia in the doorway, backed up by that of her uncle. I dashed like a maniac in the opposite direction. This brought me right out on the platform—the bare, blank platform, without a sign of a train, without a haven of refuge in sight! I sprang about midway up, descried a small closed door, pushed violently against it, and as it yielded to the forcible pressure, my hat rolled off behind, and I fell almost head foremost into a deep cavernous abyss. Something sharp and shiny rose up around me and above me. It was pile upon pile of black glittering coal.

Bruised rather and battered, I scrambled like a sweep to my feet, and had just strength left to bound frantically towards the door, and hold it by the lock.

In the same instant a bell rang, I caught the whistle of the engine, and knew that the train was up. Loud above its noise rose another. It was the voice of Letitia Lufleigh.

"Where is he? Gracious, where is he gone to?"

"He's mad, wherever he is," said the doctor calmly.

"Stark, staring mad," echoed the station-master.

"But what has become of him? Do look, do think," cried the lady distractedly. "Oh good heavens, he's under the train!"

"No, no, Letitia."

"But he is, I say! I see his hat!"

In the terrible commotion that ensued a hope flashed upon me. Everyone had rushed to the far end of the carriages. I could hear them screaming, poking, and gesticulating. Slowly I released my grasp of the coal-hole door, peered out, and made one spring across the platform. The luggage van was directly in front. In a second I was in it, and had crept behind a big box. Safe here, I listened breathlessly for the start. Even though my crushed remains lay under the wheels, the train couldn't wait for ever for their recovery. The guard plainly was of my opinion. My heart gave a bound of delight as I heard him banging to the doors, though his cool remark at the moment would have made my blood curdle under less happy circumstances.

"Smashed to smithereens! Gone as clean as a cockle! Not a hair of him left but the hat!"

A tip to this feeling functionary ended my difficulties on my arrival in town; and a letter to my aunt, when I had gained the further haven of London, cut short any trouble with her. She indorsed, at last, all the latter steps of my career with the stamp of approval, and recommended a prolongation of the continental tour which I had promptly mapped out for myself.

On my return to her hospitable hearth, never again did the name of Letitia or Lucy vex my hearing. Her cautious consideration extended to other young ladies as well; and charmed at this release from matrimonial intermeddling, I have felt that credit rather than censure must ever attach to the dashing valour of my "lover's leap."

L. Thompson.

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A Little Mistake.

"CONFOUND it!" exclaimed Jackson. "What a stupid fellow that jeweller is!" "How so?" inquired his friend. "Why, I told him the other day that I wanted engraved on the engagement ring the letters 'from A. to Z.'—'from Arthur to Zenobia,' you know—and the idiot went to work and put in the whole alphabet!"

Breaking Point.

A MAN may think he adores a woman; but his love is put to a terrible strain when she asks him to button her shoes with a hair-pin.

Then Inspiration Vanished.

SHE: "Henry!" He: "Horrors! Don't interrupt this inspiration. I am——" She: "My dear, I only wanted to say that you have dipped your pen into the coffee."

Very Unkind.

DORA: "That reminds me, I must inquire from my *fiancé* what business he is in." Clara: "I judge by the look of the ring he gave you he must be a glazier."

Why She Felt Miserable.

"MRS. GUGGINS is feelin' mighty miserable." "You don't say so! I thought she was lookin' in splendid health." "Yes, that's just it. She's feelin' so well that she can't think of nothin' to take patent medicines for, an' she jest sits and reads the advertisements and pines."

Plenty of Business.

"MUCH business this morning?" said the chemist to his new assistant as he entered the shop, which was also a post-office. "Yes, sir," replied the youth. "I have had a busy morning of it. There have been six women in to look at the directory, and I've obliged eight people with postage stamps, besides changing a sovereign."

Method in His Madness.

WIFE (fondly): "Do you remember, John, how you used of an evening to hold my hand—my sweet little roseleaf you used to call it, you funny boy—for hours and hours? How silly my old boy used to be." Old boy (grumpily): "Nonsense, Jane; don't be stupid. I was always practical and business like. I did that just to keep you from the piano."

The Twins' Names.

MRS. M'WIGGINS: "Oh, Archibald, I have such good news for you. I have finally selected names for our twin boys. The chosen appellations seemed to come to me as a sort of inspiration." Mr. M'Wiggins: "Thank goodness! Our days of constant searching after cognomens and our nights of sleepless anxiety are over. What are you going to call the babies?" Mrs. M'Wiggins: "Pete and Repeat." Mr. M'Wiggins: "Happy inspiration!"

A Brilliant Conversationalist.

RICHARD: "What kind of girl is Miss Zephyr? Is she much of a conversationalist?" Thomas: "That's where she excels. I played whist with her last evening, and if it had not been for her there would hardly have been any conversation at all. She was the life of the table. She always had something appropriate to say, such as 'What's trumps?' 'Is it my play?' 'Oh, dear! I didn't know it was yours,' and numerous other equally impertinent remarks. Oh, yes; she's a splendid conversationalist."

From a Gushing Pen.

EDNA: "What do you suppose makes Tom write such awfully gushing letters?" Kate: "Oh, I suppose he uses a fountain pen."

Angelic Praise.

MISS BUDD (to famous pianist): "That music was truly divine, monsieur." Monsieur: "Ah, mam'selle, zat is indeed praise; for who but an angel would know divine music!"

A Convenient Gift.

UNCLE: "And what are you going to give your little sister for a birthday present?" "I'm going to ask father to get her a football, and then I'll show her how to play."

Forcing a Smile.

"DEAR me!" cried mamma, "what *is* the baby crying for?" "He's cross with me, mamma," said Mollie. "I was trying to make him smile with the glove-stretcher."

Poor Papa.

LITTLE ETHEL: "Mamma, what does it rain for?" Mrs. DeHomely: "To make the trees and grass and everything grow pretty." Little Ethel: "Then why doesn't it rain on papa?"

Sure to Stay.

VOKES: "We have at last secured a cook who will stay with us." Carson: "Nonsense!" Vokes: "Not at all; I took her on the recommendation of the policeman on the beat."

The Tune that Haunted.

FIRST BALD HEAD: "That's a beautiful piece the orchestra is playing." Second Bald Head: "Ah, it is one that will always haunt me." "Why?" "It is the only one my daughter knows."

Overheard in a Crowd Watching a Balloon.

MRS. HARRIS: "How do they make the balloon go up?" Mrs. Gamp: "They toss some sand out to be sure." Mrs. Harris: "And what do they do when they want to come down?" Mrs. Gamp: "They put some more in, of course."

Pressed to Confess.

"You told me you didn't like smoke, George," she said reproachfully. "Who says I do?" he asked, indignantly. "Nobody; but I distinctly felt several cigars being crushed into dust in your vest pocket when you hugged me that time." And he owned up.

Saving them up.

"IF you think I'm such a conceited ass, why do you have anything to do with me? Why keep all my letters to you, for instance?" "My dear boy, I am keeping those letters to show you five years from now, just to convince you that you are what I say you are."

Not What She Wanted.

CLERK: "Here is a letter from that actress. She is willing to give us the testimonial, but she wants us to write her first giving definite information about terms." Successful Soap Man: "Terms?—yes. I wonder what we ought to charge her for publishing her name in connection with our soap. It's a big advertisement for her."

Very Much Alive.

"PAPA," said a beautiful girl, as the old gentleman came in late, "did you notice the dead body of a young man in the yard?" "Why, no; what's the matter?" "I refused young Mr. Paperware to-night, and from the hopeless, despairing look upon his face when he staggered from the house, I fear he may have killed himself." "Well, I'm glad you refused him," said the old man, spitefully; "he has just beaten me five times at billiards."

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A Woman's Trust.

A Charming Little Tale of a Misunderstanding.

"The woman who gives herself to a man, who consents to be his wife, should feel the most absolute trust in him; otherwise she should not consent to share life with him!" declared Lilian Barham decisively.

"You are older than I, and more determined in character," sighed Alice Deed, her friend. "I always was timid, and I sometimes think that I shall never be bold and trusting enough to accept a man, supposing that a man ever cares enough for me to make a proposal. It must be nice to have such trust in anyone, and you must certainly have great faith in your lover, and be very fond of him, to face the smiles of your friends, who have not failed to remind you of your strongly-expressed vows of single-blessedness!"

Lilian Barham laughed happily.

"I *do* love Mark Amberley!" she said warmly. "It seems strange to me that he should have so thoroughly taken possession of my heart as to sweep away all my resolves so completely. That, Alice, shows the power of love! I *do* trust him——"

She was about to continue, but she stopped abruptly, and, to cover the sudden break in her sentence, she made pretence of having heard a knock at the door. A chill had fallen on her heart, for she realised a something which she had not been able to define. She had no time to analyse her feelings while Alice Deed was with her, for that feather-brained young lady kept up a constant chatter on topics connected with weddings, but after Alice's departure she sat still in a cosy arm-chair and tried to examine her heart.

While she was with Mark Amberley, she was in an ecstasy of joy; she felt bound up in him; she felt that she could not live without him. He was all in all, and she trusted him, as she had told Alice that a woman ought to trust her future husband, unreservedly, entirely. Yet——. A slight flush overspread her face as she remembered her recent expression of opinion. It was true; when she was away from him, there came over her a chill of—doubt! Yes, it was doubt; she realised it for the first time. She had wondered if this undefined sentiment were doubt, and she shuddered.

"It is foolish and unjustified!" she assured herself. "A punishment on me for my long defiance of the little god of love," she added with a laugh.

She went upstairs and looked at the trousseau and at the presents from her relatives and friends, as a kind of antidote to the poison, and then there came a letter from him and her chilly doubt vanished once more and she was unspeakably happy.

The following evening she was to meet Mark Amberley at a ball given by the Dowager Lady Amsden at her magnificent residence in Grosvenor Place, and she looked forward to the dances she would have with him. He was a superb dancer and she was so fond of dancing! Very few men nowadays can claim to be good dancers, and she was usually vexed with two or three of her partners whenever she went to a ball. The pity of it was that she could not have him to herself all the time!

The evening came and the first part of the programme was over. She had been obliged to give some dances to others, and Mark, finding that he had to yield his loved one to another for the last dance before the interval, resolved to have a quiet rest in a secluded corner. He left Lilian talking to her hostess, in order that it might not appear that he was monopolising her, and walked listlessly away.

It was with a mingled sentiment of vexation and satisfaction that Lilian awoke to the fact that her partner for the dance had not come to claim her; she was not sorry to sit out that dance, but it was vexing to be left and not to have the chance of sitting it out with Mark. Lady Amsden apologised, and would have sent her younger son in search of the truant, but Lilian interposed.

"I would prefer to sit out this dance, really!" she expostulated vigorously.

"It is unpardonable!" asserted Lady Amsden.

Her son, a young fellow of eighteen, was about to offer himself as a partner, but on hearing Lilian say that she would prefer to sit out the dance, he drew back. Lilian Barham's beauty and hauteur inspired him with something like dread.

After a few seconds, Lady Amsden was called to another part of the ball-room, and Lilian quietly moved off to a spot where she would not be so much within the view of the dancers. She had wandered from the ball-room, her thoughts busy with her lover, when she was startled by the sound of his voice. It came from the other side of some tall plants used for decoration purposes.

She did not make any movement towards him because she heard another voice and because of the words Mark had uttered.

"To tell you the plain truth, my dear fellow," Mark had said, and his tone struck her as light, almost flippant, "I think it is rather a bad bargain, and I would draw out of it if I could see a reasonable excuse."

"But a pledge is a pledge, Mark," said the other voice. "I can't see how you can back out of the engagement now. And I think you are wrong, too. More than one man I know would like to have your chance."

"Oh, I could get out of it for that very reason! If others would be glad of the chance——. I really don't see why I should stick to the engagement if I can do better; I don't take such things as seriously as you seem to do, Archie. And I believe that I can do better, in spite of what you and others may think! No offence, old fellow; I merely wish to say that I was off my head when I ran into that affair. But I can't see a decent excuse, confound it!"

The next words were lost to her, and then the man called Archie spoke.

"I am very sorry to hear you say it. It's so near the wedding. only four days. What . . . . . Miss Barham?"

The intermediate words of the sentence were lost to her, but she strained her ears now to catch her lover's reply to the question.

"Oh, I'll undertake to arrange matters with her! I don't think that *she* will be much upset by my backing out of the engagement! Why should she? 'There are as good fish in the sea, etc.' You know the proverb."

"You take things too lightly, Mark."

"And you take them too seriously, Archie! Look here, I take you along with me and ask her, before you, if she has any objection to my backing out of the engagement! Come on now!"

Lilian Barham's cheeks were flaming and her heart was beating at a great rate. The indignity of it! Scoffing at what should be the most sacred of ties, and speaking of backing out of it in front of a third party! He was so confident too!

Did he think a woman of her nature would treat such a matter lightly, without consideration, and be as ready as he was to throw it off and laugh at what the world might say? He could do better! She had great difficulty in repressing the tears of humiliation that were ready to surge to her eyes.

But he should find no obstacle to breaking the engagement

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if he so desired; she would relieve him of the necessity of hunting about for a reasonable excuse! She passed swiftly from the back of the tall plants and stood before them.

"Miss Barham!" exclaimed Archie in surprise.

"Lilian!" cried Mark equally astonished, rising from his cuair.

Both men showed their surprise very plainly in their faces, as they gazed at the hotly-flushed cheeks and flashing eyes of the girl.

"Allow me to return this ring, Mr. Amberley!" said Lilian freezingly, taking off the engagement ring and holding it out to him.

"Lilian!" he exclaimed again, his cheeks paling.

"Miss Barham in future, if you please, Mr. Amberley!"

"But what does this mean?" he asked in perplexity. "I think there is some mistake."

"There is no mistake," she replied in the same icy tone. "I was an unwitting eavesdropper, and I desire to spare you the necessity of finding a decent excuse to enable you to back out of your engagement with me, as you vulgarly phrased it just now!"

"Lilian, I did not say that!" he declared hotly.

This contradiction, this transparent attempt to shield himself by a falsehood enraged her; it was adding insult to injury. She would have flung the ring at him had not his companion, a man of about thirty-five, stepped forward.

"Miss Barham, there is some terrible mistake, believe me!" he said earnestly. "Mark was not talking of his engagement with you at all. It was unfortunate that the word 'engagement' was used, but that is my fault; I am rather fond of using the word in connection with business undertakings or arrangements. I assure you most solemnly that the conversation which you have overheard concerns a splendid investment!"

Lilian Barham glanced from one man to the other in doubt; Archie was so earnest that she felt bound to believe what he had said.

"But why was I mentioned?"

"Lilian, I do not remember the exact words used by either of us, but I certainly never said anything about backing out of my engagement with you!" explained her lover, speaking in a manner that carried conviction with it. "I have engaged myself for a certain sum in an investment which Archie thinks is a splendid chance, but which I am now inclined to regard with less favour than I did when I went in for it. Moreover, I want the money, which is rather a lot, for an unexpected turn of my father's business—which is a very large one, as you know—has absorbed all the ready money he intended for me, and so I feel that I want the money I have so recently invested. When I told Archie that, he looked grave and said something about 'What will be thought by Miss Barham?' I forget exactly what he said. It's all very simple, Lilian, and there is no mystery about it. I feel inclined to kick Archie for his habit of using such words as 'engagement' and 'pledge' in such commonplace matters!"

"It's all perfectly true, Miss Barham," said Archie in confirmation.

Lilian's cheeks paled and she trembled. This was her trust! She sank to a chair and covered her face with her hands.

Archie discreetly withdrew.

"Don't cry, my darling!" whispered Mark. "It's all our fault!"

"No, no! I ought to have trusted you!" sobbed Lilian. "And instead, I—I——"

"Yes, you must trust me," said Mark, taking her hands from her face so that he could kiss the sweet lips, "and in future you will!"

"Fully and completely, Mark!" said the girl in a low voice. "I have learnt my lesson!"

She kept her word. She kept her engagement, as Archie would have said. And there is not a happier woman to-day than Mrs. Mark Amberley.

L. Payne.

Your Editor Chats.

I HAVE a big scheme coming along in which a number of Gramophones will be offered as prizes. Many of my readers will not, perhaps, feel very interested at this announcement, because they do not know exactly what a Gramophone is, or how it works. I will therefore tell you something about it.

A Gramophone is an instrument which exactly reproduces any sound which may be made. If you sing into it, or cough, or sneeze, or shout, the instrument will reproduce these sounds just as they were made. Therefore you can readily understand that it is possible for you to hear songs and musical pieces sung and played by the finest singers and bands of the day, without troubling to go out of your own parlour.

All you have to do is to take a flat disc and place it under the recorder. As the disc revolves, so the sounds come out of a trumpet, just as realistically as if the music were being sung or played for the first time. It is such instruments as this that we shall offer as prizes to our readers, and full particulars of the big scheme will appear next week.

OUR NEW SERIAL.

AND now as regards the new serial story which will start in a few weeks' time.

I think I may safely say that no story of such power and interest has ever appeared in SHORT STORIES. It is written by an author who has a great reputation for romance of this nature, but who will be introduced to readers of S. S. for the first time. It is a story in which the chief characters are depicted with great vividness, and their doings arouse your sympathy, your admiration, and your affection.

A NOVEL SERIES.

SHORT STORIES is essentially a paper of which the contents must, in conformity with the title, consist of narratives. Despite this, I am always receiving letters from readers who suggest that an article on a given subject would not be amiss.

There are so many subjects in which readers of SHORT STORIES are interested, which might quite well be dealt with in an article, that I am sometimes sorely tempted to create a precedent, and publish matter in other than narrative form. For example, everyone is interested in the subject: "SHOULD A MAN GIVE UP BACHELOR PURSUITS WHEN HE MARRIES?" An article on this matter in SHORT STORIES is, however, out of the question. But I have thought of a better way of discussing the point, and that is in the shape of a short, complete story.

I have selected a dozen problems of general interest, and have had short stories written on each—that is to say—each story is so produced as to form a solution of the problem. This is an entirely new way of dealing with facts, and I feel sure that readers will appreciate the innovation. I am always trying to keep SHORT STORIES well ahead of all its rivals, and I think you will not consider me egotistical when I say that I feel we are still in front. **Your Editor.**

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As it Really Was.

A Pathetic Tale of Theatrical Life.

SYLVETTE, the "clever and beautiful chanteuse," was singing and the patrons of the fashionable vaudeville theatre, where for two weeks her name would continue to appear on the outside in electric lights, were agreeably conscious of the fact that she was in exceptionally fine voice and spirits to-night.

Sylvette had the best place on the programme, which means that she appeared at an hour neither too early, when people were arriving, nor too late, when the audience were weary and tired to hold.

All the lesser vaudeville lights had twinkled and disappeared from the horizon when the peerless Sylvette had arrived to dress for her act. And now this bright particular star could shine in all her glory, supreme in the consciousness of unrivalled splendour.

Sylvette's songs were of a various nature. She changed from a pathetic love ballad to a French ditty of the most sparkling, not to say naughty, character, and from this returned in a flash to face her delighted admirers with the latest and most approved "coon song," into which she threw herself with the utmost abandon.

Yes, Sylvette was astonishingly versatile. The array of grinning youths on the front row were unanimous in their expressions of approval, all agreeing that she was splendid, which in their vernacular signified the very climax of appreciation.

The baldheads used their opera-glasses in open admiration; not with more vigilance, however, than did the women of the audience, although their interest was of not so friendly a nature.

Two of them, seated in a box at the singer's left, seemed especially interested in that dainty individual.

"You can see the make-up so distinctly from here," whispered the younger of the two.

"Of course you can. Oh, she's heavily made up, that's plain enough. I wonder if she's as pretty off the stage?"

"No, she can't be. Who wouldn't be pretty under the same circumstances? And then, think of her gowns!"

"Just imagine, Marie," said the older one, "the frivolity of such a life, vanity, vanity, nothing but vanity. Her nature must essentially be extremely inferior to permit of her singing those horrid songs with such apparent enjoyment. How dreadful to live always a life of superficiality and sham—never to have a noble incentive! Oh, it's pitiful, it's shameful."

Marie's eyes were on the stage. She was but vaguely conscious of her aunt's words. "It is sad," she murmured absently. Sylvette was bowing for the last time, with a flashing of eyes and teeth and a swirl of rose-lined, ruffled skirts.

"There—she's off. What comes next? Let's see your programme, auntie."

"I can't forget that girl," pursued the older woman, still in her pitying mood. "Such an existence is saddening to think of. Life to her is nothing but a gay bubble, and when it bursts—what then?"

But Marie replied rather peevishly as she yawned behind her fan, "I'm sure, auntie, I don't know."

When Sylvette left the stage, she hurried at once to her dressing-room, ignoring the crowd of envious performers and admiring stage hands, who, according to their custom, had gathered to watch her "turn."

Her maid speedily divested her of the rosy finery which but a few moments ago had shimmered in the glare of the footlights.

A swift application of cold cream removed the roses from her cheeks, the fascinating shadows from her eyes—and in an incredibly short time she was ready for the smart tailor-made gown that Nancy was holding in readiness for her.

When dressed for the street Sylvette was still an attractive young woman, though her face was graver by far than anyone would have thought possible who had seen her on the stage.

An unopened letter, addressed in a woman's handwriting, lay on the table. As Sylvette caught it up with her gloves and purse the gravity of her face increased all at once to an expression almost of pain. She had carried the letter about with her all day, since its arrival at the hotel that morning, and had not yet found opportunity to read it—or was it that she shrank from opening it?

Dismissing Nancy as soon as she reached the hotel, she went straight to her room.

Even after her wraps were laid aside and she was settled in her comfortable armchair she still waited, handling the letter deliberately and musing over it, but making no attempt to open it.

For some time she meditated, her head thrown back against the cushion, her eyes half-closed. Finally she straightened up with a sharp sigh and resolutely tore the letter from its envelope. This is what she read:

> "My dear daughter Sylvia,—Why do you not write oftener? Messages from you are the bright spots in our monotonous existence. You are so generous, dear, to send us so many lovely things—but it is your letters we want! We know but little of your plans—your life. You make such vague mention of your musical work. You say you have engagements in various parts of London, and we know you must be well paid, for you are constantly remembering us with some lovely gift. Be careful, dear, not to try yourself too far. Don't think we ever forget what we owe to you. I pray that my daughter is the same sweet Sylvia she always was, and that she is happy. Won't your engagements ever allow you to come home? We could get you up a concert at the opera-house, as we used to in the old days. We simply must see you again, dear. You will write more fully, won't you, daughter Sylvia? Your loving "MOTHER."

Sylvette folded the letter carefully, her eyes staring vacantly before her. Suddenly she rose abruptly and went to the writing-desk in the corner, took out her diary, sat down and wrote: "Mother has asked again why I don't tell them all about myself. I suppose I shall have to tell them some time, but not now! No, it's out of the question. They would never understand."

She underlined the last sentence and again rose, pacing the room restlessly. What a strange mood she was in to-night.

Returning again to the desk she caught up the diary and began to turn its pages, reading them as she stood. A look of absorbed interest replaced the pained distress of her face. At length she sat down in the armchair and read on and on, as if she were reading the story of another person.

April 10th.

"I am almost discouraged; I do not know where to turn. There seems to be nothing for me here. I have sung, recited and played at concerts and similar functions, hoping that they would lead to something better. But I'm just as far from securing a paying engagement as ever. Mrs. Mills hints at my returning home. I dare say I have imposed upon her hospitality—but what can I do? I can't go home; I promised them I would succeed and send them relief and I will do it.

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Oh, the complications at home; I dare not think of them. Poor mother, how does she stand it? No, no, I won't give up. I will find something."

"April 25th.

"Letter from mother. Alice is ill—poor little thing. I know why—it's from wearing those old thin shoes. My heart aches and aches. I know mother is keeping a great deal from me. I know what desperate straits they are in. Oh, I must find something. I will make one more mighty effort. Dear God, help me and show me the way."

"May 3rd.

"At last help has come. It is far below my ideal, but it means bread and butter and money for the folks. Once I would have scorned the offer, now I grasp at it as a dying man grasps a straw. I am going into vaudeville. I have had a trial and the manager offers me one week, with promise of the entire season if I succeed. The idea is popular now—quite the fad, and pays better than anything else, they say. Mrs. Mills says I ought to be thankful enough to get such an opportunity; that it is not to be sneered at. Mrs. Mills is a Londoner and she understands, but I can't let them at home know about it. In that little country town they would not look at it as Mrs. Mills does, I'm sure. No, it would never do; but I can send them money! Thank Heaven for this relief."

"May 30th.

"What a rush I've been in! No time for a diary. Well, I made a pretty fair success and they have promised me the season, but how the money flies! Photographs, costumes, everything! Couldn't send anything home for two weeks, but oh, how proud and happy I was when I did send £20. Now, if I can just keep booked up I'll be all right. Luckily the vaudeville houses keep open all summer, so I need not be idle during the hot weather."

"June 15th.

"The work is awfully hard—three performances a day. I'm losing flesh somewhat, but then it means money for them. How overjoyed they were when relief came! But why will they ask so many questions? They want to know all about my work. Well, there's no use thinking of that. They could not understand. The work is honest and I shall always keep myself from the real theatrical life. It need never hurt me."

"August 6th.

"I can't imagine what is the trouble. The agents don't give me any more engagements. I haven't a single one in prospect and I have been idle now for two weeks. What can it mean?"

"September 18th.

"I've trudged and trudged about this city in the heat until my feet ache with weariness. Every theatre is booked up. I haven't sent home money for a month. Oh, what shall I do. I'm nearly desperate again."

"October 3rd.

"At last I understand. A well-meaning manager has opened my eyes to my deficiencies. He says my act is tame—needs more ginger. With a coon song or two and a high kick thrown in. He says I must not wear long dresses. He advises me to get up some *chic*, dashing costume if I mean to make a real success in this business. He says my appearance and stage bearing are attractive enough (in fact he said a number of nice things about my looks), but that I need these other things to please the general public. He tells me I would command twice as much salary and play only twice a day, but how can I ever sing those songs and how can I—oh, I can't—I simply can't——"

"October 19th.

"Yes, yes, I can do it; I can do anything to save Alice. Mother writes that she has grown so delicate the doctor insists that she must have a change of climate during the coming winter. He urges them to send her—says it is absolutely necessary to her recovery. She has been ill ever since that first time mother wrote. Poor, patient little thing! Will I sing coon songs, French songs, and wear abbreviated skirts? Yes, I'm nerved up to it at last. I know I can do it and make a success. Applause shall be mine! For applause means money and money means a change of climate for dear Alice!"

"December 1st.

"Well, it is all done. I am a full-fledged variety actress of the most pronounced type. They have sent Alice away. At last the great stress is over."

Sylvette let the diary slip into her lap and read no more. After awhile she rose wearily to prepare for bed. As she did so she noticed a folded bit of paper on the floor, and picking it up, discovered it to be a postscript to her mother's letter.

"P. S.—I don't want to worry you, Sylvie, but Alice is not improving as we had hoped. Try not to worry, dear.

"MOTHER."

Sylvette slept wretchedly that night.

She had to force her spirits next day to appear as scintillant as was expected of the radiant Sylvette. A heavy hand seemed clutching at her throat, but she flung off the influence. She wrote home at once and sent a letter brimful of tenderness to Alice. She began to feel hopeful once more.

On the last night of her engagement, however, she grew restless and foreboding again. She was feverishly alert when night came. It was almost time for her turn and Nancy was adding a finishing touch to the jaunty costume when a telegram was brought in by one of the stage hands.

"For me?" questioned Sylvette. Again that hand clutching her throat. She opened the telegram slowly, in a dazed way, and stood reading the words over and over:

"Alice died this morning. Come at once.—MOTHER."

Sylvette stared dumbly.

"What is it, Miss Sylvette? Lord! look at her lips!"

She took the pencil and blank and wrote mechanically:

"Coming to-night. SYLVIE."

A loud rap sounded on the door and an alarmed voice—"Sylvette! Sylvette! your turn!"

She faced the stage manager with the same dazed, staring eyes.

"Must I go on? My sister is dead!" Her voice sounded strange to her, like that of another person.

"Great Scott! My dear girl, I can't let you off now, it's too late! They're waiting for you. The Thornley Sisters disappointed us, too—one of 'em's ill. I am sorry, but——"

Sylvette was on the stage, smiling, sparkling. Her hands were like ice. There was a roaring in her ears, but the habit of affected buoyancy asserted itself. She sang, she joked. Her eyes flashed with even more than their accustomed brilliancy. Her audience thought her amazingly spontaneous to-night. Gay, winning, rollicking, she captivated them as never before. It was all a nightmare to her. The rapturous applause, the sea of upturned faces. "Alice is dead; Alice is dead!" The words kept beating on her brain till it seemed the tension would snap.

When she reached the shelter of her dressing room she did not cry out or swoon. She heard as in a dream voices murmuring: "Poor Sylvette; it's very sad about your little sister." "Can't we help you?" "How brave you are."

Sylvette was flinging her things on a chair while Nancy packed the trunk. "Hurry, Nancy," she cried. One thing she would avoid. In a few turns a quartette would sing "The Lost Chord." She must get away before then. She would not, could not, endure it.

She was dumbly conscious that the stage manager spoke to her kindly and that the others pressed her hand and offered their sympathy.

She found herself gazing at the plump envelope just brought round from the box office.

"It will help pay"—she shuddered—"the expenses."

Suddenly a sweet, piercing tenor arose:

"Seated one day at the organ——"

"Oh, Nancy—come—I can't stand that! Quick—my bag—good-bye——"

Her voice broke. She was gone.

"It will do her good to cry," said the others pityingly.

Out in the box Marie and her aunt were sitting.

"The gay Sylvette was gayer than ever, wasn't she?" remarked the girl.

"And just as superficial. What a life! I wonder she never tires of it!"

Angela Morgan.

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OUR . . THRILLING SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By Henry Farmer.

Mr. Penworthy at Gurlston Bay.

When Esther asked that Mr. Penworthy might be sent for, it had seemed strange to her father; but he was only too willing to do anything that would please her. He himself had taken a great fancy to the homely little horticultural specialist. He knew him to be a great favourite with Esther. He had telegraphed for him; but Crump had already been on his way to Gurlston Bay. When the news of the series of catastrophes reached him, the accident to Esther, and her subsequent precarious state, and the recapture of Scarsdale, the little man had been distressed beyond description. He believed himself to be in a position to offer Esther more consolation than even her father could, and that the time had come to reveal his true identity to the banker. Benny Beard was under surveillance in London; Tom Jackson and Fred Wilton could be relied upon to look after Railton; Revelle had been so seriously damaged in his encounter with Scarsdale that he had been unable to leave Gurlston Bay, and was lying disabled at Winter's house.

Crump's heart had brought him to Gurlston Bay; at the same time, from a professional point of view, everything was in apple-pie order.

"Shall I be allowed to see Miss Mansfield at once?" he questioned.

"Yes," answered the banker.

"And then, Mr. Mansfield, I should like to have a confidential talk with you on a matter of very great importance."

The banker looked at him curiously, questioningly. Crump shook his head.

"It will be a long talk, and I am most anxious to see Miss Mansfield. Poor young lady, it has been very grievous; but it must be a source of some consolation to her to know that, though Alec Scarsdale has gone back to prison, he lives; and you, Mr. Mansfield, though I understand that you look upon him as a guilty person, yet you yourself must be filled with feelings of gratitude to the man, convict though he be, who saved your child's life!"

It was known now who the man was who had fallen from the cliff.

"He has brought untold misery into our lives," whispered the banker hoarsely, "but, for my child's sake, I would give worlds to be able to believe, to have proof of his innocence! I would——"

He stopped abruptly, as if suddenly realising that Mr. Penworthy, landscape gardener, was hardly the person with whom to discuss these matters; again he eyed the little man curiously. The situation was altogether incongruous.

"Mr. Mansfield," said the little man, reading his thoughts, "I shall explain presently. You will understand me better then. For some time past I have been sailing under false colours."

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you this much now. I rely upon you to keep my communication absolutely secret. My real name is Crump. At one time I was connected with the detective staff at Scotland Yard."

John Mansfield stared at him with a look of blank amazement.

"Crump? Not *the* Crump?"

The little man nodded his head, and looked as if the emphasis on the "the" had embarrassed him.

"I have imposed upon you, Mr. Mansfield. I will tell you why briefly, more fully when we have our talk proper. Chance brought me to Warham on the morning following the robbery at your house. Even then I had my doubts about Alec Scarsdale's guilt. I was present at his trial, and witnessed an incident that convinced me of his innocence; though an old man, and very rusty, I felt that, this being my conviction, it was my duty to endeavour to prove Scarsdale's innocence. I did not take you into my confidence then because, rightly or wrongly, I believed that nothing would have shaken your belief in his guilt. You would have looked upon me as keeping open a wound in your daughter's heart that you wished to heal. You would have opposed me, tooth and nail. You would have been a source of great inconvenience to my plans. I am only revealing myself to you now because that dear, brave young lady, your daughter, is seriously ill, and I venture to believe that her mental anguish would be greatly relieved if she knew that her father believed in the innocence of the man she loves, and though I am not at present in a position to prove his innocence in a court of law—though, God willing, I hope to be before very long—I have gathered enough together by now to convince you, I trust, of his innocence."

"I would give worlds to believe it," whispered the banker hoarsely, "but——"

"There will be no 'but' presently," said Crump quietly. "You will please treat what has passed between us as absolutely confidential; and now might I be permitted to see Miss Mansfield?"

"Prove Alec Scarsdale's innocence," whispered the banker, his belief in his guilt shaken now by an indescribable something about the little man's manner, "and if you come to me and ask of me half my——"

"The only thing that I shall ask you for, Mr. Mansfield," said Crump, with a shadowy smile, "is an invitation to your daughter's wedding! And I may be asking you for that sooner than you anticipate!"

For before Crump had left Warham, a piece of information anent the future movements of Mr. Revelle and Mr. Faversham had reached him indirectly through Fred, and he was anticipating something happening. Mr. Seaton Revelle's creditors were beginning to clamour for money. Railton had heard from his master to the effect that he would be shortly returning to The Firs; also that Mr. Faversham was to be expected.

"And now, Mr. Mansfield, would you please lead the way. I shall not stay with Miss Mansfield long. After that we can talk more fully!"

"Esther," said John Mansfield, as he entered the darkened bedroom, "I have brought someone to see you—Mr. Penworthy!"

A faint cry came from the bed. Crump, his lips quivering a little, advanced very quietly, and, taking the thin hand outstretched to him, pressed it reverently to his lips; then, still holding the hand, he sat down beside the bed. For a few moments there was complete silence. Esther's big eyes were fastened on the homely face; but the little man could find no words. He seemed incapable of doing anything but swallow. The banker stood near the door, his arms folded, his head down-bent. Was it possible that he had been wrong? Had

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OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

Our Powerful Serial.

he been helping to persecute an innocent man? If he had done so, it had been in all good faith; but his conscience was torturing him how! And his child! If it were so, then he had persecuted her also.

"We must be thankful," whispered Crump unsteadily, breaking the silence at last, "that you are going to get well; we must be thankful that he—he is living and is well. I have inquired personally after him. He is well. And, for the rest, my dear child, we must put our trust in God! I venture to believe that we are nearer our goal than we were. I believe that, before long, we shall be in a position to strike. I am beginning to be very hopeful!"

He had not dwelt on all the horrors that she had been through, he had not even asked her how she was feeling; but this was not from any lack of sympathy. He wished to instil hope. He wished to cheer, not depress. He had spoken as though he took it for granted that she was on the high-road to recovery; yet not brusquely, nor with a there's-nothing-much-the-matter-with-you manner; but rather with an exceeding gentleness and tenderness. And what was not spoken in words, was conveyed by the pressure of the hand that held hers.

"I have told your father the truth about myself," he continued, "and presently we are going to have a long talk!"

Esther's eyes dilated. They sought the silent figure standing near the door.

"Does he believe now," she whispered, "that——"

"He will do after our talk. He will be altogether on our side."

Since that night of the robbery, there had been a little barrier between Esther and her father, raised up by his belief in Scarsdale's guilt, a barrier that had prevented perfect understanding, and had been a cause of secret heartache; but Crump was on the eve of removing it. He was about to open John Mansfield's eyes as to the real character of Mr. Seaton Revelle, the man on whose evidence Scarsdale had been convicted, the man whom the banker had hoped, one day, to welcome as his son-in-law.

Crump remained some little time longer, whispering words of hope and comfort; then, with a final pressure of Esther's hand, and a "God bless you," he quietly left the room with the banker.

More than an hour passed before the door of Esther's room was opened, and John Mansfield re-entered. He moved quickly to his daughter's bed. Stooping down, he gathered her up in his arms.

"Esther," he breathed out chokingly, "forgive me! My eyes have been opened. I can never forgive myself. I have wronged you, I have wronged him. I believe now that Alec is innocent!"

"Oh, father, father! Thank God for this!"

The kindly-faced little man, already on his way to the railway station, had brought this about. He had broken down the barrier that had stood between father and daughter, and brought them together again. He had revealed to John Mansfield the true characters of Revelle and his friend, Mr. Faversham.

"I feel," said the little man to himself, "comparatively speaking, quite light-hearted again, now that barrier has been swept away. Within the next few days my foreign correspondence ought to begin to bear fruit. I can't help thinking that we are on the eve of something happening at Warham."

A well-dressed young man, who had been advancing along the road from the opposite direction, had stopped suddenly in front of Crump.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, "you've managed to change yourself considerably; but if you're not Mr. Crump, I'll eat my hat!"

People are eating less.

At the annual meeting of a well-known Refreshment House Company the other day, it was officially reported that the number of people served had not decreased, but the quantity of food consumed had. This means so much direct loss of strength; for as soon as the food supply is diminished the bodily strength declines. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans will keep an edge on your appetite during summer's trying weather, and will prevent you from being "run down" or becoming a sufferer from indigestion's evils. Mrs. Mary A. Dodsworth, of Shipyard Row, Selby, says: "I could take very little food because of indigestion. Meat was to me uneatable. Eggs caused me pain. Bread, tea, bacon, and ordinary articles of diet made me so sick that I hated to touch food at all. The result was I became so weak and jaded that I was hardly able to walk. To-day I am in robust health; and the difference in me is due solely to Bile Beans. I am a living example of what vast changes they can work."

Every man and woman who has no appetite should remember Mrs. Dodsworth. Bile Beans are sold by all chemists at one and three-half-pence or two and nine. Anæmia, debility, "summer-fag," constipation, headache, and all female ailments disappear wherever they are introduced.

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(No. 452.)

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PRICE ONE PENNY.

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Crump, it will be remembered, on taking upon himself the character of Penworthy, had grown a beard and moustache that had very much altered his personal appearance, and had concealed the bald spot on his head, memento of a fierce struggle with a burglar, under a *toupet*.

The little man showed no signs of either embarrassment or annoyance at being thus suddenly unmasked.

"And you," he said, "are Mr. Gerald Phipps. How do you do! I hope I see you well. Dear me! The last time I saw you was when you came over from Dunnavon Chase with Sir Reginald Stanley to visit my little place. Perhaps you remember how beautiful my roses were looking?"

Gerald Phipps was shaking the little man's hand heartily. After his retirement Crump had settled down in a charming cottage on the estate of a Sir Reginald Stanley, a gentleman whose story has been told elsewhere, and who owed much to the detective.

"Mr. Crump," went on the young 'Varsity man, "last time I saw you, you assured me that you had done your last day's work. And yet I don't mind betting a fiver that you've some business on hand at this very moment!"

"I don't deny the impeachment, Mr. Phipps!"

Crump produced one of his "Penworthy" cards, and handed it to him.

"That is my present name and occupation. I can rely upon you not to give me away!"

"Trust me! And, look here! You're the last person in the world that I expected to knock across; but the man of all other that I wanted to. Mr. Crump, I've got a case for you!"

Crump glanced at his watch. He had a train to catch.

"You'll pardon me, Mr. Phipps, but I am rather pressed for time, and the matter that I am at present engaged upon demands all my attention; but if you should feel inclined to walk along the road with me, I should be very glad to hear the details of this case of yours, and give you my advice, such as it is!"

"It's a most serious business," said Phipps excitedly, "my hands have been tied, are tied now, in fact; but with you it's a different matter. You won't give me away, I know. I—I believe in Scarsdale's innocence. In fact—er—I did my best to help him to get clear, and if this got known, don't you see, I should stand a big chance of being run in!"

Crump's eyes had brightened.

"But this is what I'm coming to. You've read about that ghastly accident on the cliff—how the man who saved Miss Mansfield's life proved to be Scarsdale. In the papers it was stated that the rope broke. It was wrong. The rope was cut through. And I've got a piece of that rope. Scarsdale gave it to me!"

"Mr. Phipps," said Crump sharply, "this meeting with you is providentially opportune. Your business is my business. The train will go without me. I will thank you for the fullest details!"

It was late evening when Crump reached Warham. He carried with him a piece of rope that had been round Scarsdale's waist when he went over the cliff, the cleanly cut strands of which pointed to the fact that it had been severed by a knife.

The little man's face wore a singularly stern expression.

"I could prove attempted murder now, I believe. I hope to prove a charge of murder against him, the vile scoundrel! These things can wait. I want first to prove beyond doubt Scarsdale's innocence. So much happiness depends on this! And, I may be wrong, but I do believe that something is about to happen very shortly!"

THE DATE IS FIXED.

WHEN Seaton Revelle stepped into the closed brougham that awaited him outside Warham Station, the marks put upon him by Alec Scarsdale in that short, fierce struggle had not altogether subsided. For two days he had remained in his bedroom at Gurlston Bay. Again and again he had surveyed his battered features in the mirror, and every time blasphemy had escaped his lips. He hated anything approaching personal disfigurement. The sight of his own face had pained him more than his aching, bruised limbs. He had sent Scarsdale back to prison again, but even this only acted as a partial salve to his wounded self-esteem. He could not bear to be beaten or humiliated. And Scarsdale had thrashed him! He was conscious, too, that the goal was receding from him. He knew now that he had misunderstood Esther; that never for one moment, when he had been flattering himself that he was making progress, had Scarsdale been absent from her mind. And now there was another worry. Creditors were clamouring for money. He had posed as a rich man. He must stop his creditors' mouths. Let the news get abroad, and it meant social ruin; and he clung to the position into which he had raised himself.

Railton admitted him to The Firs. A quick glance at the marks still visible on his master's face, then he dropped his eyes to the ground.

"I am glad to see you back, sir!" he murmured. "Mr. Faversham is here. He has anticipated you by some three-quarters of an hour!"

Benny Beard was in the billiard-room, knocking the balls about. The dapper little man was wearing an uneasy, restless expression. He had heard of Scarsdale's re-capture, of Esther's illness, and the remorse that had been for so long gnawing at his heart-strings was gnawing yet more bitterly. Unprincipled scoundrel, thief, and perjurer he might be, but there was humanity somewhere in his composition. He loathed himself more than ever for his share in the business. He had tried to excuse himself. He had been dragged into it. Esther's white face and tearless eyes haunted him. He thought of her as she had been, all sympathy and tenderness, when she had tended him after his accident. What had she done that she should suffer thus?

"Heavens!" he muttered hoarsely, "and to think that I have had a hand in this! But I've done with the Marquis now—done with him for good. He can go his way; I'm going mine. God! but I've been a coward in the past, or I should have done this before now; but I'm going to do it now. I'm going to tell him so to his face!"

But he could not help a shudder. He was a moral coward. He dreaded breaking with this man who had been his master for so long. If he parted with the Marquis he might not be safe. The Marquis was unforgiving and vindictive. At the same time the Marquis had better be careful. They were both in the same boat.

Benny leant forward, played, missed and pocketed his own ball.

"If only that fellow Scarsdale were righted and that poor girl made happy, I should be able to sleep better at nights!"

But he was a coward. Yet he wondered if it would be possible, without incriminating himself.

When the door opened and Revelle entered, the expression on Benny's face was that of a guilty man. He did not look the former in the face as he shook hands. His words of greeting had a nervous ring.

"Had a good time, Benny?"

"Yes, Marquis, yes. And an innocent one. 'Pon my word! I think a quiet, innocent, respectable life suits me best. And you?"

Glancing at him shiftily he saw the traces of Scarsdale's handiwork on his face. Revelle winced.

"I say, Marquis, you ought to thank your stars that you came through that—that business at Gurlston Bay with your life!"

"I didn't send for you to talk over that," answered Revelle sharply. "I'm frightfully hard up. We must pull off the Normanhurst business at once. Fellows are howling for money. I'm in a desperate corner. We must pull it off this week!"

Benny Beard turned a little pale, and shifted his position nervously.

"Marquis," he stammered, "you'll excuse me, won't you, if I speak out; but I'm not having any this time. No—no more, thank you, if you don't very much mind!"

Revelle moved up to him deliberately, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

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Deafness and Catarrh.
212 Cases Cured.

THE Semi-annual Report of the Drouet Institute lately published in the leading London daily papers gives a record of 212 cases of deafness, and ear, nose and throat diseases cured by the Drouet Method during the first six months of 1902. A brief analysis of these 212 cases shows results which are, to say the least, remarkable. Nearly one-half the patients before applying to the Institute had been under some form of treatment which had failed. There are numerous cases of deafness of 5, 10, 15, 20, and even 40 years duration in which restoration of hearing had been effected, and some of these patients had been "Stone Deaf." Then there are those astonishing cases, where deafness was cured at the age of 60, 65, 70, 75 and even 86 years. Again there are cases of sclerosis, or deafness from dry catarrh of the middle ear, pronounced incurable by many Aurists, which have yielded to the new treatment of the Drouet Institute, all of which give renewed hope to those who, after trying the older methods, have given up in despair. For those who suffer from catarrh of the nose and throat there are the histories of cures of cases of long standing in which the Drouet Method has been successful, even after operations and severe cauterizations of the nose and throat have failed.

Those who desire to read the complete details of the various cases can find very full descriptions in the latest number of the "Journal for the Deaf," a publication which is issued by the Institute as a means of assisting people who desire to gain a knowledge of the causes and the symptoms of deafness and diseases of the ear, nose and throat. Besides plain talks to the deaf, and to catarrhal sufferers, the "Journal" describes the method of treatment devised by Dr. Drouet, which consists chiefly of an external application placed on the prominent bony part of the skull just behind the ear. A free copy of the *Journal* with a "Supplement" containing an additional record of upwards of 40 cases cured during the past month, can be obtained by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, 72, Regent's Park Road, Primrose Hill, London, N.W.

A special feature of the Drouet Institute is the Correspondence Department which enables patients who cannot come to London for a personal consultation, to receive advice and all instructions for carrying on the treatment at home. This is accomplished by means of a Pathological Report Form which allows patients to give explicitly the details of their ailment. In fact all but a few of the 212 cases reported cured had treatment conducted by correspondence. The Report Form is always enclosed free with each copy of the *Journal*, and the advice by correspondence, as well as the consultation by means of the Form, is also absolutely free.

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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A FEW RECENT TESTIMONIALS.

Mr. H. R. Francis, Beaulieu House, Shandon Road, Clapham Park, S.W., writes (May 15th, 1902): "You will be pleased to hear that after taking your pills my complexion has become most beautiful and clear. Though I am not vain, I find it difficult to abstain from seeing myself in every mirror I come across. I trust you will be able to make your remedy known to all the thousands of sufferers from sallowness and skin blemishes."

Miss M. A. B., of Brixton Hill, S.W., writes (May 5th, 1902): "I have much pleasure in informing you that since I have begun to use David Macqueen's Pills, a great change has come over me. My health has greatly improved, and my complexion (so my friends tell me) is charming, thanks to your pills. I shall certainly recommend them to my friends. P.S.—You can make what use you like of this, with the exception of the full name and number in address."

Miss A. K., Railway Road, King's Lynn (June 28th, 1902), writes: "I am very pleased to say that after taking your pills my complexion and health have improved wonderfully."

Miss Bertha H., of Stroud Green, N., writes (May 8th, 1902): "Gentlemen, I write to thank you for the pills which have certainly proved most beneficial. I intend to recommend them to my friends."

Mr. A. Kay, Chadwell Heath, Essex, writes (May 2nd 1902): "I have been taking your pills for a short time only but really must say they have a wonderful effect on my health. They do not purge or act violently in any way, but gently and surely bring about a most healthy state. Apparent *outwardly* and inwardly felt."

Mrs. S. Wilson, St. Margaret's Terrace, Station Road, Bognor (May 15th, 1902): "I enclose 1/1½ for your pills which please forward to me as before. I think it only right to let you know that I am more than satisfied with the results, and think that every word in your advertisements is true; as my complexion and skin was a great annoyance to me, but after taking one box of your pills my skin is getting simply lovely which I can only attribute to your wonderful blood purifying pills. I feel, when out, bound to stop everyone I see with a bad skin and tell them of your great remedy."

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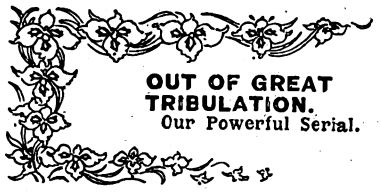

"Benny, don't talk rot! You're in this business with me!"

The words had been spoken masterfully.

"But it isn't rot this time. I've had enough of it!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Revelle, again.

"It's not nonsense. The last business has sickened me. You've sent that poor chap back to prison; that poor girl's been lying on the brink of death. I've had enough, more than enough, I tell you. We'll part friends, and all that, Marquis, but I'm hanged if I'll go another inch along the road with you. It's no use you trying to argue with me, I've made up my mind!"

Revelle's lips were twitching. A hard look was in his eyes.

"I shouldn't break with me, Benny, if I were you," he whispered, with just a suspicion of a hiss in his voice, "or——"

His hand tightened on Benny's shoulder. Then Benny broke away from him, a nervous, but rather unpleasant expression in his eyes.

"Don't threaten me, Marquis, or I might be tempted to do the same. We're both in the same boat. If there's any sinking, we'd both sink together."

Revelle changed colour. He had looked upon Benny as completely under his thumb. He had never dreamt that he was really capable of breaking with him. He gave a little laugh. His whole manner had changed.

"Well, well, Benny, we don't want to quarrel. It won't make any difference to—er—our friendship. I shall miss you awfully—more than I can say. We've worked splendidly together. Of course, I've still got Railton; but he's not the same; but at the same time if you've made up your mind, it's no use discussing the matter further. But you won't be in a hurry to go, will you? Stay on here as long as you like. Glad to have you for your own sake!"

"It's awfully good of you!"—Benny did not seem any more at ease in consequence of the Marquis' change of manner—"but I think I shall be getting back to town this evening!"

"Very well, old chap. Please yourself. You're your own master, of course. I suppose you will be staying on at your old quarters. I shall be giving you a look up one of these days."

"Well, I'm not quite sure. I may travel for a bit. I haven't quite made up my mind. I'll let you know when I've definitely decided!"

"Very well. Come on, I'll play you a couple of hundred up, and give you fifty, that's about fair!"

Revelle took a cue from the rack, and proceeded to chalk it unconcernedly; all the same he was gravely exercised in his mind about Benny's future intentions.

"I am," he said rather inconsequently, "one of those fellows—you play first, Benny—who never forget and never forgive a bad turn. And I've had awful good luck in the past. I've never yet failed to get even with anybody who's played me a dirty trick."

Benny played his ball into baulk. Revelle stepped up to the table, leant forward, and glanced along his cue.

"I believe if a fellow played me false, I shouldn't think twice; I'd wipe him out of existence, and take my chance of the scaffold!"

He played a beautiful stroke, running his ball in off the red.

Benny's next stroke resulted in a bad miss. Revelle followed with a break of twenty-five.

"Yes"—Revelle was chalking his cue again—"the man who sells me will be signing his death-warrant at the same time."

"Marquis," suddenly snarled Benny, very white about the lips, "what the dickens are you driving at? Are you getting at me? Do—do you think that I should—should ever round on you?"

Revelle laughed.

"My dear Benny, you're hyper-sensitive! You round on me!"

He laughed again. But the situation was a strained one.

It was the haunting memory of a beautiful white face, an indescribable look of sadness in the dark eyes, that caused Benny to make a bad hash of the easy position Revelle had left him.

"But I tell you what, Benny, though you won't stand in with me, you might be a good chap and lend me your tools!"

"With the greatest of pleasure possible, Marquis. I—I brought them along with me. I thought you might like them. You do understand me, don't you? This is absolutely a friendly dissolution of partnership!"

"Of course, dear old chap! I'm afraid that you're suffering from Railton's trouble—loss of nerve. Say no more about it!"

* * * * *

"Railton, let me have a look at those plans."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Faversham had taken his departure. Revelle was alone in the smoking-room. The silent valet drew some papers from his pocket—very carefully drawn up plans of The Towers, Lord Normanhurst's residence.

"I believe them, sir, to be quite accurate!"

He drew out another paper.

"This, sir, contains a time-table—if I may use the expression—of the policemen on night duty in this neighbourhood. I have to thank my two young constable friends for the facts scheduled there."

Revelle took it.

"This, Railton," he said after a comprehensive glance, "is simply admirable!"

Railton flushed a little, and bowed.

"And when, sir, if it is not an impertinent question, is it your intention to carry through this enterprise?"

"To-morrow night, single-handed. Mr. Faversham has resigned!"

"So I gathered, sir, from his rather sudden departure. I trust not in consequence of any friction?"

"Oh, no, we parted the best of friends!"

"Then to-morrow night, sir?"

"Yes, to-morrow night, Railton. Have you any suggestion?"

"Only this, sir, if you will pardon the liberty; would it not be as well—or perhaps you may deem it an excessive precaution—to be seriously indisposed to-morrow, confined to your bed, and let the fact be made known?"

Revelle nodded his head.

"You see, sir, in case of any unpleasantness arising, I should be able to testify to having attended you in the course of the night, the other servants being able to vouch for the same!"

"Yes, that sounds all right, Railton! Influenza to-morrow, then, let it be!"

(To be continued.)

First Woman: "I got a letter from you yesterday; but do you know it is dated next Wednesday week?" Second woman: "Good gracious! John must have posted it the very day I gave it to him."

Mrs. Strongmind: "Why don't you go to work?" Tramp: "Please, mum, I made a solemn vow twenty years ago that I'd never do another stroke of work till women was paid the same wages as men."

Mrs. Hansom: "I understand, sir, that you have secretly been making love to my daughter, and I must forbid an acquaintance begun in that way. You should have seen me first." Shrewd Suitor: "Madame, had I seen you first I should have forgotten your daughter and fallen in love with you." Mrs. Hansom: "Um—the informality of the proceeding was all I objected to. Come with me and I will introduce you to my husband."

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Cut Discourteous.

"F. K. B." made the acquaintance of a gentleman three years ago, and he used to pay her great attention. One day she thought he seemed rather cool, so the next time she met him she did not care to recognise him. She heard that he afterwards wondered why. She since thinks she has made a mistake. She likes him very much and would wish to be friends. Whose place is it to speak first?

* * * *

Evidently "F. K. B." has been in the wrong. However cool he may have been on the occasion in question, as she knew him socially, by cutting him she commits an offence, the penalty of which is the cessation of an acquaintance. His coolness may, for all she knows, have been caused by private worry or indisposition, and have had nothing to do with his feelings towards her. Why not take the opportunity next time she meets him of giving him a very nice bow, and if she gets a chance of speaking, tell him that she was afraid she had omitted to notice him the other day, "thinking at the time he was someone else," or some excuse of the kind. The man could scarcely be expected to take the initiative after her treatment of him.

The Cure for Ugliness.

"CAN one make oneself less ugly?" asks "STELLA," who confesses to being one of the plainest girls imaginable. "If you can recommend me any way by which I can improve my looks I shall be very much gratified."

* * * *

The surest way "STELLA" can improve her looks is to look after her personal character. Whoever knew people uncharitable enough to ridicule anyone's ugliness if they saw in it signs of a kind nature and generally attractive disposition? On the contrary, people altogether forget one's looks in one's character. Does not beauty grow hateful to those who contemplate it if it does not cover a nice character? Let "STELLA" altogether forget her looks and cultivate accomplishments, say singing, playing the piano, painting, fancy work, or a knowledge of useful books; let her do good actions whenever she can, and before many years her ugliness will have worn off entirely, as surely as the beauty of her friends does, and give place instead to the good looks of a good heart.

Should Girls go to Cafés?

"ADA" went with some girl friends the other night rather late to a West-end café, and while there was seen by a gentleman friend, who expressed his great surprise at seeing her at such a place. "ADA" maintained that there was nothing wrong in her conduct, and had rather a tiff with the man. However, she is prepared to abide by my judgment in the matter. Ought she to have gone there?

* * * *

There is nothing particularly wrong about it. On the Continent women of all classes go to cafés. But it is not so in England, where they are often not desirable places for girls of respectable parents. I should not like to see a girl friend of mine at such a place. There is, I repeat, nothing wrong, but a girl by going to places of this kind associates herself with an undesirable class and really derives no good from such visits. Of course a girl, escorted by her *fiancé*, or say her brother might go to such places, but certainly not with other gir friends.

The Shady Suitor.

MANY years ago Peter was a suitor for the hand of "ANNA H.," but just as things seemed to have been brought to a happy climax, something went wrong with him in business, and discreditable stories got about in connection with him. Of course "ANNA H." was compelled for the time being to break off the engagement, partly because Peter had not a penny to bless himself with. What was the truth of the stories against Peter, "ANNA H." never knew, but since this he has succeeded in placing himself in a splendid position, and has again applied for her hand. Do I think she should accept him, and if so, would her parents be likely to consent?

* * * *

What sort of a position has Peter now got into? Is it a responsible post in a really good undertaking? If so, I think "ANNA H." might safely reinstate him into her affections, and I cannot see that her parents need object to again receiving him as their prospective son-in-law. But "ANNA H." should be sure as to Peter's position. I have known young men of doubtful reputation who have announced that they were receiving munificent salaries as secretaries of companies, and at the end of three months have found themselves within an ace of the police-court as conspirators for fraud—the willing tools of bogus company promoters. Get a friend, "ANNA H.," to make a few inquiries as to Peter's position before you again take him in hand as a suitor.

The Happy Heiress Hunter.

"SHOULD a man look for a wife with money?" "JONAH" is a young man in a modest position, but believes that if he met a girl with money he could place himself independently in highly affluent circumstances. Having to work for the necessaries of life prevents his carrying out certain schemes he has in mind, and he thinks that if his household were secure he could really do great things in the world. Do I, therefore, think he would be justified in seeking a girl for her wealth alone?

* * * *

If "JONAH" thinks he can find a girl with wealth who is disposed to give herself and her fortune into his tender keeping I should certainly advise him to seek for her. Columbus sought for America, and many men are at present seeking for the North and South Poles. I do not discourage marriages for wealth, if they come off, provided always that the man is man enough not to expect to live on his wife's means, but is prepared to work at a profession. Such marriages have, in many cases, paved the way for men with brains but no money, and provided there is a certain amount of proper marital affection between the parties, these matches often result quite happily. So, "JONAH," don't bother about the ethics of the matter if you really think you can find that girl.

Etiquette for Mistresses.

"HETTIE" is a servant girl, and the other day her sister called. While she was there, her mistress entered the kitchen and appeared to be in a very amiable mood. "HETTIE" introduced her sister, who did not know how to act in the presence of the mistress. Can I tell her what would be the proper etiquette under the circumstances?

* * * *

The etiquette should be decided by the mistress. Of course it would not be usual for her to shake hands with a social inferior, so she would probably have bowed a "how d'you do," and entered into a general conversation. "HETTIE'S" sister would reply "Quite well, thank you," or something of the kind. In introducing anyone to a lady in such a position, the lady herself is expected to make the first acknowledgment, and all tactful people of good breeding would know how to save embarrassment to those introduced to them in a way which would at once facilitate conversation.

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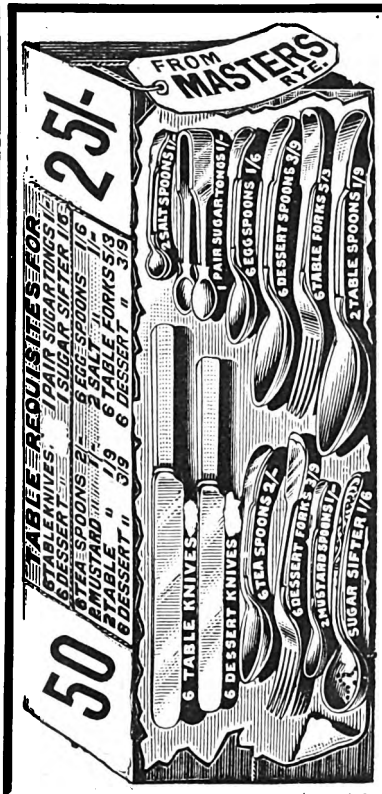

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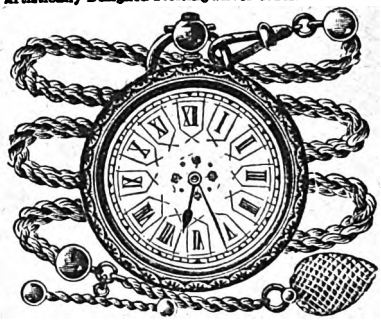

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For the Week Ending September 13th, 1902.

Princess Poppinjay.

The Tragic Little Story of a Village Wooing.

"Joshua! Whatever be the matter wi' ye?"

"Hannah!" he answered her, as he staggered, white-faced and trembling in every limb to his own arm chair in the chimney-corner. "I 'a sin a dead man—i' the watter younder!"

The old host of the "Black Jack" pointed, with shaky forefinger, out through the open doorway in the direction of the weed-covered, sluggish, ebbed stream of the disused canal.

"A dead man, Joshua! What be a dead man doin' here?"

"Thee's fulish, wife! How be I to know!"

"An' where were 'e, an' what wer' 'e like?"

Joshua Fibley continued to gaze vacantly in front of him, big beads of sweat standing thick upon his forehead, his hands the while twitching convulsively.

"'E wer' down in that flag bed, by the owd bridge—'is clothes were good, an' 'e looked as 'e wer' a gentry, but 'is face I coonna see, for 'e wer lyin' on it, an' it wer' unna the watter."

"What be ye a goin' to do about it, Joshua?"

"I dunno yet—a thing like that 'ull ruin the "Black Jack"—whatever I do——"

"Well, Hester will put it all right for us, but about this awesome thing, my man! Ye must do somethin' soon, afore folks get a hold on it."

"I must that! I'll just go down again an'—an' turn it over, an' see if I knows 'un."

"Don't go, Joshua! Don't go by theeself—wait for the sergeant as 'll be by on 'is rounds in half an hour for 'is early pint!"

"No, I tell 'ee! I'll go by myself first—now!"

He got up as he spoke, and shivering in spite of the July heat, went out into the sunshine and down the little sloping brick path towards the canal at the bottom of the garden.

There was not another house of any description for at least a mile round in any direction, the small lonely place, half farm, half public-house, seeming almost impossible of existence.

Farm labourers from the villages round, and occasional excursionists of the tripper sort (the spot being only thirty miles or so from the Metropolis) were the customers the "Black Jack" in the main depended upon, but it was a poor place, whose accommodation for both man and beast was of a kind at once the most primitive and scanty.

At the foot of the garden flowed, or rather crept, the canal the deserted, neglected aspect of which but added to its picturesqueness and charm.

With halting feet and beating heart the old man approached the spot where, but a short while before, he had seen the gruesome thing which had fastened itself upon his mind, to the exclusion of every other thought.

"Yes, there it was, just as he had first seen it. Why he should so desire to know more of this dead man, he could not satisfy himself, but there was the craving, and he could not shake himself free of it.

Not a human soul was in sight, not even a customer up at the house.

It was as much as he could do to bring himself to touch the inanimate piece of clay.

He was on the point of turning the body upon its back when he heard a shout from above.

"Joshua! Joshua!"

It was the voice of Hannah, his wife. He listened but did not answer.

"Joshua! Hester wants ye!"

Slowly again his old arms went down to turn the dead man so that he could see his face.

Down the brick path he could now hear the footsteps of some one running swiftly.

He made as though to sign back whoever it might be, though his lips, try as he would, could not frame a word, or even a whisper.

A supreme effort, and the suicide, or murdered man, lay before him, his face upturned to the sky.

A foreign and a handsome face, it was strange to him, and unfamiliar.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps.

"Father!—where are you?" rang out a young, rich, contralto voice.

Then, before he could prevent her, she was by his side, and had seen the face of the dead.

Tall, stately, dark-eyed, and of a type absolutely un-English, she seemed on the instant to turn to stone.

She did not weep or wail, but with hands clenched in front of her, moaned out—"Istria—my Istria!"

"You know him?" asked the old man, in childish wonderment.

"Know him!" she answered wildly. "It is Istria Danielli—the father of my little Giacomo—my husband!"

Six years before, Hester Fibley, then about nineteen,

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and a remarkably handsome girl, had left her home at Trenunder to enter the service of the Countess of Rochdale as confidential maid.

So clever was she and tactful, that she speedily made herself invaluable to her mistress.

There was only one thing about her which troubled the Countess — viz., Hester's undoubted air of distinction, and her refined superiority to the ordinary members of her class and station.

As a matter of fact, Hester had better taste in dress than had Lady Rochdale herself, wore her clothes more effectively and becomingly than did the modern representative of ancient Norman blue blood, and was therefore largely in the nature of a thorn in the aristocratic side of the old dowager.

Lady Rochdale was, in her way, curiously unconventional, almost eccentric; one of the most noticeable of her peculiarities being a mania for the entertaining of foreign notabilities, or, at any rate, those who passed for such. At her country place near Trenunder, and also in Grosvenor Square, she was for ever surrounding herself with the good, bad, and indifferent of Europe, from Paris to Petersburg.

It was this habit and custom of hers which ultimately led not only to Hester's domestic secession, but also to the creation of a social wonder, lasting more than the proverbial nine days.

One particular season, the special shining light of the usual somewhat motley Rochdale gathering in London was a certain Prince Istria Danielli, a connection by marriage of the great Italian house of the Borghese.

This gentleman was, for one of his nationality, more than ordinarily wealthy, the great majority of the modern Italian nobility being notoriously poorer even than the very poorest of church mice.

But it was his attractive personality quite as much as his money, which called forth the by no means shy glances of society's daughters, both fair and otherwise, though without doubt it was the Danielli ducats which operated largely in making the handsome prince the object of every manœuvring mamma's super-polite attention.

It will readily be imagined, therefore, that when, on the eve of Lady Rochdale's biggest and last function of the season, Prince Danielli suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, and when also her ladyship's confidential maid vanished in like manner, leaving behind her for her mistress' edification and enlightenment a note signed "Hester, Princess Danielli," society was shaken from its foundation to its centre.

Of course the general opinion on the defection of "His Excellency," and on the "shame-faced treachery" of Hester Fibley, was wholly condemnatory—with one exception.

That exception was Kenneth Ogilvie, Lady Rochdale's secretary and man of affairs.

A young man of poor Scottish family and descent, Kenneth Ogilvie, while being beyond question the true, refined gentleman, was liberal-minded and practical, in straightforward, healthy, commonsense fashion.

Appearances counted for little or nothing with him, and when handsome Hester came upon the scene and into his life, he thought not of her birth or parentage, but let her see unmistakably that did she please she had it in her power to make him the happiest of men.

Then entered the "fairy prince," and though other people were blind to the Italian's secret wooing of Hester, Kenneth Ogilvie, with the insight of true love, divined it—and realised his helplessness.

There was no mutual promise between him and Hester, therefore he could but be silent and watch events in her interests.

Still, when the catastrophe did come, when this "girl of the people" removed herself without a word from his reach, he felt hurt and sore, for though the love-lamp of his life would yet remain with him, the light had gone out.

To make matters worse he had to listen to all sorts of comments upon Hester and her works, his own mouth being of necessity sealed.

Thus he was left with an image impressed upon his heart and memory, that would remain with him until his dying day.

* * * *

Five years after Kenneth Ogilvie's last sight of Hester, he happened to be staying with a bachelor acquaintance in the neighbourhood of Trenunder for the week-end.

His friend, a hard-worked journalist, and literary man generally, was enthusiastic upon this especial corner of the kingdom.

"My boy!" he said after dinner, on the Saturday evening, "for lovely country, lovely air, and lovely women, there isn't another place in Great Britain that can beat hereabouts!"

"No?" said Kenneth, who, in their latter days found it difficult to get up enthusiasm upon anything; even the most remarkable. "You seem, Davidson, to know all about it."

"Know all about it! Why, of course I do, man! And, talking of lovely women, I saw one fair specimen when I was down here a fortnight ago, who, I think, would bring you out of your cave, my knight of the dismal countenance."

Even this did not rouse the other to respond in kind.

"I'll tell you what little I know of the story connected with this lady fair—it is a veritable romance."

"Romance in these days!" said Kenneth Ogilvie, with just the ghost of a smile. "Go on; but you mustn't expect me to believe it, all the same."

"Miserable sceptic! But listen! Once upon a time in this very village, or town rather of Trenunder, a certain poor couple lived with one child, a daughter. As the girl grew up, she developed personal gifts that might have been envied by ladies of the highest of high degrees, thereby incurring the jealous dislike of every other member of her sex, throughout the whole countryside.

"Nothing very romantic or unusual in *that!*" remarked Kenneth.

"By-and-by," the other proceeded, "the damsel took service with some big family, and, for all practical purposes, was seen no more by the folks of these parts. A year ago, however, a lady, with a boy infant, a nurse, and two other servants, put up for a few days at this very hotel. I won't excite your derisive faculty by mentioning the name she gave, merely saying that it was a peculiarly high-sounding foreign one."

"Foreign?" queried Kenneth, displaying slightly more interest in the narrative.

"Yes, sir! but 'foreign' of the very best hall-mark, the name, that is. Well, now comes the astonishing part of the whole tale—the romantic part of it. This lady (who, by-the-way, spoke English perfectly) one day ordered a carriage, and drove, alone, to the cottage inhabited by the old parents of the beautiful maiden I told you of. There she remained awhile, returning in the evening to her hotel."

"And the next day departed, bag and baggage, for parts unknown, I suppose?" queried Kenneth.

"Nothing of the kind, my too previous friend!—nothing of the kind! Within a week of the arrival of the fair visitor, whom many had recognised as the some time absent daughter of the aforesaid old couple, the latter removed out of Trenunder,

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and, though hitherto absolutely unpossessed of means, entered into the occupancy of a small, lone public-house and farm in the valley, and about five miles on the Porterbury road. When fairly settled at the "Black Jack," the lady and her baby-boy (the servants returning to London) joined the new host and hostess of the solitary little place, staying for a week or ten days. She repeats this short visit every three or four months, and is known among folks for miles round as 'Princess Poppinjay.'"

"Has she paid this periodical visit of late?" asked Kenneth, with curious quickness.

"My boy! she's here, or rather there, now! Her being so it was that reminded me of this very pretty little drama of real life. By-the-way, I forgot to say that, according to rumour, she met, during her period of service, with some foreigner of distinction, who, falling in love with her, married her, and carried her off to his native heather. Her sudden return, alone, is certainly strange and unaccountable, while no one seems to know whether her husband is dead or alive. Of course, as she appears to have plenty of money, she it is who has put old Tibley and his wife into this little business, though it is a bit inexplicable her choosing so primitive and poor a place, seeing that she herself uses it every now and then as a sort of secret rest and refuge."

"And she is there now, you say?"

"Yes."

"Can you direct me to this "Black Jack" inn?"

"Oh—oh! Why, I'll show you the way to it myself to-morrow."

"Thanks! But, if you don't mind, Davidson, I'd sooner go alone."

"Oh, very well! Only, mind, I shall expect a full, true, and particular account of everything!"

"That depends. I make no promise."

* * * * *

Except to travellers, the "Black Jack" was shut for business purposes until midday, not a single sign of life being visible about it, as Kenneth Ogilvie strolled up to the open gate of the neglected-looking little farm-yard.

He began to think that his errand would be in vain; that a hope, new-born during the past twelve hours, was to fade and fail, as every other hope had faded and failed.

It was while he was thus balancing probabilities in his mind, that he saw, through the green tracery of the hollyocks and the dahlias, in the garden at the side of the house, the gleaming in the sun of a white dress.

Not stopping to think, he moved across the yard, mounted the few rickety brick steps which led up to the garden level, and in a moment was face to face with the one woman in all the world for him.

"Mr. Ogilvie!"

"Yes, Hester! I, indeed!"

"But—but how did you find me? What do you require of me?"

"As to how I found you, chance did much, and opportunity the rest. All that I require of you is to know if you are well and happy."

"It is kind of you! You were always kind."

"Was I? I don't remember! But, tell me—can I be of any service to you? I feel, somehow, that something is troubling you!"

"Mr. Ogilvie—but come along this path towards the canal; I would rather that my father or mother did not see or hear me talking to you."

"Surely not as an old friend!"

"They know nothing of old friends! They only know that I married a rich and titled man, and that less than twelve months after my wedding day, my husband, in some mysterious way, was spirited away from me, his brother, who always hated him, assuming the title and property, with the exception of that portion of the latter settled upon me by my husband, Prince Istria Danielli."

She spoke the name with a proud insistence which well became her, and Kenneth thought he had never seen her look so beautiful as she did at that moment.

"Yes," she went on, looking away from him, "there *is* something! I have a trouble! and, perhaps—who knows?—you may be come to help me."

"Believe that, Hester! I cannot call you else. Yes, believe that! Now, tell me, and what man may do to help you, that will I, for—for the old-time memories' sake!"

She could not but rightly interpret his meaning, the ring of his voice betraying him in spite of himself.

Then she told him,

Married to the Prince at a registry-office on the very morning of Lady Rochdale's reception, she left with him for Paris on the following evening. Staying in the French capital only long enough to have the religious ceremony performed at the Italian Embassy, she and her husband (whom she described as an honourable, true, and good man) travelled on without delay to the latter's estate on the Venetian frontier. Here, in the Palazzo Danielli, they lived happily for a little more than ten months; until, indeed, just after the birth of her boy.

Then, one day, Istria, her husband, started for Florence to meet his brother, and never returned. In a week Marco Danielli turned up, accompanied by a notary and the local syndic, and said that his brother Istria must have perished in some manner by the way. No one remembered to have seen him at the Venice railway station so that he must have disappeared with his horse before arriving at the City of Waters.

Given to understand that she must give immediate possession to the claimant brother, Hester, through another and friendly notary, secured her own interests, which, owing to her husband's generosity, were on a most liberal basis.

Although her husband fully had her affection, she would have been content at this point to leave with her child for England, but for one thing. Marco Danielli had possessed himself of certain papers which would be necessary in the future to establish her son's rights to the Danielli title and estates. These Marco refused to surrender, or rather denied all knowledge of their existence.

Wearied at last with her futile quest, she decided to go to England, and to wait events.

Now, through the friendly notary, with whom she was in constant communication, she had word that Marco Danielli was endeavouring to dispose of certain priceless jewels, pictures, and other property, and that unless action of some sort were taken to prevent him, the most valuable part of the family belongings would assuredly be lost for ever.

In the end, it was hastily arranged that Kenneth Ogilvie, as Princess Istria Danielli's representative, should proceed to Italy, and do his best with Notary Maffei's help, to circumvent Marco's fraudulent intentions.

It was also agreed that Kenneth and Hester should meet in the morning by the old bridge on the canal to discuss final matters.

"Good-bye!" she said, "don't go back through the house yard; keep straight along the canal side, and it will bring you out close by the "George."

"Good-bye, Hester!" he answered, waving his hand to her as he passed under the bridge, and so out of sight.

* * * * *

The next morning, before Kenneth had even thought about starting for his rendezvous with Hester, he was told that the local sergeant of police wanted to see him.

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"Beg pardin, sir, for disturbin' you, but Mrs. Filbey's daughter, up at the "Black Jack," her as is known hereabouts as 'Princess Poppinjay,' wants to see you particular."

"Why, of course, what is it?"

Kenneth marvelled much at receiving a reminder of his appointment by such a messenger.

"Well, sir!—there's murder or something very much like it."

"Murder—what do you mean?"

"Well, it *may* be suicide, but I has my doubts."

"Murder!—suicide! What is it, man?"

"There's a body bin found in the canal, by the old bridge, sir, an' it turns out to be the Princess' husband, sir!"

"Prince Istria Danielli? Why, she thought him dead years ago!"

"Perhaps, sir, you'd best go down an' see her, she's mighty upset! I've got to go into Porterbury for the county superintendent."

In less than half-an-hour Kenneth was in one of the rooms of the "Black Jack."

Hester's one cry to him was "He came to find me! He came to find me!"

To soothe her he promised to proceed on his journey at once, in order that he might try and get at the bottom of the mystery.

Before doing this, however, he insisted that she should leave the place, return to London with her boy, and await there the result of his efforts and inquiries.

He did not attempt to conventionally comfort her, feeling that, whatever the virtues of the dead man, he himself would act the hypocrite in being otherwise than relieved at her being once more a free woman.

Her last words to him were "I cannot understand it—make it clear for me, and I will be grateful—very grateful!"

By daybreak next morning he was at Calais on the road to Trieste and the Palazzo Danielli.

* * * * *

The evening shadows were gathering fast as Kenneth Ogilvie sat, taking a hasty meal, in Florian's, on the Piazza of St. Mark's, Venice.

He had arrived at the Palazzo Danielli the afternoon of the day previous, to be informed by Notary Maffei that Marco Danielli was at that moment in Venice, and, having effected his object, was preparing to leave in forty-eight hours for Trieste, *en route*, it was believed, for South America.

Kenneth went back again, therefore, to the queen city of the Adriatic, the honest little notary engaging to follow on in the course of a few hours.

Little imagined Kenneth that that night would connect him, and one very dear to him, with one of the greatest calamities the artistic world has ever sustained.

Then, Giovanni Maffei bustled into Florian's, joined Kenneth at his table, and poured out a budget of red hot news.

"No wonder the poor fellow disappeared for all these years! The villain Marco had him seized, the day of his visit to Florence, just outside his own grounds and conveyed to a private asylum for the insane.

"It was not until one of the asylum attendants was persuaded by Prince Istria to believe in his sanity and to help him to escape—an event which took place only a fortnight ago—that it was possible for him to attempt to right the wrong.

"Unfortunately, however, he did not come to me first, but procuring funds from an old friend whom he swore to secrecy, made at once for England in search of his wife.

"As you have told me, and as there can be no doubt, he missed his way in the dark, and was drowned without chance of help. How he found out his wife's whereabouts we shall never know, beyond the fact that he knew she originally came from Trenunder."

"Now, Signor Maffei," said Kenneth, "we have only to deal with this Marco—if we can. He has these papers, there is no doubt, and I fancy that if you call upon Italian law to check him, we shall yet be able to bring him to book."

"*Si, signor, si!* But look, there he is—there, quick, our hats. You pay the bill! I will after him—and you follow—to the left by the Campanile!"

Kenneth caught the little notary up before he had gone half the side of the piazza.

"There he is—see! Ah, he disappears!"

What followed is matter now of history.

There was a mighty rending sound, a roar like that of an explosion, and the great Campanile, the glory of Venice, four hundred and more feet high, suddenly fell upon its own base, almost like a pack of cards.

People shrieked, great clouds of dust rose up to obscure St. Mark's and the Doge's Palace.

It was hopeless in the face of this national calamity to expect success in their quest; the notary and Kenneth, therefore, after hearing that no one presumably was killed, went back to Florian's.

A couple of hours later, however, it was rumoured that a man's body had been found under a portion of the ruined tower. Out of curiosity Kenneth and his companion went to see, and the lawyer's first glance was enough.

"It is Marco Danielli!" said he, and (to the officials present) "I, as the legal representative of the Princess Istria Danielli, claim that everything found on the person of this man may be impounded by the State until I have proved my case on my client's behalf."

A month or so afterwards Kenneth Ogilvie, personally handed to Hester, in London, the packet of papers attesting her son's heirship and titular rights.

With regard to Hester's gratitude and the nature of it, one thing only can be said—she has promised to talk it over with him twelve months hence, and he is perfectly satisfied, for he feels that she will keep her word.

Ralph Enderby.

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A Horrid Little Flirt.

A DAINTY TALE OF A LOVE DUEL.

"Yes, it's quite true, Jack—she's a lovely girl—and as charming in manner as in feature. I can't describe her to you—she's beyond description! But she's a horrid little flirt! If I were you I wouldn't go near the place! You take my tip, old man."

Jack looked at his companion, a tall, slim, young man, with jet black hair, and a handsome moustache of the same colour, then he cast a glance in the mirror opposite, and beheld himself; his companion was much the handsomer man of the two, for Jack barely reached the middle height, he had light hair and a very poor apology for a moustache, and, worst of all, it was straw-coloured! Then his eyes were bluey-grey, and looked quite ordinary compared with his friend's fine dark orbs.

"Miss Harley surely couldn't have resisted your charms?" he said, smiling.

"I tell you she has broken the hearts of a dozen fellows already—and mine among them," said the other, trying to look melancholy.

"Well, I shall go and still hope to return heart-free in spite of this syren's charms," laughed Jack.

But his companion shook his head at him sadly as he left the room.

Mabel Harley was indeed all that Jack's friend had said of her; her beautifully-moulded figure, her trustful brown eyes, and her wavy golden hair, all combined to give her that peculiarly attractive appearance that had led to the fascination and subsequent downfall of so many would-be lovers. But if we were to endeavour to adequately describe the charms and graces of this naughty little flirt—we should require a volume setting aside for the purpose, so following the example of Jack's friend, we wisely forbear with the remark that "she was beyond description!"

"Who is that blonde young man opposite, who keeps looking this way?" Mabel asked of the lady who sat next her, feeling in her wicked little heart that she had already made another conquest.

"Oh, that's Jack Ordry, studying, I believe, for the Bar. He is over for a visit at his uncle's," replied the lady addressed.

"By Jove!" muttered Jack under his breath. "The fellow didn't exaggerate in the least—she's simply charming! Jack Ordry, take care!"

After dinner Jack received a formal introduction to Miss Harley. He invited her to dance, and Mabel complied with a smile which was the more dangerous on account of its seeming innocence. Ah! that smile had done more damage to the hearts of her victims than the blackest frown in existence!

After the dance the two strolled away together, and took a seat almost hidden from view by the spreading leaves of a palm.

"It's all up with him!" whispered one of the guests significantly. "It's a pity, too, he's such a nice young man, and so straightforward himself. He'll believe every word she says."

"Are you fond of society, Mr. ——?" Mabel queried, fixing her lovely eyes on him.

"Call me Jack, if you please, it is easier to remember, and sounds so much nicer from your lips," Jack responded with one of his most slavish looks.

Mabel smiled winningly; so she had made another conquest already. She wished that fellows wouldn't lose their hearts quite so readily—it spoilt the fun.

"With regard to society, I think it depends to a great extent upon the people one meets there. Sometimes I feel awfully bored, but I am enjoying myself to-night immensely."

He cast at her another loving glance as he spoke.

"Oh, for shame, Jack!" she cried, slapping him playfully on the back. "And now"—she continued with pretended gravity—"I am going to concede a point and allow you to call me Mabel."

His answer was a surprise to her. "How delightful! Especially as there will be no danger!"

"Danger of what?" she responded quickly.

"Of us falling in love—or any of that sort of nonsense. We shall be just like brother and sister together."

Then her conquest was not so complete after all, and Mabel answered in momentarily pique—"There certainly will be no danger as far as I am concerned!"

Jack answered with wonderful frankness: "Nor as far as I am concerned either. I think thirty is quite young enough for that sort of thing, and how pleasant it will be to be able to talk naturally to each other without the constant fear of being misunderstood."

"What a horrid fellow!" Mabel cried, stamping her foot passionately on the carpeted floor of her own room. "The very idea of talking to me like that! But I'll punish him—I'll make him fall head over ears in love with me, and then just tell him what I think of him!"

"So the duel has begun," Jack soliloquised. "Lucky I was forewarned! I wonder who has had the best of it. I've got it bad myself anyway. I must wait a day or two to recover before I make a fresh attack!"

So Jack waited two days before he paid the Harleys a visit. Mrs. Harley compelled him to take afternoon tea with them, and Jack confined his attention almost entirely to the old couple; they were simply delighted with him, while Mabel thought his inattention to herself was positively rude.

However, Mabel schemed to get a few moments alone with Jack in the garden after tea, and then she commenced her pre-formed plan of revenge with her utmost ability. She talked glibly on various subjects, and again and again her eyes shot coy glances, and her lips formed into the most bewitching little smiles and pouts at his answers; now she would stoop suddenly but with matchless grace to cull a flower, then she would stand erect in front of him playfully barring the way; finally she insisted upon fixing a flower in his button-hole, allowing her hands to linger for a moment near his neck, which has a very tragic effect upon a young man if he is at all susceptible. For a time she thought she

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was succeeding pretty well in her wicked plot, and at last felt emboldened to put the question :

"What sort of girls do you admire most, Jack ?"

Oh, how he longed to throw his arms round her waist and cry passionately : "You—you are the sort of girl I most admire and love !" But he managed to control himself, and answered quite calmly : "I am afraid that I am no connoisseur on the subject. As a rule, girls all look very much the same to me."

"But have you never been in love, Jack ?" she asked.

Jack treated this as some huge joke. "Good gracious, no !" he laughed. "As I said before, I think it is plenty of time to be in love when one gets to be thirty."

If Mabel felt mortified at his answers she covered her confusion ably enough, and her laughter never sounded merrier nor more unaffected, than as she led the way back to her parents.

"A very successful evening," Jack commented, as he threw himself down on the bed.

"Positively detestable !" cried Mabel, "I hate him !—and I know he does care for me—he couldn't help it !"

Jack's visits were frequent after this, he said there was nothing he liked better than a conversation with Mr. Harley, and one of Mrs. Harley's cups of tea—Mrs. Harley could make tea ! This he intimated to one who always repeated everything—a very useful vehicle if one knows how to manage it.

Mabel's conduct towards Jack changed and she became more "stand offish." Under these new tactics she felt sure she should draw him on. Jack, however, was not to be drawn on, he was always very polite, and beyond that seemed to take no further interest in her whatever.

"I have it !" she cried, after having lain awake for two whole hours plotting, "I'll make him jealous !" Then she rolled over and went to sleep in less than five minutes.

Now there was in the neighbourhood a certain Colonel who showed undisguised admiration for Mabel ; a few weeks ago Mabel would have liked nothing better than a little flirtation with the Colonel, but now her whole desire was to make Jack fall in love, and she realised little gratification from this new escapade.

However, she went walks with the Colonel and generally contrived to drop across Jack ; that young gentleman, however, contrary to expectations, showed the utmost unconcern, he raised his hat and positively smiled when he first met them —to Mabel's great disgust.

But having considered it out in her wise little head, Mabel concluded that Jack knew her reputation for flirting so well that he considered this as nothing more than one of the others —she was positively certain this must be the case—"Or else," she asked herself, "how could he help being jealous ?"

A week later the neighbourhood were surprised by the announcement that Miss Harley and the Colonel were engaged to be married. "Now we shall see !" Mabel said to herself triumphantly.

The next day Jack dropped in for tea, Mabel met him with a smiling countenance.

"I suppose you have heard the news ?"

"Yes," he replied cheerfully, "and have taken this early opportunity of calling to congratulate you." He spoke so calmly, could it be possible that he didn't care, after all ?

"The Colonel is a splendid fellow ! So handsome ! Everybody is fond of him !—and though you perhaps could have done better—well, it's best to choose the one that we really love."

Then Jack took his seat at the table, and talked away to the older couple, but the worst of it was he seemed unable to speak to Mabel without bringing the Colonel's name in every time ; he seemed a good deal more pleased about the arrangement than Mabel herself. Why couldn't he let the subject drop !

"And when is the marriage to take place, Mabel ?"

"I don't know !" She answered so shortly that both Mr. and Mrs. Harley turned to look at her.

Only Jack didn't notice, and went on innocently :

"Anyway, you'll invite me to the wedding—I shall be back in town by then, I expect, but you must write and let me know."

Jack seemed to think it must be a pleasure to Mabel to keep on harping upon this one subject. At last she could bear it no longer, but rose abruptly and left the room.

Jack returned home moody and dissatisfied, he was not at all sure of his ground, but he consoled himself by the thought that if he had betrayed his love, she would have only treated him the same as the rest of them—better that she should never know.

The engagement with the Colonel only lasted a fortnight, then the report was circulated over the town that the match was broken off. That afternoon Jack made another call.

"And how's the Colonel ?" he queried.

They were standing alone in the garden together.

"I don't know," she replied sullenly. "Haven't you heard that the engagement has been broken off ?"

"I am extremely sorry," cried Jack. "Could I do anything to explain this misunderstanding—for I am sure it is only a misunderstanding ?"

"No ; it is quite irrevocable—I find that I do not care for him—I love another."

There was a look in her eyes that conquered Jack all in a moment. He knew that he was a fool. He had been forewarned what would happen—he went into the snare with his eyes open—simply because he couldn't help it.

"Mabel," he gasped, "dare I hope that I am the one ?"

She looked at him unmoved, that fickle smile still upon her lips. "But you know you do not intend to be married until you are at least thirty ?" she said wickedly.

"Mabel," he cried passionately, "I have loved you all along !" And he was pouring into her ear the tale of burning love.

So she had conquered, at last her revenge was consummated !

Perhaps Jack saw something of triumph in her eyes, for he broke off in the midst of his appeal and cried fiercely :

"I know that I am a fool to let you know !—I was told that you had no heart—you cannot love nor know what love is ! Well, you have heard my tale and added another conquest to your list ! And now farewell for ever !" He turned abruptly and left her standing there.

"Jack ! Jack ! Come back to me—I do love you !"

And Jack turned to see her little hands stretched out towards him, while her wonderful beauty was enhanced ten-fold by the soft light of love that shone from her eyes.

"Ah !" she sighed, her lovely head resting on his shoulder, and her arms incircling his neck, "I did not know what it was to be in love then—had I known I would never have led others on !"

Then she put her arm through his and they walked back very slowly towards the house.

W. H. Martin.

"A FOE IN THE FAMILY"

is the title of the splendid new serial story which is to commence in "SHORT STORIES" in a few weeks' time.

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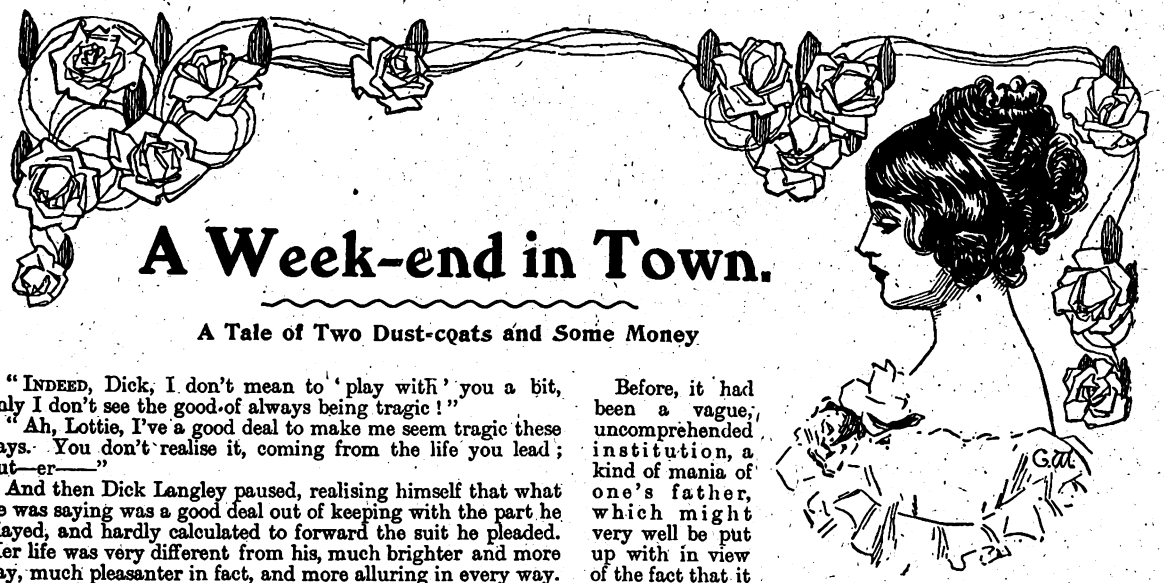

A Week-end in Town.

A Tale of Two Dust-coats and Some Money

"Indeed, Dick, I don't mean to 'play with' you a bit, only I don't see the good of always being tragic!"

"Ah, Lottie, I've a good deal to make me seem tragic these days. You don't realise it, coming from the life you lead; but—er——"

And then Dick Langley paused, realising himself that what he was saying was a good deal out of keeping with the part he played, and hardly calculated to forward the suit he pleaded. Her life was very different from his, much brighter and more gay, much pleasanter in fact, and more alluring in every way. But was this the time to point out the differences? Was it wise for him, who sought to induce her to link herself to him and his life for ever, to insist now upon these sufficiently obvious differences, the change for her that marriage with him would involve?

He sighed, and his eyes straying down from the dainty chiffon about her neck, along the exquisite material of her summer gown, to where two glistening points of grass-green leather, soft as satin, showed where her little feet nestled half under the seat—his eyes taking in these things told him that her costume of to-day represented at least a month of his poor salary.

The unshadowed gaiety of her bright face might have been smiled upon as pure beauty by most men. To poor Dick, in his present mood, it meant several thousands of sovereigns per annum in maintenance. Poverty would bring shadows there, he thought; the absence of the thousand and one luxuries which each day brought her would soon overcloud that face and overcome the sunshine of it.

"You are right, dearest," said he, with another half-suppressed sigh. "And I am all wrong. I won't be 'tragic' any more. It was sweet of you to come this afternoon, and throw over that garden-party; and I'm an ungrateful wretch to repay you with boredom."

Lottie Crane beamed upon her rather melancholy lover. He was really a "dear" she told herself, for the thousandth time at least; and it was a horrid shame that his father should have been ruined, and died, and left his wife and son and daughter so poor, and—and the rest of the unhappy story. It would have been so much nicer if things could have gone on in the old happy, careless fashion, as they went when she had first met Dick, two years ago, at the Langley's luxurious place near Maidenhead. What lovely summer days on the river those had been! And how jolly Dick had been, choosing her from among the other nice girls in all their excursions and amusements! Business was a horrible thing, thought Lottie. Even her wealthy old uncle and guardian, the great diamond merchant, was sometimes upset, and made grumpy, by this same business.

"I wish people could get on without business and money, and those things," said she, prettily, to Dick. "It would be so much jollier if the government, or—somebody, could supply all the really nice people with everything they wanted, and let the horrid people do all the business!"

"Ye-es," Dick was understood to agree with dainty Lottie in this revolutionary sentiment. Business meant distasteful routine and a hundred and twenty pounds a year to Dick—now.

Before, it had been a vague, uncomprehended institution, a kind of mania of one's father, which might very well be put up with in view of the fact that it provided the means of settling one's bills, buying new boats, horses and what not, and, in short, of keeping one well ahead of one's fellows in the jolly, flirtatious sport called life. But now—well, everything was different now.

Dick's father, one of the most daring speculators of his day, had died, an almost penniless bankrupt, two years before this summer afternoon. The world in which Dick had industriously played up till the age of twenty-five knew him no more; Maidenhead was a distant Paradise, remote indeed from the terraced street in Brixton, to which Dick wended his weary way from Cannon Street each evening. His poor mother had grown undeniably fractious of late, in the dusty, fusty little Brixton "front parlour," and Madge, his pretty sister, the best sculler and punter of her sex at Maidenhead, was drooping, these June afternoons, like a flower whose roots lacked nourishment. Poor Madge held that morning and afternoon "governessing" was worse than "anything in the City."

But it was not quite true that the world of his youth knew him no more. Two links between it and Dick remained yet unsevered. One of them, in the charming person of Lottie Crane, sat beside him at this moment, upon a green-painted seat in the Park, close to which she had been in the habit of meeting Dick on Saturday afternoons for quite a long while. The other was an old college chum, Henry Marley, who dined with Dick every Saturday evening in a famous restaurant near Piccadilly, and played billiards with him afterwards in a hall below the dining-room. This link had come very near to snapping, apparently, by reason of Dick's insisting upon taking his share in the small expense involved in these weekly evenings out. But Marley's good-nature had triumphed at last, and Dick's pride was smoothed by his being allowed to pay for the billiards, whilst his friend's play was rather spoilt by the necessity of allowing Dick to win in the last game, and so lose nothing by the evening's amusement.

The first link, personified in pretty Lottie Crane, was of gossamer; the other, of the steel by which friends are bound one to another. Yet there was no sort of doubt but that the first tie, fragile though it might be, was yet by far the more precious to Dick Langley.

Fascination is still stronger than affection, and the love of a man for a maid, a passion that still will thrill him more deeply than can any relation with those of his own sex. But it is surprising upon what slight and fragile foundations the blind god will erect his fairy palaces—and, alas! how apt the structures are to topple over at first breath of an unkind wind, or even to disappear in a single night, as the result of, let us say magic, or the work of evil sprites.

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In the case of Dick Langley and Lottie Crane the foundations were singularly slight. Just two months prior to the disastrous collapse in the midst of which Dick's father had died by his own hand, in his Moorgate Street office, Lottie had arrived at the Langley's beautiful river-side home with a school-friend of Dick's sister. That had been her introduction to the Langley household. It was known that she was an orphan, and that her uncle and guardian, with whom she lived, was a wealthy man and an eccentric, with a fine house and estate in Surrey, which he seldom saw, and a large flat in London. His charming ward had every possible liberty, and was encouraged to visit and amuse herself with girl friends, and particularly, under the wing of the mother of one of these friends, Mrs. Lane Thompson. The Langleys had never met Lottie's uncle; indeed it was understood that the old gentleman did not meet people at all in the pleasure-loving world in which the Langleys lived and had all their interests.

"I had no end of trouble with dear old uncle before he would let me come up to the flat for this week-end, Dick," Lottie had explained on the present sunny afternoon of her meeting with Dick. "And, you know, it really was difficult getting up from Deepdene by myself on Saturdays; such a long way, and—people wondered, and——"

"Yes, yes; I can guess; and it was sweet of you to have come so regularly, darling," said Dick. "And now, don't you think you will let me come and see your uncle, and ask him—and tell him——"

"Dear Dick, it would be simply ruinous," exclaimed Lottie, with a pretty grimace of horror. "If you had heard him at Christmas—you remember, when I said I wanted you to come to Deepdene, and I wouldn't—when he was so horrid about Mr. Spargrave!" (Spargrave was the son of a wealthy stockbroker, whose country house stood within a mile of Deepdene. Lottie's guardian had informed her that here was the husband intended by Providence for her) "If you had heard him then, Dick, you would realise how impossible it is, as—as things are, you know. He said the most outragous things; and when I ventured to say something about—well, about people marrying for love, you know, he quite flew into a passion, and growled out that in my case it would be marrying for the work-house, and—horrid things like that. And—Dick, dear, I'm sorry, but that's five striking. Do you know, I must go back now. Uncle always comes home about five on Saturdays, he says, and he expects me to have a cup of tea with him."

They rose, and walked slowly toward Princes Gate, Dick's eyes upon the gravel at their feet, his soul in the depths. Lottie insisted upon their parting at the gate of the Park, and would not hear his protests.

"Well, say you will come next Saturday, darling—somehow," said Dick, who was feeling particularly wretched, and, as he would have said "out of the running," this beautiful June week-end. "I must think about things. I won't let you go, my sweet—not for all the uncles in the world. Something must be done. I'll find a way, somehow. But mean time, say you will come next Saturday."

"Yes, I will come, Dick. Good-bye—Dicky!"

"Good-bye—my heart. Oh, darling, think of Dick sometimes in—in the middle of things!"

And with this somewhat incoherent appeal on his lips, and a great deal of very loving sadness in his heart, the junior clerk, who but two years before had been the open-handed, free-living young man of fashion, turned, and walked slowly back through the Park towards Piccadilly. There were still two hours to be lived through before he would meet Marley at the Regency Restaurant. Lottie would spend a portion of those two hours in the hands of her maid, thought Dick; for the girl had told him that she was going to a smart dinner-party and a dance that evening with Mrs. Lane Thompson.

"H'm! I'll go down Regent Street," thought Dick; "and see if I can't pick up some pretty little thing for Madge to wear to-morrow. Poor child, *she* doesn't get many fal-lals, these days. Alas!"

So the two hours were spent not altogether unpleasantly in the kindly laying out of a very few shillings on behalf of Madge and Mrs. Langley in Brixton; and Dick was feeling upon rather better terms with himself and the world when he passed the resplendent porter at the great swing doors of the Regency, to meet his friend. But, whatever his state of mind, it was a fact that Fate appeared to cherish no very amiable intentions in the matter of Dick's affairs at this particular week's end. From seven o'clock, their customary hour for meeting, until ten minutes to eight, Dick sat at the little table which Marley and himself invariably used on these occasions, and still no Marley came.

"Hang it!" reflected Dick, moodily. "He might have sent a wire or something. But, to be sure, there was no place for him to send it to. Ah, well, I suppose the only thing will be to have a chop, or something—the cheapest thing on the menu, begad!—and go home."

Already an attentive waiter had turned away two applicants for the seat opposite Dick, saying, with a look of understanding in Dick's direction, that the place was engaged. Now, as an elderly, shrivelled-looking gentleman approached the table, Dick whispered to the waiter:

"Let him have it. I'm afraid my friend cannot be coming this evening. And you might bring me a chop, will you? I—I've no appetite to-night."

And that was odd, if true, for it was Dick's custom nowadays to go without even his usual eightpenny lunch on Saturdays, in anticipation of the very pleasant and satisfying meal which Marley made a point of ordering in the evening.

So the parchment-faced old gentleman, with the broad, black ribbon hanging from his *pince-nez*, was politely ushered to the seat opposite Dick, and there settled himself, after a funny little ceremonious bow to his *vis-à-vis*.

It may have been this little old-fashioned courtesy, or it may have been interest in the elderly gentleman's rather singular order, given in a business-like manner directly he sat down:

"A small sole, a cutlet, not too well done, spinach, green peas; half of '43, at once, please, and a half of—er—of '97, in a basket, with the Stilton—bring the whole cheese, please!"

But whatever the cause, Dick found himself responding readily to some polite but common-place observation from the old gentleman, and (what was a good deal more remarkable) when he had ceased to pretend that the remains of his chop held any interest for him, Dick positively accepted the elderly stranger's invitation to join him in a glass of port.—"A really very creditable vintage I consider, for a public place; unpretentious, no doubt, but sound, and not unpleasing, I think."

The wine was certainly pleasing enough to Dick's palate, after his ungarnished chop, washed down only by that unremarkable vintage which the water companies are good enough to supply to most of the residents of London—when convenient to themselves.

Dick explained (even one glass of good old port exerts a distinctly lubricatory effect upon a young man's tongue) his disappointment of that evening, in the matter of his weekly billiards in the hall below.

"Well, now," said the old gentleman; "I am fond of a game of billiards after dinner myself, when—er—particularly

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after having carried any affair to a satisfactory conclusion, as I may say that I have this afternoon. With your permission, my dear sir, I shall be delighted to try and take the place, for an hour, of the gentleman who has disappointed you this evening; or, since it is perhaps presumptuous of me to expect to take a young man's place, let me say that I will endeavour to mitigate in some part the loss caused you by his absence."

"A really delightful old chap!" thought Dick, as he smilingly assented. "He talks like an old play." The stranger ordered a bottle of '97, the old port, to be sent downstairs to the billiard-room, and together the oddly-matched couple chose a table. Dick removed his coat and hung it up, with the light dust-coat which he was carrying, upon the hook which he always used for the purpose. His elderly companion made no change, however, in his dress, and the fact rather caught Dick's attention, by reason that the old gentleman was wearing a light top-coat, on this warm evening.

The port was opened while they chalked their cues, and, at the end of an evenly contested game of "a hundred up," the old gentleman called for another bottle.

"I don't think I'll take any more, thank you," interposed Dick, a little awkwardly, and speaking also, it must be admitted, a trifle thickly. The fact was he was thinking that he ought to order something for his hospitable companion, and the thought of the probable cost of that "very creditable vintage" frightened him. But the old gentleman poohpoohed the notion of not having any more port.

"Why, my dear young friend," said he, to his acquaintance of two hours' standing; "life after dinner would be intolerable but for port. You have my word for it, my dear sir, there is not half a headache in a hogshead of this particular wine. I know it well."

The young man was persuaded, and played two further games with his host, both of which he won. The fact that Dick took but one glass of wine during the progress of these two games may conceivably have had something to do with his winning.

Seeing the hour was close upon eleven, Dick said he must leave at the end of this third game. The old gentleman protested that the evening was young. He drew off his coat, hung it up, and pressed his dear young friend to give him his revenge in "fifty up" at all events. In courtesy Dick felt obliged to yield to this, and the heat of the room made an iced whisky and soda grateful to him, after the port. This short game ended, Dick asked the marker for his coat, and firmly declined his elderly friend's invitation to further play.

"Well, then, if you really must go, my dear young friend," said the stranger, "I shall play just one more game with this good man here"—indicating the smiling marker—"and then go off to bed myself. I have to thank you for a most agreeable evening spent in the society of the most congenial—a most pleasing close to a satisfactory day for me. I trust I may again have the pleasure—er—Good-night, my dear young friend; good-night!"

And so, with rather brighter eyes than usual, and carrying his head very erectly, Dick walked off, carrying his dust-coat and an evening paper upon one arm, his gloves in the other hand, and in his mind a conviction that life was not really so drab a business as one might fancy, even for a junior clerk with a hundred and twenty pounds a year.

On his way to Brixton, Dick dozed for a few minutes, and finding on his arrival at "Carrington Villa" that his mother and sister had already retired for the night, he decided to make directly for bed himself. In hanging his coat in the hall, Dick's hand rested for a moment upon the upper inside pocket of the garment, and:

"Now what have I put there I wonder!" he muttered, sleepily.

A moment later, and he was standing under the hall gas lamp, a bulky Morocco pocket-book in one hand, the light top coat in the other.

"Why, good gad!" he exclaimed aloud. "It's not my coat at all!"

Then he walked into the stuffy little "front parlour," and, having turned up the gas, sat down at the centre table to examine this pocket-book. Dick was not at all sleepy now.

The first thing he drew from the case was a flat wad of bank notes held together by a rubber band. There were five for one hundred pounds each, four for fifty, ten for ten pounds, and three for five.

Eight hundred and fifteen pounds. The junior clerk almost gasped. Then there were various memoranda, including a note of the numbers of all these, and some other, bank notes. There were several cards bearing the name of "Mr. Rupert Ball, 122, Portgavon Road, S.W." Then—and poor Dick's eyes glittered at the discovery—rolled in silk, and encased in a little leather pouch, he found eighteen uncut diamonds of a sort which the veriest ignoramus in such matters could not but regard with admiration. Dick felt that these jewels must represent a far larger sum than the value of the bank notes, and had he guessed six times that sum, he would as a fact still have been well within the mark.

"Good heavens!" muttered Dick at length, leaning back in his chair. "I suppose it belongs to the little old man at the Regency. Thousands of pounds—Great Scott! and all in the pocket of a common or garden top coat, the very image of mine! Thousands of pounds—and I suppose he has thousands more; and I—Pooh! That's nothing whatever to do with it. But still—H'm! And only this morning Madge was saying how she wished to goodness we even had enough capital to allow of our going out to California, or to South Africa, or anywhere out of this stuffy—Oh, dear! What's the good of thinking of all that? The thing's of no more value to us than a piece of string. Of course I shall have to take it back. Portgavon Road—H'm! But, Great Scott, what a find!"

And then, slowly, Dick replaced its contents in the Morocco pocket-book, and slowly, sadly, betook himself to bed, the book in his hand, the mellowing influence of that evening's wine, and his inclination for rest alike departed from him utterly.

* * * * * *

It was a restless, miserable night that Dick passed. The mere thought that the value of several thousands of pounds lay under his pillow, seemed to fence off sleep from the head above the pillow. It was singular that the temporary possession of riches which did not belong to him should increase the distance between himself and the dainty Lottie Crane. But it did. Never had Dick felt so hopeless regarding the girl he had learnt to love beside old Thames at Maidenhead, as he did when he met his mother and sister at breakfast on that Sunday morning.

"Good heavens!" he thought, as he looked round the dingy little apartment. "How could I ever have thought of asking her to share this sort of thing? It's absolutely beyond the bounds of things possible."

And his hopelessness robbed him of what might have been a pleasure, when he came to make his little presents to Madge and her mother; the trifles he had purchased on the previous evening in Regent Street.

After breakfast, he retired to his room, and again examined the contents of the pocket-book.

"With this," he muttered; "I could start a new life out there—somewhere—out in the open, away from all this sordidness. And Madge would bloom like—Oh, look here;! This won't do. By gad, I'm losing my head. It isn't safe. I'll go and tell them about it."

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And he walked down the skimpy little staircase, warned by a wholesome instinct that in this case safety lay in taking counsel.

You may be sure the women-kind were finely flustered. Dick's mother had never been a strong-minded woman. Her misfortunes of the past two years had shaken her life to its very foundations. She never had practised economy; the necessity for it irked her almost beyond endurance. Her health had been very indifferent since her husband's tragic end.

"Dick," she said, after a long pause. "I don't see why you shouldn't—I—It seems providential. Oh, my dear Dick, you know how sorely we need help!"

"Goodness; this is cheerful!" muttered Dick. "But, I say, you know, mother!" he said aloud.

"Why, mother, dearest, what can you be thinking of," cried Madge, flushing to the roots of her fair hair. "Of course Dick will take the thing at once to this Mr.—what-ever-his-name-is, in Portgavon Road—Of course!"

"H'm! Yes; of course, I shall," agreed Dick; and felt some relief.

"Well, well, my dear; I don't know. You know best. But, oh, this dreadful, scraping, cheese-paring life—I——"

And poor Mrs. Langley dissolved into tears, her worried mind occupied by hazy pictures of her old, luxurious life at Maidenhead. The world is full of such people, in these days of rapid fortune-making, and losing; and their cases are very hard, and sad.

At three o'clock that afternoon Dick Langley turned out of Porchester Street into Portgavon Road; and in his breast-pocket was the famous case, with its wealth of bank notes and diamonds. Number 122 proved to be a huge, sombre-looking house, divided into three flats. A footman in plain black clothes answered Dick's knock, and informed him that Mr. Ball was at home. Dick was shown into a dining room which had every appearance of being very seldom used; and in a few moments there entered to him there his elderly acquaintance of the Regency Restaurant, looking, Dick thought, a good deal worried.

"Ah!" began the old gentleman. "My excellent young friend of last evening. I thought I did not know the name James gave me—er—Mr. Langley, I think. H'm! Ah; yes; the name is not altogether unfamiliar, I think; all the same. Ah—er——"

"I suspect you are thinking of my father, who died two years ago," said Dick. And the old gentleman hastened to tide over what seemed an awkward moment.

"Ah! And how did you find me out, now? I am very pleased to see you I'm sure—er—very pleased. I must tell you that our pleasant evening had a most unfortunate, a most disastrous ending for me. Yes, really disastrous. I went upstairs to have a devilled biscuit, after my last game, you know, and hung my coat on a rack at the door of the supper room. And, if you'll believe me, sir, some rascal took it from there while I was at my biscuits, and left in place of it, one rather like mine, I must admit, but—er—quite unlike mine in the pocket, I do assure you; for there was a matter of close upon ten thousand pounds in diamonds and notes, in my pocket-book; the result of negotiations of that very evening—very successful negotiations, too."

"Well, well," thought Dick; "he hasn't an idea of the true state of the case. He will smile when he sees the coat I am sitting on." Dick had thrown the old gentleman's light coat, which he himself had carried from Brixton this afternoon, on the back of the chair in which he sat. He now rose to reach it more conveniently. As he did so, the door of the room opened, and a young girl entered, dressed for walking, and saying:

"Oh, uncle; there's someone come to see you. Please don't let them keep you too—Oh, Dick! However could you!"

It was Lottie Crane, quite unaware till the moment that her uncle had found his visitor, and never dreaming who that visitor might be.

"Why, what the dickens does the girl mean? Eh? What! Dick? What d'ye mean, child?"

"My name is Dick, sir," explained that young man, with a smile.

"Well; but what the—tut——"

"And I've come to bring you your coat, and pocket-book, sir, which the billiard-marker gave me last night in place of my own. The diamonds and the notes are quite safe."

"Eh? What? You've got the coat, and the book? Well, bless my soul! But how the——"

"Darling uncle, this is Dick, you know. I told you about Dick last Christmas. And Dick is—Dick, you know, is——"

"Oh, tut, tut! God bless my soul and body!"

"Well, darling uncle, you know you said yourself this morning that you played billiards last night with the most agreeable young man in London. Well, uncle, dear, that—that's Dick, you know!"

And Dick is quite learned about diamonds now, though at the diamond-merchant's office they say he will never make the expert man of business that his uncle-in-law still is. And that is quite possible; but they are a very happy pair, Dick and Lottie; and they say that Madge, who lives with her mother at Deepdene, will marry Spargrave.

And so you see, life, like the curate's egg in the story, is "very good in parts, my lord!"

A. J. Dawson.

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Troubled Matchmaking.

The Story of a Desirable Engagement.

On the death of her father Elsie Roscoe went to live with her aunt, and in due course Mrs. Bailey proceeded to gratify her desire to exercise her powers as a match-maker.

Mrs. Bailey had longed for such an opportunity; she had no children of her own, and her brother had been a man who did not brook interference with his domestic arrangements. Mrs. Bailey had endeavoured to persuade him that he really ought to permit her to see about a husband for Elsie, but he had always cut her short with the remark that Elsie would attend to that matter on her own account when she wished to. Elsie appeared to be quite indifferent on the subject, helping her father with his scientific researches, and taking a more sober view of life than is common with young women of her age.

Mrs. Bailey's opportunity came with the change in the condition of things, and she decided in favour of a gentleman named Monckton.

Mr. John Monckton was about ten years older than Elsie, and reputed to be in very comfortable circumstances. He lived in Wilsford, but he was connected with a large business in the town, and went backwards and forwards every day to the office. He was very quiet and reserved, and all that was really known about his business was that he had an office with a clerk or two, but did a large commission business in British and foreign goods.

"Just the man for Elsie!" declared Mrs. Bailey. "She has been brought up very staidly, and she wants a man of the same temperament and mode of life. And she will make him a good wife, too. A splendid match!"

The disparity of age was not serious; possibly, he was not ten years older. His appearance was not stylish; it would not have attracted a town-bred young woman, probably, but Elsie was different. She made a few discreet inquiries concerning Monckton, and these inquiries were made outside Wilsford so that there should be no false notions concerning the man. The result was satisfactory.

Mrs. Bailey soon contrived that Mr. John Monckton and Elsie should meet frequently. He was invited to the villa after three or four meetings, and finally she succeeded in bringing the match to pass. John Monckton proposed and was accepted. Not exactly a love match on Elsie's part, but love would come after marriage. She respected him, and thought a great deal of him, so what more was to be desired?

Mrs. Bailey kept the engagement secret for the greater part of a week, and then handed a notice to the editor of the local weekly just in time to secure its admission in the issue published on Saturday. She strictly enjoined him to secrecy. Thus it came about that the announcement of the engagement was made to friends in Wilsford through the medium of the local journal.

Elsie had gone to the house of a friend some miles away and intended to return that evening. Mrs. Bailey read the notice with much gratification, and waited with conscious pride for the numerous congratulations that were certain to pour in.

It was about eleven o'clock when the first visitor was announced; this was the vicar of the parish, the Rev. Algernon Sanders. He looked grave, as if he had come to offer condolence instead of congratulations.

"I saw a notice in the Wilsford *Express* this morning, Mrs. Bailey"—he began, as though delivering a text—"and I—or—that is, I suppose it is correct?"

"Certainly!" replied Mrs. Bailey stiffly.

She had never got on very well with the vicar; he would do things in a way that she considered to be quite wrong, and he was not so amenable to reasoning—Mrs. Bailey's reasoning, that is—as he ought to have been! Still, they were quite friendly, although she had once threatened to cease attendance at his church and betake herself to the sacred edifice in the next village. His manner on this present occasion jarred on her nerves, and she was ready to assert herself if necessary.

"Then I am sorry to hear it!" said the vicar with such bluntness that he left her speechless for the space of fully sixty seconds.

"Yes, I am sorry to hear it!" repeated the vicar with emphasis. "Miss Roscoe is an excellent young woman, and she ought not to throw herself away on that good-for-nothing Monckton!"

"Mr. Monckton is an honourable gentleman!" she burst forth. "He is held in high esteem by every person in this place, and his reputation in the town where he conducts his business is all that could be desired. I think you owe me an explanation, sir!"

The vicar looked uncomfortable.

"I have reason to know, Mrs. Bailey, that the reputation of Mr. Monckton is not so good!" he said mildly. "I admit that he is generally esteemed, but that is because certain facts, known to a few, have been kept confidential by those few. His financial position is a very bad one, I should say, but I feel that it is not my place to say more, as *I* am not one of the vic—sufferers. I came to give you a hint, and I will leave you to regard it or not as you please. I fear that my presence is not welcome, so I will withdraw!"

He did so, and Mrs. Bailey sat still and pondered. What on earth did the man mean? Her feelings were like those of a man who has undertaken a task different from any in which he has had previous experience, and who finds that he has been over-confident of success. Had she made a blunder as a match-maker? She tried to assure herself that she had not, but the vicar was not a man to say such a thing without foundation, even if he were an unreasonable individual.

"Here's a note, ma'am," said the maid, entering at this moment. "I don't know when it came. It was dropped in through the letter-box."

Mrs. Bailey took the note with a certain sentiment of relief. This was a congratulation from someone who knew Mr. Monckton in the town, or it would not have been dropped through the letter-box anonymously. Good paper! The writer must be comfortably off!

Mrs. Bailey opened the envelope and looked for the address at the head of the letter, but it was quite plain; she looked for the signature, but that also was missing. Then she read the communication and a troubled expression overspread her countenance.

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It was brief, and contained a warning. John Monckton was not what he seemed; he was reputed to be well-to-do, but this was incorrect. He was hard-up. What did he do with his money? The inference was that he did not pass the entire day in his office, but had some more agreeable occupation! Was he really travelling when he was away?

"I don't like anonymous communications!" said Mrs. Bailey aloud. "Still, there is truth in them at times!" she admitted in the next breath. "I must get to the bottom of this! Dear me, match-making is not so pleasant as I thought it was! I have been priding myself on having made a better selection for Elsie than she would have made for herself, but I really wonder if it is quite wise to take the matter entirely out of the hands of the party most interested!"

Mrs. Bailey had little time left for reflection. Another visitor was announced in the person of Mrs. Dr. Gillett—that was how she was popularly named in Wilsford—who came in hurriedly.

"I saw the notice," said the bustling wife of the village medico, after the usual greetings had been exchanged. "But you surely do not mean to say that dear Elsie has actually become engaged to that man?"

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Bailey, flaring up. She was getting tired of the disparagement of the husband selected for Elsie; she could not understand that everyone else knew that he was a bad subject and that she alone had been gulled. "Why not?" she repeated with emphasis.

"Because he is insolvent! Because he is worse than that, he borrows money off his friends and doesn't pay!" said Mrs. Gillett just as defiantly. "There!"

Mrs. Bailey rather admired the Doctor's wife, and she was impressed with the frank declaration. Yet she felt that she must defend her choice.

"There is some mistake!" she declared. "He is perfectly honourable, and he satisfied me as to his financial position. I went thoroughly into that, you may be quite sure!"

"I'll prove it to you!" cried Mrs. Gillett. "I'll fetch his I.O.U. for the twenty-five pounds my husband lent him!"

She went off in a hurry, but she was back almost before Mrs. Bailey had time to realise that she had had time to perform the journey. She pushed a paper into Mrs. Bailey's unwilling hands. There was no mistake about it; an I.O.U. for twenty-five pounds, signed by John Monckton, stared at her.

"He has borrowed quite five hundred pounds from people about here," said Mrs. Gillett. "He pretends that he wants the money to complete a purchase; he only wants it for a fortnight or three weeks, till he receives payment of various large accounts. My husband lent it; he wondered why Mr. Monckton didn't keep his word, but thought that he would remember it and pay. The Doctor felt reluctant to remind him, as he was so honourable a man. They do not meet often, or the subject might have come up in conversation. In fact, Mr. Monckton is so reserved and so seldom meets anyone to have a chat, that it is a wonder he ventured to ask for the loan, that was what we thought. But it is all coming out now, and the Doctor and others had decided to wait on him this afternoon and claim payment when we saw the notice of his engagement to Elsie."

Poor Mrs. Bailey was in despair; she stated her intention of calling on Mr. Monckton during the afternoon, and asked that the proposed visit of creditors should be postponed till the evening.

Mrs. Bailey tried to eat a little lunch, but the attempt was a failure. She was getting ready to go to Monckton's villa at the other end of the long, straggling village when Elsie Roscoe returned.

"My dear Elsie, I am glad to see you back!" cried her aunt fervently. "I have been much upset this morning, and—and—but it isn't so bad as it might be, seeing that you might have been married before it was found out, and you don't really love him!"

Elsie stared at her aunt, and turned pale.

"I don't understand, aunt!" she faltered. "Is there anything wrong? Has any accident happened to Jack? O don't keep me in suspense! Let me know the worst at once. Oh, my dear Jack!"

"She really loves him!" groaned Mrs. Bailey in despair. There was no mistaking the fact; it was patent in the girl's manner and expression. "People are saying discreditable things about him, Elsie, dear, and——"

"Well?" asked Elsie, her manner changing.

"I can't say, of course, my dear!" protested Mrs. Bailey, noticing the change from anxiety to indignation, "but there seems to be some foundation for them!"

"Tell me what they say!" commanded Elsie with decision. "My Jack is above anything discreditable, and I insist on knowing what calumnies have been uttered against him, so that I may defend him!"

Her aunt had never seen Elsie look so proud and defiant. She related what had passed and showed the anonymous letter. Elsie put it into her pocket.

"I am going to see John," she said briefly. "I will tell him all, and it will be bad for those who have tried to slander him!"

"I am afraid he will feel insulted," moaned Mrs. Bailey, "yet—I saw the I.O.U.!"

Elsie went through the village with a defiant expression on her usually placid face, her head poised proudly, and every movement indicative of a determination to defend her lover against all comers. People wondered to see her walk through the village so haughtily, and began to say to one another that she need not be so proud at having become engaged to Mr. Monckton.

Elsie had not been gone long before Mrs. Bailey's maid brought in a card inscribed with the name of John Monckton.

"Ask him in!" said the widow, when she had recovered from her surprise. "I can have it out quietly with him," she added under her breath. "Perhaps it is well that Elsie is out, although he will be disappointed!"

Mr. John Monckton entered. He was a man of medium height, rather too stout for his number of inches, but upright and more quick of movement than one would have anticipated. His face was half concealed by a wealth of moustache and beard, and a pair of spectacles with large, round glasses. The kind of man who does not attract at first sight, but who improves very much on acquaintance.

He said "Good afternoon, Mrs. Bailey!" in a brisk manner, but he appeared to be suffering slightly from hoarseness, and he seated himself modestly in a corner where he was out of the draughts and also in obscurity.

"It is rather a pity that Elsie has just gone out, Mr. Monckton. She must have missed you, for she went to see if you were at home. However, I am not sorry, as——"

"Oh, it doesn't matter at all!" was the rather startling reply. "I prefer to see you alone just now. Never mind Elsie. You will excuse me, but I am somewhat hoarse. I have a request to make, just a small favour to ask. I am in great need of a little loan for a few days till I get some accounts paid, a mere matter of twenty-five pounds! It is like that in business sometimes; one has to sink so much capital in the stock and so on. Do you think that you could oblige me?"

Mrs. Bailey sat speechless with amazement and anger. At length she burst forth vehemently:—

"You are a rogue, a swindler, and I have a good mind to hand you over to justice! To think that——"

But Mr. John Monckton did not wait to hear the finish; he had appeared uneasy from the first moment, but the outburst threw him off his balance entirely. He sprang up and made a dash through the door into the hall, where he literally ran into the arms of his exact counterpart, behind whom stood Elsie

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"Ha!" cried the new-comer, gripping the man who had rushed into his arms. "So I have caught you! I did not expect to have such luck. You wretched scoundrel! You have turned up again to impersonate me and rob my friends of their money and me of my good name! Stand aside, Elsie, and I'll thrash him through the village!"

The inhabitants of Wilsford were treated to the uncommon spectacle of seeing Mr. John Monckton belabouring Mr. John Monckton with a stout walking stick half way through the village street. By the time the victim of this vigorous treatment had got away from the stick, he had lost his glasses and his beard was awry, and he looked less like Mr. John Monckton than he had originally done.

"That's a cousin of mine," explained Elsie's lover to Mrs. Bailey, a little later. "He resembles me very much in build and features, and it is not difficult for him to make up a bit. He impersonated me some time ago, and narrowly escaped imprisonment. I thought he had left the country, and I have grown a beard since then. Unfortunately this addition to my person has made it more easy for him to impersonate me, and I shall have to discard it! Such effrontry to come here, to this house! I suppose you detected the difference in the voice and certain differences in appearance and manner, which intimate friends and relations perceive quickly, and so he was exposed?"

"I am afraid I did not," admitted Mrs. Bailey shamefacedly. "He pretended to be hoarse, he sat in a dark corner, and I was so agitated! I called him a rogue and a swindler because what he said was so different from what you had said and I thought I was addressing you!"

Mr. Monckton laughed good-naturedly.

"It was a case of a guilty conscience! He thought you had found him out, so he bolted. Now I must find out how much money he has had in my name and repay it. It is a pity they did not call upon me to redeem the I.O.U.'s, for I should have been spared a good deal of money! I have wondered why some people have seemed so distant lately!"

Inquiry showed that the pseudo John Monckton had practised the same trick to aid the deception as he had tried on Mrs. Bailey; he always had a cold, and paid his visit either in the twilight or sat in a dark corner.

Congratulations poured in as soon as the mystery was cleared up, and the ceremony at the village church was something to be remembered. The vicar performed the marriage ceremony so well that Mrs. Bailey has been on better terms with him ever since.

George Day.

ELDERLY LODGER: "How did you sleep last night, Professor?" Professor Larkins (testily): "Lying down, madam."

THE BASHFUL LOVER: "Miss Agnes, I—er—hem!" She (sweetly): "*Do* you, Mr. Mammasdear? Now *wouldn't* you like to join our sewing class?"

FATHER: "I am inexpressibly shocked. Your mother tells me that you are engaged to three young men." Daughter: "It's all right, papa. They are all football players, and when the season closes I can marry the survivor."

NICE OLD LADY: "Will you kindly tell me if the lady who writes 'The Mother's Page' every week in your paper is in? I want to tell her how much I have enjoyed reading her articles on 'The Evening Hour in the Nursery.'" Office Boy: "That's him over there with the pink shirt, smokin' a pipe."

"MISS TWILLING," said Mr. Calloway, glancing down at his shining boots with a complacent air, "don't you like to see a man looking as if he had stepped out of a band-box, his clothes nicely brushed, and everything about him indicating refinement?" "Yes, Mr. Calloway, I do," answered Miss Twilling, with a significant look. "I like to see such a man as you have described about once a year."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 9. — Rather a favourable year for business for those whose birthdays fall to-day. Good for health and general affairs. Those in employ need to exercise care or they will lose it.

Girls born in the early morning will become engaged.

The day is good to do business, speculate, sign papers, and travel.

A child born to-day will be fortunate in business, will be clever, and rise in life.

September 10.—Those who celebrate birthdays to-day may expect a changeable year. Should avoid changing residence. Guard against loss.

Girls will find love affairs very interesting, but if born early they will need care against deceit.

The day is good to deal with elderly people, but beware of promising speculations. Have a care with horses.

A child born to-day will never be settled, and if a girl the prospects of marriage are not good.

September 11.—Little progress; much anxiety and worry are indicated here. Strong opposition if in business; trouble with writings and landlords.

Young girls will have obstacles and disappointment in love affairs; those born near six p.m. will meet with strange experiences.

The day is one to keep quiet on, and let others make the first move in matters of business. Don't change residence here.

A child born this day will be subject to many vicissitudes, and should keep in employ of others.

September 12.—A dull year; disappointment in business and sickness in domestic circle. Beware of law and monetary losses. Bad for farmers.

Girls born near six a.m. must beware of broken promises, and should place but little confidence in opposite sex.

The day is bad to speculate, deal with elderly people, or sign agreements.

A child born to-day will be wise to keep in the employ of others.

September 13.—A quiet year; business much as usual.

Girls must beware of attentions from married men.

The day is not good for changes, or asking favours; go steady.

A child born here will be fond of change and will go abroad if born from noon to three p.m.

September 14.—The year will be good for business, and bring many useful friends. Guard against quarrels, or you go to law.

Girls will find much discord in love affairs, chiefly through third parties.

A child born here will be subject to many mishaps, but fortunate in business. Will be clever, though stubborn and rash.

September 15.—A mixed year; beware of accident and of fire. Farmers, builders, and elderly people are favoured.

Young girls will have a quiet time in love matters.

The day is good to buy property, land, or deal with landlords. Beware of mishaps between nine and ten p.m.

A child born to-day will be fortunate and rise in life. The mind will be steady and painstaking; the wit keen.

Asturel.

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The Stranger from London.

A Romance of a Country Village.

It had fairly poured for two days, and I had waded through all the newspapers and other reading matter to be had at the little hotel at which I was staying.

The landlord, Mr. Carpenter, was a jolly old fellow who was noted for his lively stories, and he did his best to entertain his guests and keep up their spirits as they sat in the porch of the Wayside house and watched the steady downpour.

I did not join the group in the porch. If there is anything I particularly dislike it is to listen to the chatter of a lot of people who are trying to delude themselves into the belief that they are enjoying life when the face of Nature is ankle deep with mud and water, and it is still raining as if it never intended to stop. So I kept to my room and read books, week-old newspapers, patent medicine almanacs—anything that would help me in a measure to forget the abominable weather.

But on the evening of the second day, when it grew suddenly colder and a roaring wood fire had been kindled in the open fireplace in the big sitting-room, I was one of the first to gather round its cheerful blaze.

Now, if ever, was the time for story-telling, but the landlord's repertoire seemed to be about exhausted.

"No use asking for any more funny stories," he drawled out with a deprecatory shake of the head. "These two wet days have pumped me dry, so to speak. I can only think of one more story, but as there isn't anything comical about that one, I don't suppose you'll care to hear it."

"Give us a story, by all means," urged one of the ladies. "I can always sleep better if I have a ghost story or some exciting adventures to go to bed on."

"Well," began the landlord, reflectively, "I don't think this comes under the head of a ghost story nor even a story of adventure. I'll have to tell it, and let you classify it for yourselves.

"The climax of my story came ten years ago when I was keeping a hotel in my native village, but the beginning dated back many years before that, to the time when the Peeks were the nabobs of the place.

"Squire Peek, with his wife and only daughter, lived in a big white house on a hill on the outskirts of the village, and a haughty, high-stepping old chap he was when I first knew him.

"He always seemed to consider himself and his family a little above the rest of the folks in the village and when Lucinda Peek grew up, although she was by a long way the best looking young lady in the place, and while the young fellows were all half daft over her, none of them really had the courage to make love to her for fear of arousing the wrath of the stiff-necked old squire.

"The first one who tried it was an outsider, and the ruthless way in which his aspirations were nipped in the bud by Lucinda's father held forth very little encouragement to the others.

"He was a young college student, named Harry Randell, who had come into the country to spend his summer holidays in earning some needed money. Though dependent wholly on his own earnings, he was bravely working his way through college, it seems, and he got a job keeping the books and making up accounts at the village shop in the daytime, and at night he gave lessons on the violin and other musical instruments. He was a first-class singer, too, and soon after coming to the place he started a singing school, hiring the schoolhouse and charging a good fee for lessons, which he gave every Thursday evening.

"It was at the singing school that he made the acquaintance of Lucinda Peek, and it was a clear case of love at first sight. He was a manly young fellow, and when people saw how matters were shaping, everyone wished him well.

"But the course of true love runs uncommonly rough sometimes as the poet tells about, and when young Randell walked boldly up to the big house on the hill with Lucinda one evening, and asked her father for her hand in marriage, it was said that the haughty old squire drove him from the house with the direst threats and curses that one man ever poured upon the head of another. It was then near the close of his vacation, and Randell was compelled to return to his college without again seeing Lucinda.

"It was said that letters addressed to Lucinda in young Randell's handwriting came after he went away, but the postmaster, who was a friend and sort of dependent of the squire, saw to it that none of them ever reached her. Finally one of the letters received after Randell had left the place, was returned to him so I've heard, with the notification across the face of it that the person to whom it was addressed, was dead.

"It was a cruel and wicked thing to do, but such things will happen when a penniless student falls in love with a nabob's daughter.

"Years passed. Squire Peek finally died, and then it was discovered that most of his fortune had been wasted in unwise speculations. The big house on the hill was sold, and mother and daughter moved into a small cottage at the other end of the village. A year later Mrs. Peek died (of a broken heart, it was said), and Lucinda was left alone in the world.

"She was now thirty years of age, and though there was a look of settled sadness on her countenance, she was still the handsomest woman in the place, and it was rumoured that she had refused many flattering offers of marriage.

"Well, ten years went by, and those of us who had been young once were growing old, Lucinda among the rest. One of the banks had failed that spring, business was almost at a standstill, and the country round was in a bad way generally. Right in the midst of the stagnation a stranger suddenly appeared in the village. He was a middle-aged gentleman,

with iron-grey hair and beard, and had the air of a prosperous business man.

"He took rooms at the hotel, saying he was from London, and was looking round for some quiet village in which to spend the summer. I told him I thought he would find things quiet enough, just then, and he said, in a sort of absent-minded way:

"'Yes, it does seem quieter than it used to.'

"'Why, when were you here before?' I asked, giving him a quick look, and vainly trying to place him.

"He coloured up and said he had been thinking of something else when he spoke, and the matter was dropped.

"Well, the first night he was there he sat about, listening to every word that was said by the villagers who dropped in, but taking no part in the conversation. After awhile the crowd began to discuss the bank trouble, and one of the party said:

"'Too bad about Lucinda Peek, isn't it? They say she lost every penny she had by the bank failure, and it is only a question of time when she will have to give up her cottage and go out to work for a living.'

"Before the sentence was fairly ended, the stranger jumped up, with a face white as a sheet.

"'For God's sake, tell me quick!' he gasped—'is Lucinda Peek alive?'

"'Why, of course she's alive,' said I.

"'And her father and mother?' he asked next.

"'They're both dead,' I replied.

"'And she no longer lives on the big house in the hill—in her old home?' he questioned eagerly.

"'No,' said I; 'she is now living in a small cottage near the——'

"'Excuse me for interrupting,' he broke in, impatiently. 'My name is Randell. I used to know Miss Peek. I must see her at once. Have you someone you can send with me to show me the way to her house?'

"I called in Joe, my man of all work; and, by the way, Joe is still in my employ, and I think I'd better let him tell the rest of the story."

Stepping to the door opening into the hotel kitchen, the landlord called out:

"Here, Joe; come in and tell the ladies and gentlemen what happened the night you showed the stranger from London the way to Miss Peek's cottage."

"Well," began Joe, apologetically, as he stepped into the room, "I think ye'll all be disapp'inted, because there didn't anything happen wuth mentionin' scarcely. In the first place, the gentleman didn't say a word all the way to the cottage—jest walked; that's all; an' I had to run purty nigh all the way to keep up with him.

"An' when we got to the gate, an' I told him that was the place, he went flyin' up the path an' began knockin' at the door as if he was there on very urgent business. In a minute or so, Miss Peek opened the door, an' I heard him say: 'Lucinda, don't you know me?' and she held out both hands an' said: 'Why, it's Henry!' an' the next minute they were hangin' on to each other, laughin' an' cryin' both at once, like a pair of softies, an' I seen I had no further bizness there, so I come away an' left 'em; an' that's all that happened."

"You have forgotten one important item in your story, Joe, and that is the present that Mr. Randell gave you for showing him the way to the cottage," suggested the landlord, smilingly.

"Oh, yes," said Joe, "the gentleman handed me a five pound note the next day, an' when I told him it was too much, he said:

"'No, my man, you earned every penny of it, and more besides.'

"My conscience troubled me considerably for taking it, though, for a day or so, but when I heard that he gave the village clergyman £25 for marryin' him an' Lucinda, —an' only a five-minutes' job at that—I made up my mind that Mr. Randell must be a millionaire an' left off worrying about it."

W. S. Gidley.

Your Editor Chats.

THE NEW SERIAL.

At last I am able to announce to you the title of the new serial story which I hope to commence in the course of a few weeks time. It is to be called "A Foe in the Family," and though somewhat different in style from our present serial, will, nevertheless, I feel sure, hold your attention and interest quite as well as, and even more—if that were possible—than that story has done. I will be able to give you the exact date of its commencement shortly. It will, however, follow immediately upon the conclusion of our present serial, and as, at last, the dark clouds which have up to now blackened poor Alec Scarsdale's life are just beginning to show their silver lining, the grand climax, in which our hero emerges triumphantly from out of great tribulations, cannot be far off.

FREE GRAMOPHONES.

Regarding our scheme for supplying certain lucky readers of Short Stories with gramophones gratis, of which I made a preliminary announcement last week, I may fairly say that the scheme is now complete, and next week I hope to give you full details of the competition.

"THROUGH THE PERIL OF THE NIGHT."

Next week's coloured cover you will find represented in miniature on page 344. The picture depicts a most thrilling incident in a powerful story entitled "Through the Peril of the Night," which we have been at no little pains to procure. The girl is a somnambulist, and in her sleep is walking along the telegraph wires because she feels sure that her lover is begging her to come to him in order to escape some danger. What the danger is, of course, the story tells, as also the dramatic sequel to her terrible journey. Undoubtedly it will be the tale of the week.

C. Y. N. T. H. I. A.

By the way, I received some excellent results from our "Cynthia" competition. Seldom indeed has a competition been more popular, and many and curious were the sentences sent in. All sorts of subjects were dealt with—humorous, pathetic, serious, and extraordinary, while the best one dealt with the subject of the innocent and lovable Cynthia herself. The winning sentence constructed of words the initial letters of which formed the name Cynthia was:

"Change Your Name To Hope I Advise."

This excellent result was sent in by Mrs. E. Ryan, of 21 Abbott's Road, East Ham, E., and consequently the first prize goes to her. Many other good sentences were sent, and consolation gifts go to the following:

S. White, 162 Camberwell New Road, S.E.; H. Martin, Superintendent Peabody Buildings, Herne Hill; W. Tombs, 13 St. Olaves House, Walnut Tree Walk, Kennington; J. S. Ryan, 21 Abbott's Road, East Ham, E.; E. Tudor Marsh, Villa Chrysanthème, Ellison Road, Streatham Common; H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, S.E.; H. C. Pickard, 46 St. Giles' Street, Northampton; C. Windsor, 11 Ramsden Terrace, North Street, Leeds; T. Allison, 18 Fleet Street, Gorton, Manchester; S. L. Baines, 6 Ingatestone Road, Woodford Green.

Your Editor.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

THE STORY STARTS HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin, with Fluffy's help, stole a pocket-book, containing abouteight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, and during this interview Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Frankie left the room; but I stayed, and, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope, overheard Hope (who turns out to be Kinross' cousin) tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. I told Frankie what I had overheard.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperone, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with a man from Jamaica who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. He and Kinross arrived with Casellis at Pont Street, and Casellis was asked to say what he knew of Frankie's dark past, but, instead of disclosing any unpleasant facts, he swore that she was a perfectly innocent woman.

Several other witnesses were called, but Frankie scored over each one in turn. Thus baffled, Hope left, and Kinross formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived. He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell in a dead faint. Doctors were called, and pronounced it a paralytic seizure. Toby next called. In three days his uncle's bill must be redeemed. If this was not done he vowed that he would shoot himself.

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FRANKIE MAKES A WIFE BREAK FAITH.

Among Frankie's acquaintances at this time was the wife of Horace Grendale, a young M.P. of great ability. He was generally considered to have a big political future before him—whatever that may mean—and was at present private secretary to a member of the Cabinet—the Minister for Foreign Affairs, I think it was.

Toby had introduced my cousin to Mrs. Grendale, who had straightway fallen in love with her. Frankie tolerated her affection, and she became a constant visitor at Pont Street.

She was a pretty woman, one of those sweet, appealing creatures, with melting eyes, a pathetic mouth, and an ingenuousness all infantile. She was the daughter of a country squire, and had seen but little of Society before her marriage. She now burnt with the desire to become a leader thereof.

She modelled herself upon my cousin. What Frankie did Dorothea Grendale—"Dollie" her intimates called her—strove to do likewise.

Her husband was charming but not rich. He, a very ambitious man, worshipped dear Dollie, and regarded her as a miracle, not only of beauty, but of intellect. She could be an admirable listener on occasions, and always turned up at the Commons when he made a speech.

In spite of his affection for her, Dollie's extravagances hit him rather hard. He swallowed milliners' and other bills, but drew the line at gambling debts. "All the smart set gamble," Dollie wailed, but her husband would not listen. She must play no more.

This being so, Mrs. Grendale gambled when she could, upon the nod, and in this way had got into Frankie's debt to the extent of about two thousand pounds. Remembering this, it occurred to me that Frankie might ask her for the money. It would help towards the £5,000 required for Nathan's bill.

I suggested this to Frankie the morning after Toby's call.

"The money must be raised, Frankie, or I'm sure Toby will do something rash. Why shouldn't Dollie pay what she owes you?"

My cousin nodded.

"I'll see what I can do," she said. "I'll go and see her this afternoon. By-the-by, Cynthia, run down and fetch this morning's paper, will you? I want to look at the stocks and shares."

Frankie studied the columns of the *Times* intently. She seemed to derive great satisfaction from the share market, and looked quite bright when she laid the paper down.

"I think we shall meet the bill all right," Cynthia, she said, "if Toby will be sensible. You might take a hansom to Downing Street"—Toby was a clerk in the Home Office—"and tell him, whatever he does, he's not to ask anyone I know to lend him the money. It's too risky."

I did as I was told, had a nice drive, saw Toby, and picked up Lord Chesterton on my way back. I asked him in to lunch. We found Pettigrew installed in the drawing-room, looking pleased with both himself and Frankie.

The millionaire had fought shy of Pont Street for a while, but had gradually drifted into the old state of things. He was as much infatuated with Frankie as ever, but was far more reticent both as to his affairs—and his pocket-books.

He seemed in an expansive humour that day, however; either Frankie or the lunch had loosed his tongue.

"How are things going in the City?" said my cousin. "I look upon you as a Stock Exchange magnate, Mr. Pettigrew. I believe you make millions every day!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear lady," said Pettigrew—pleased none the less.

"I love to hear about the City," said Frankie enthusiastically. "Companies are always exciting, and sometimes romantic."

"Not much romance about Wall Street, anyway," he said grimly. "By the way," he turned to Chesterton, "you don't know anything of politics, I take it? I don't suppose, for instance, you could give me any information as to the state of the game between your country and mine, in reference to this arbitration matter? It's about a strip of territory in South America, Mrs. Norton," he explained, "to which Britain and the United States both lay claim. The negotiations have been pending for years and years, but at last things have come to a head. The decision will shortly be made public; meantime I'm in a fix. I've put a lot of money into a scheme for building railways in that particular quarter of the globe. We're only waiting for certain concessions to be signed to start right away. But the bother of it is that we don't know which government will take the territory over. If the 'States' come out on top I'm all right; my company will get the concession. If Britain wins the deal"—he grimaced—"there's a rival company who'll put us clean out of the running. If I could get to know which way the cat is going to jump I could act accordingly. Either buy more shares or sell out those I have. It's an awkward position anyway."

"I'm afraid I can't help you, Mr. Pettigrew," said Chesterton. "I've steered clear of politics so far. I only vote for two bills—the deceased wife's sister, and for the better preservation of pheasants!"

It seemed rather a strange combination, but I didn't like to make any remark. Frankie said men hated women to criticise them, and I didn't want Lord Chesterton to feel that way to me.

"It's an intensely exciting situation, Mr. Pettigrew," said Frankie. "I suppose you could clear a really big sum if you only knew what was going to happen?"

"I should that, Mrs. Norton. I'd pay handsomely for the information."

Frankie flushed and her eyes grew very bright.

"There's likely to be an exciting debate in the Commons this afternoon on this very matter," said Chesterton. "Suppose you all come down to the House and have tea on the terrace?"

Pettigrew was otherwise engaged, but Frankie at once accepted. She seemed in great spirits at the notion, just as if she had an invitation to a specially smart affair.

She put on one of her prettiest gowns, a pale green voile embroidered in silver, and a toque of cerise roses. I wore a sweet mauve muslin over a silk slip, with a ruffle of white chiffon, and a soft, crinkly straw hat trimmed with a mass of chiffon and hydrangea.

Chesterton conducted us to the Ladies' Gallery. It reminded me of a sheep pen, only we poor sheep couldn't get our heads through the *grille*. Frankie and I had good seats in the front row. I felt as if I were at the theatre and wished the orchestra would commence.

A very stout and very prosy person was speaking with much deliberation and a large number of "ahems." He was followed by an impassioned youth, with a tiresome collar that seemed to get in his way perpetually.

After he sat down everyone said "Hear, hear!" It was just like the theatre only the performers didn't take their call.

Presently Mr. Grendale got on his feet. Frankie listened to him attentively. At the close of his oration, short, sharp, and brilliant, Dollie, who had been seated further back, leant forward and welcomed Frankie with delight.

"So sweet of you, darling, to come and hear poor Horace"—Dollie always spoke of her husband as poor Horace—"didn't you think him splendid? Of course you did. Going to have tea on the terrace! How delightful! so am I."

It was a gay scene on the terrace. Society women in smart frocks, literary women

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—not all smart—political women and a good sprinkling of actresses. Everyone ate strawberries and cream, including the legislators. Frankie was soon the centre of a group of Irish members; she and Dollie seemed to be the features of the afternoon.

It was a beautiful day, and the river looked bright and sparkling in the sunshine. I should have enjoyed myself thoroughly if it had not been for the thought of Toby and that terrible bill.

Dollie drove back with us to Pont Street. She was most affectionate to Frankie, and more than ever impressed with her friend's social importance.

"You must stay to dinner, dear," insisted my cousin. "Lady Gaveston is out—engaged in good works, so we can have a cosy time together."

We had a very nice meal, and then adjourned to Frankie's den. Dollie smoked cigarettes and drank champagne with a delightful sense of being wicked! "Poor Horace" had such quaint ideas about women. He couldn't bear them to smoke, she explained.

From cigarettes Frankie discussed chiffons, gliding in the most natural manner possible into Clairvette's infamous prices and her determination to be paid.

"By the bye, Dollie, if it's quite convenient, you might let me have a cheque. I'm awfully pressed, old girl, or I wouldn't bother you. I suppose you can let me have a thou. on account?"

Dollie crimsoned to the tips of her ears.

"I have spent every fraction of this quarter's allowance, dear," she said. "I shan't have another penny till next month."

"That's easily got over. Horace never refuses you anything. He'll give you a cheque for the asking."

"He can't, Frankie. He——" Dollie paused. She always tried to impress one with the idea that Horace was possessed of millions. It would, she thought, discredit her position in the smart set if she acknowledged the true state of the case.

"You don't mean to say that Mr. Grendale can't afford to pay his wife's gambling debts?" sneered Frankie. "You've no business to have played at all, if that is so."

"Horace made me promise not to gamble any more."

Frankie shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, tell him you owe the money to your dressmaker, or your tailor; I'm not particular what you say so long as I get the money. Look here, Dollie, you can't say I've been hard on you. You've owed me close on two thou. for the last month or six weeks. I've not asked you before, shouldn't now unless I was terribly pushed. You're bound to get it, old girl, and that's the fact. Would you like me to ask Mr. Grendale for you?"

"For Heaven's sake, Frankie, don't do that."

Frankie frowned, glancing at the little woman contemptuously.

"You're not behaving well, Dollie. You play with me for high stakes, then you ask me to wait for the money, although you know debts of honour should never stand over. Now when I can wait no longer you try and put me off indefinitely. It's dishonest and mean. I relied on the money to meet certain obligations. My creditors won't show me any mercy, I can tell you."

Dollie wrung her hands.

"I don't know what I shall do," she sobbed. "I daren't ask Horace for anything just now. He's so worried and harassed about affairs in Parliament. The negotiations between Britain and America have kept him awake night after night. It's very silly of him for *he's* not responsible, but there it is. I *can't* speak to him now."

Frankie gazed at her friend through a haze of smoke.

"I must say that's rather rough on you, Dollie. A woman like you oughtn't to be neglected, even for politics. The sacrifice shouldn't be all on your side."

Dollie immediately assumed an air of injury and sighed.

"I expect you could do with a little money yourself, dearie," continued Frankie. "It's a long time till next month."

"I'd give anything for some cash. I owe such a lot it makes me positively wretched."

"A clever woman like you ought to be able to make all she wants. Everyone speculates nowadays. With your sources of information you should do very well on the Stock Exchange. Why, a man I know was telling me only this morning that he could clear hundreds of thousands in the next few days if he only knew how this arbitration matter would be settled." Frankie looked swiftly at the other. "Political secrets always leak out, you know, somehow or other," she continued, "nobody knows *how*, but somebody makes a fortune. Why shouldn't you?"

"I—oh, Frankie, it would mean breaking faith with Horace! I couldn't do that. Besides"—suddenly getting frightened—"I don't know anything about the arbitration."

Frankie smiled cynically.

"Look here, Doll," she said slowly, "you'd better understand me; I mean business. You've got to pay the money you owe me. If you don't get it yourself I shall be compelled to go to your husband. By to-night—within an hour—he will know how his wife has deceived him. He will know that his wife is a gambler, and"—she lowered her voice—"a cheat."

"Not that, for God's sake, not that! It was only once, and I didn't mean to—indeed, indeed I didn't. He loves me so dearly. Trusts me so completely. I should die if he were to change towards me. I thought you were my friend, Frankie."

The unhappy little creature clutched at my cousin's hand and strove to soften her.

"It will be your own fault," said Frankie coldly, "if your husband knows. Here I point out a way by which you can clear off your debts and start afresh, and you talk sentimental rubbish about betraying your husband's trust. Don't be a fool, Dollie! How could it harm your husband? Am I likely, for my own sake, to persuade you against your interest? No one will ever find out. Come"—she bent towards her coaxingly—"I'm sure you know; tell me, which is it, Britain or America?"

"No, no," Dollie buried her head among the sofa cushions. "Don't ask me. I daren't—I *won't* tell you."

"You know the alternative. I go to Mr. Grendale."

"You can't mean it, you don't mean it!" Dollie rocked to and fro. "If I did," she glanced up tearfully. "Are you sure it wouldn't hurt Horace?"

"Positive."

"And I should get enough money to pay you and everybody else?"

"Enough to pay *me* certainly," said Frankie, "and some besides."

"But I don't know anyone on the Stock Exchange."

"I'll settle that part of the business. Come now. Speak."

But at that Dollie fell to whimpering.

Frankie lost patience.

"Be quiet," she said, "you little fool. Listen to me," seizing her by the wrist. "I'll waste no more words on you. Tell me at once, this minute, or I go to Horace. *Poor Horace!*" and she sneered.

Dorothea Grendale raised her head, a strange look in the big blue eyes. Weak she was, foolish and vain, but yet she loved her husband. The very thought that she might lose that husband's love and trust was terrible. If she did not do what Frankie wanted he would learn what she had

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done. He would turn utterly from the wife he had held so dear.

And yet it was an awful thing to break his confidence. How could she, how could she do it?

I read the struggle on her face and impulsively sprang forward.

"Don't tell," I cried, "you'll never forgive yourself if you do. Confess everything to your husband; I know that he'll forgive you, but don't reveal what he said to you in confidence. For your own sake, I beg you, I pray you—don't."

Frankie showed no anger at my interference; she smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"It's true—quite true," sobbed Dollie, "I'd better tell Horace all."

"Certainly," said my cousin. "I quite agree with you. We'll go together—Cynthia, ring for the carriage."

"I—I—Oh, it's no use," cried Dollie. "I can fight no longer. My husband told me last night about the arbitration—he was so full of it he had to speak to someone. Britain gives up her claims in favour of America. There—there—I've told you. I've betrayed Horace—betrayed my husband—what shall I do, what shall I do?" Hysterical sobs choked her, she was agitated beyond control.

Frankie promptly dashed water in her face and poured brandy down her throat. Then, tucking her up on the couch, charged me on no account to leave her for a moment.

"I am going to see Hiram," she whispered. "He'll give pretty well all I like to ask for what I've got to tell him. Keep Dollie here till I come back. At any rate, Cynthia, you might be glad of one thing. Pettigrew's money will settle Nathan's bill and save Toby from disgrace. Remember, there was only to-day to get the money. Yesterday was the first and to-morrow will be the last day of grace."

Somehow it seemed too heavy a price even for Toby's safety, as I glanced at the figure on the couch. Dollie was quieter now, but an occasional sob still shook her slight frame. She was very young, quite a girl, I thought, as I watched the pretty, fair head, drooping with shame.

Presently she sat up and commenced to talk.

"You can't think how good Horace has been to me," she said. "I've tried his patience often, I've been foolish and silly, and thought more of what other people have said than my own husband. I wish I'd never tried to be smart. If I'd been content to go out less, and stop at home more, I should be happy now, instead——" She commenced to cry again, plucking restlessly at her gown.

"Don't you make the mistake I've made, Cynthia. If you get married be content with your husband's love. Don't worry and fret about Society. It won't help you; when you're in trouble it will stamp on you, laugh at you. I wish I had done as he asked me," she wailed. "He begged me to go into the country this season. He said London would rub the bloom off my cheeks, he might have said off my heart, too. He would have run down from town very often, I should have seen just as much of him. Why did I refuse—why did I refuse?"

I sat and listened with a heavy heart. My mind went back to those first days when I had come to live with Frankie. Only the matter of six months or so, but what a lot had happened in those six months. How many things I had learnt that then were strange to me.

I knew nothing of Society then. Now—I know really too much!

The hours passed very slowly, ten, eleven, twelve had struck and Frankie had not yet returned. Dollie had made one or two efforts to go home, but I had easily dissuaded her. At last she fell into a broken sleep, murmuring every now and then her husband's name.

Just after midnight Frankie returned, looking splendid in a long sacque coat of black satin and a picture hat with heavy plumes.

She called me from the room.

"I've seen Pettigrew," she said, "and arranged everything satisfactorily. But as ill-luck would have it, coming out of his hotel—the Cecil, you know—I caught sight of Kinross. He was with two other men, and looked black as thunder when he saw me by myself. He'll make an awful fuss about it, Cynthia, and goodness knows what excuse I am to make for being out alone at such an hour. He's sure to ask for an explanation. Good Heavens!" as a thundering knock at the front door interrupted her. "I do believe that is my lord himself. What am I to do? He mustn't know that Dollie's here. You'll have to see him, Cynthia, while I get rid of her. No, that won't do. You must be present when I speak to Dollie. Quick, we must get it over soon," and she pulled me into the morning room.

"Well, Dollie," she said, smiling in her usual manner. "Are you better? That's right. I've good news for you, my dear." She leisurely unfastened her coat, studying the other intently.

"Here's my receipt for what you owe me, Doll, and a thousand pounds besides. Count the notes and see that they are all right, dear."

My cousin laid the paper and the notes on the table.

Mrs. Grendale did not speak. She rose from the couch, walked to the table, deliberately took up the notes and threw them on the floor.

"Why, Dollie——"

"I don't want your money," Dollie interrupted swiftly, "and I won't take it. As for this," she lifted the receipt, "it is of no value to me *now*, and she tore the paper into shreds.

Frankie breathed quickly, the situation was becoming strained. Outside in the hall, Kinross, his voice louder than usual, was imperatively demanding to see Mrs. Norton. At any moment he might stride into the room to look for her, and then——

"Don't be foolish, Dollie," said Frankie, biting her lips. "If you don't take the notes, what are you going to do?"

"This—I'm going straight to my husband to tell him everything." She glanced defiantly at Frankie, and moved towards the door.

In a second my cousin intercepted her, and stood triumphant, towering over her.

"You little fool," she said, "to think you can get the better of me. You will tell your husband everything, will you?" she mocked. "Idiot! He knows already, I've told him myself, everything—not half an hour ago."

And with that Frankie threw up her head and sailed out of the room.

Kinross was waiting for her, angry and impatient, in the hall. I heard his voice raised to question her. She took him in the dining-room and closed the door.

He had come to ask her for an explanation of her midnight call on Pettigrew.

What explanation could she give?

(Frankie's explanation to Lord Kinross is recorded next week.)

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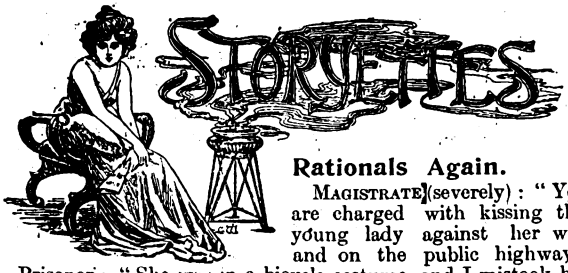

Rationals Again.

MAGISTRATE (severely): "You are charged with kissing this young lady against her will, and on the public highway." Prisoner: "She was in a bicycle costume, and I mistook her for my long-lost brother." Magistrate (briskly): "Discharged! Call the next case."

Why it came Last.

MR. HOJACK (at dinner): "My dear, isn't it very queer for you to serve soup after the beef?" Mrs. Hojack: "Not at all, love. This is oxtail soup. It comes last."

Saved the Situation.

POLLY (to her *fiancé*): "Tom, you danced four times with that girl Jenkins, and only twice with me." Tom (slyly); "Well, it takes quantity, you know, to make up for quality."

Why it Failed.

PASSENGER in railway carriage to his neighbour: "Is marriage a failure where you live?" Colonist (returned home for a few months): "I'm sorry to say it is." "Why?" "Lack of women."

The Height of Consideration.

HE: "I think it is an outrage that the ladies should wear high hats in the theatre." She: "Yes. I must admit you men are much more considerate." "Of course we are." "Some of you who get in the front row are even so considerate as to leave your hair at home. You are too good for this world."

The Way Out.

SWEET SEVENTEEN: "Oh, papa! I have found a way for you to escape the death duties." Father: "I fancy not." Sweet Girl: "Yes, I have. You give half your stocks to Mr. Slimpurse, and then I'll marry Mr. Slimpurse, and so all the money will be kept in the family, and the Government won't get a penny."

Reassured.

TIMID LADY (about to buy a ticket for New York): "And is the boat that sails on Thursday perfectly safe?" Agent for the Ocean Greyhound Co. (gravely): "Madam, I can assure you that in all the time this ship has been in service, and that time covers a number of years, madam, not once has she gone to the bottom." Timid lady (reassured): "Oh, then, it must be all right. Let me have a cabin, please."

A Chance for Somebody.

MR. DECKER had been entertaining a party of his friends in the parlour, and the aroma of their cigars still lingered in the curtains. Mrs. Decker was naturally disgusted when she came into the room. She threw the windows wide open, and remarked: "Well, it is all very well to talk about inventing smokeless powder, but I don't see why somebody hasn't the gumption enough to invent a smokeless tobacco."

Love's Young Dream.

FATHER. "Now, see here! If you marry that young pauper, how on earth are you going to live?" Sweet Girl: I have been reading a poultry circular, and I find that a good hen will raise twenty chickens in a season. Well, the next season that will be twenty-one hens; and as each will raise twenty more chicks, that will be 420. The next year the number will be 8,400, the following year 168,000, and the next 3,360,000! Just think! At only one shilling a-piece we should have £168,000. Then, you dear old papa, we'll lend you some money so that you will be able to pay off the mortgage on this house."

Love in the Grocer's Shop.

"Do you love me?" said the paper bag to the sugar. "I'm just wrapped up in you," replied the sugar. "You sweet thing!" murmured the paper bag.

Another Philanthropist Hardened.

PHILANTHROPIC OLD GENT: "Here, my little man, here's a penny for you." His Little Man: "Toss yer double or quits—whether yer makes it tuppence or keeps it."

Her Reasons.

MR. FLATHOUSE: "Why did you kick me under the table when I asked Gorgeleigh to have some more wild duck?" Mrs. Flathouse (severely): "For two reasons. There was no more wild duck, and not being a professional dancer I could not kick over the table."

Why He Refrained.

"MR. BLUFFLY," she said, graciously, "you are one of the most original men I have met for ever so long. You haven't said a single word about the weather." "No," he replied, with a tinge of regret in his voice, "I couldn't give my opinion of the weather in the presence of ladies."

He Wore Size 9.

MRS. DE BRIDE was entertaining callers. After they left she remarked to her husband: "I hope they didn't see my walking shoes lying there; they wouldn't think me very tidy if they did." "Oh, if they saw them, they probably thought they were mine," answered her husband, in a consoling tone. And she hasn't spoken to him since.

A Gentle Hint.

MRS. BRIGHT: "My daughter tells me that you have become quite an adept in palmistry." Young Squeezem: "Yes, I have studied it for some time. Mrs. Bright: "Well, I have had a plaster impression taken of Madeline's hand, and if you wish to study it you can do so at your leisure. It will save you the trouble of a personal examination, you know."

An Ominous Symptom.

"A GOOD wife is Heaven's greatest gift to man, and the rarest gem the earth holds," remarked Mr. Jarphly, the other morning. "She is his joy, his inspiration, and his very soul. Through her he learns to reach the pure and true, and her loving hands lead him softly over the rough places. She is——" "Jeremiah," said Mrs. Jarphly, solemnly, "Jeremiah, what wickedness have you been up to now?"

Not Quite what he Meant.

MISS CLARA WINTERBLOOM: "Mamma, this is Mr. Tutter. I want to introduce him to you. Do you know that he was under the impression that I was the only daughter, and I have just been telling him that I have two sisters." Mrs. Winterbloom: "Oh, yes. You must meet Maud and Estelle. Mr. Tutter. They are both of them older than Clara there.' Young Tutter (wishing to say the right thing): "I didn't suppose it possible, Mrs. Winterbloom, that you could have any daughters older than Miss Clara."

What is Love?

LOVE: A nervous disorder affecting the entire system, and sometimes even the clothes and food of the victim. Peculiar to both sexes of all ages, from childhood to second childhood. Always fatal in age, seldom in youth. Symptoms: Loss of appetite and interest in mundane affairs. Anxiety as to personal appearance. Longing for flowers and poetry. Sudden affection for children, especially babies that the victim has formerly despised. Demented belief in the absolute perfection of some being of the opposite sex. Vacant expression of the eyes and cerebral cavity. Patient speaks in monosyllables, and takes an especial interest in the monosyllable "Yes." Treatment: One dose of the monosyllable "No" and nursing, for males. For females, a new seal-skin jacket, diamonds, and a trip to the Riviera, are sometimes efficacious. An application of "stern parents" may be of use, but more often merely excites the malady. Marriage is an absolute specific. But it is so dangerous that it is never used except in extreme cases.

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A Mission Which Failed.

And the Ambassador who Succeeded.

MRS. LYNN felt her responsibility more than usual that morning. For four years she had been piloting her nephew, a young minister, past all kinds of matrimonial snares, only to find that when the right girl came along he was as blind and as unresponsive as though he had been made of wood.

True, he had never been even slightly conscious of the aforesaid matrimonial snares, and had not known that she was piloting him past anything. How should he—for nature, while giving him six feet of height, and power and logic and eloquence in the pulpit, had ordained that he should be as clay in the hands of the potter when it came to worldly affairs.

As for Mrs. Lynn, while he was in his study busy with next Sunday's sermon, she was expressing herself unsparingly to old Jane.

"It's really rather too bad of Dick—it's not at all what I expected of him!" she declared. "Here is Grace Noble, pretty and sensible, and with so much taste—and a sweet voice—I can't endure a screeching woman—and no relatives to speak of—I never could dream of having Dick marry a woman with an odious mother to come here and dictate to me—and she has a little money, though I'm not particular about that—I have enough for Dick——"

She paused to take a breath and to sigh a little, which gave Jane an opportunity to remark fatuously:

"Perhaps he hasn't noticed her. He's not worryin' about no woman."

"No, he hasn't noticed her," replied Mrs. Lynn with spirit. "I have her here to dinner, and go off and lie down afterwards on purpose, and he sits up there and talks books the whole time. Books! And once he came in and met her in the garden in the moonlight, and he stood there and talked flowers. No wonder she doesn't like to come over here. When he was gone that last time I pretended that he was to be away all night, and begged her to stay with me—almost lying for his sake, Jane—another little bit and it would have been a falsehood!—and he came back and wasn't in the house five minutes before he was off to see old Pennybaker, because he was ill! What is anyone to do with a man like that?"

"I wouldn't worry myself with no man," said Jane sententiously, thus virtually admitting that the problem was too much for her.

"Yes, but I can't leave him alone," said Mrs. Lynn, with a tragic emphasis. "If I do he is likely to marry just anybody—perhaps that sandy-haired Gaines girl—and think of her mother! Someone's at the door, Jane."

Mrs. Lynn was still reviewing the situation and grieving over it desperately when Jane returned.

"That young Harrison to see you, ma'am," she said with the privilege of age, and Mrs. Lynn went to meet the young Tom Harrison.

When she emerged from her conference with the much-embarrassed young man, a contemplative look was upon her face and a new look in her eyes.

"I'll see what can be done, Tom," she said cordially, and a sense of justice to Tom forced her to add, "but I don't think you need expect anything."

"I'm not hoping much," he confessed gloomily. "But I knew you were so intimate—and perhaps if she knew you thought well of me——"

"Of course," said Mrs. Lynn, busily plotting treason against Tom. "Good-bye. Tell your mother I'll send her that pickle recipe next week."

With an innocent countenance and a guileful heart Mrs. Lynn made her way into the study.

"You know how you like Tom Harrison, Dick," she said with warm and graceful interest. "Well, he's just been here—and he wants you to undertake a very delicate mission for him."

"What is it? I should be glad to help Tom," said the Rev. Richard Moore, pushing his books away.

"I knew you would," Mrs. Lynn hastened to assure him. "I told Tom you would. He's in love with a girl, you know, and he's so timid, and feels so unworthy, and so afraid of a refusal—and he thinks if you would go first and talk to the girl about it, and tell her how much everyone thinks of Tom—how much you think, especially——"

He towered before her, aghast.

"Well, I should certainly call that too delicate a mission," he cried. "Let him go himself."

"I told him you would go," said Mrs. Lynn unmoved. "He'd never go—and there'll be his happiness spoilt for his whole life. Grace thinks so much of you—it's Grace, you know—she'll listen to what you say. She went by with her sketch book a little while ago. You'll find her out in the park, I think."

He did not move.

"You mean Miss Noble?" he asked. "Don't you think she is rather superior to——"

"To Tom?" she said, with great cheerfulness. "Of course she is—but so is every woman to any man she is likely to marry. If they waited for their equals they'd all die old maids. Go along with you, Dick, and do the best you can for Tom."

When the young man found Miss Noble she had carefully established herself in a remote corner of the park, and the sketch she was painting, he saw, as he came up, should have included a bending tree with a glimpse of water under it. What was there about such a picture to make one turn it upside down with frantic haste and shut the book over it? She stood up, the colour rushing to her face, and the minister stood and looked down at her. He was all at once conscious that it would seem incongruous to speak to this girl about marrying Tom Harrison. But he had promised, and what he had promised was to be done.

"I hardly know how to go about it," was the undiplomatic way in which he opened the subject. "I shall do it very awkwardly, I know."

She did not help him out. He was embarrassed, but he went heroically on. There was but one way known to the young minister whereby things might be done, and that was the briefest and simplest and most direct way.

"I hope you won't think me officious," he said; "but I come on behalf of young Mr. Harrison. He loves you very deeply, and is so little conscious of his own merit"—he felt himself warming up—"that he hesitates to tell you of his love. I am only anxious for you to do him justice. I know him, I suppose, better than anyone else knows him. He is a thoroughly good fellow, who has built himself up through many adverse circumstances."

Miss Noble was looking at him haughtily, and her face was very white.

"Mr. Harrison is fortunate in his advocate," she said in chilling tones. "Will you tell him that I asked you not to speak further of this matter, because it would be useless—now and for ever?"

He floundered helplessly, and for one swift moment resolved never to be a friend to anybody again

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"I am sorry," he said—for speech was given him that day for his own undoing. "No man's love is to be lightly thrown away—least of all the love of a man like Tom."

He waited a moment. She had turned away and was drawing on her gloves, her sketch book under her arm. Having nothing else to do, he watched the trembling gold that the sun threaded into her hair. Manifestly the proper thing to do was to go, but he could not go without looking into her face again.

"I hope you won't be angry with me," he murmured contritely. "I knew I should do it badly—I don't suppose there is any man living who could be as awkward about it as I naturally would—but you shouldn't make me feel quite so wretched as this." He walked round until he was facing her. "You surely are not going to be so unforgiving—Grace!"

She had raised her eyes, and he saw the tears in them. In an instant he was holding both her hands, and the sketch book was on the ground.

For a long moment he stood there, holding her hands and looking into her face, while his own face grew white. Then he let the hands fall.

"Good-bye," he said. "I must go and tell Tom that I can't plead his cause—for I love you myself. And then I suppose I shall make a failure of my own hopes."

He had not surprised her secret—he had only discovered his own. The young artist made a sudden grasp after her scattered pictures, the colour beginning to flame back into her face again; but he was before her; and there the topmost one had nothing to do with a bending tree and a glimpse of water under. It was a very good likeness of the Rev. Richard Moore, though even he could see that it flattered him.

"I was painting that for your aunt," said the young lady, blushing furiously. "No, I will not—at least—Richard!"

Mrs. Lynn was sitting in the half dusk of the vine-clad porch that evening when he came in and went up to her falteringly.

"I am afraid you will never forgive me, Aunt Helen," he said. "I know you were not thinking of my marrying for years yet—perhaps never—but Grace and I love one another—and I have told Tom—and I hope you won't be unwilling, auntie."

Mrs. Lynn was obliged to press both hands to her heart.

"Why, Dick Moore!" she cried, much scandalised. "I thought you went to win a wife for Tom! Well, I suppose I never shall understand any man alive! But no doubt it is all for the best. Go and bring Grace—and I'll have to forgive you, I suppose." And she stood on tiptoe to kiss the boy she had brought up.

J. T. Bishop.

The Missing Bank Note.

A Pretty Little Tale of a False Accusation.

THE respectable home of Miss Jessie Howard was in a state of turmoil. One hundred pounds had been paid to Miss Jessie that morning, and within little more than an hour the money had vanished as if by witchcraft.

Just now Miss Howard was tearfully going over all the circumstances with her niece, who stood before her with indignant eyes and protesting voice.

"Of course, Amy," sobbed Miss Jessie, "it is only natural that you should feel as you do just now, still I do wish that you would be a little more reasonable."

"Reasonable!" ejaculated the younger Miss Howard, with infinite scorn in her voice; "it is not I who am unreasonable! It is you, Aunt Jessie, when you insinuate for a single moment that Robert Armstrong had anything to do with your wretched old money."

"But just listen, Amy. I tell you I had it in my hand when he entered the room. Mr. Tenney had just been in and paid it to me. It was just as he left that Mr. Armstrong came in. I know that I held it in my right hand when he came, for, you see, I distinctly remember that I had had to put it down before I could shake hands with him. Then he told me his errand, and, of course, that put all thought of the money out of my head. I never dreamt, Amy, that you cared for him."

"Well, I do, auntie," her niece affirmed, with a sort of wrathful positivity, "and I hope you were nice to him. You haven't told me yet what you both said."

"Oh," with a deep sigh, "I suppose I was nice enough to him. You see, I didn't miss the money until after he had gone. He told me that he liked you and wanted to marry you; that he believed you cared for him. Of course I said I was astonished, and I expect he could see easily enough that that was the truth. But I had always liked his mother, and of course we know all about his family, and that's something, although it doesn't seem to matter about his family at all," she ended rather incoherently.

"Go on, auntie," commanded her niece imperiously, "what else was said?"

"Oh, well, I told him that it was not a matter in which I felt that I should interfere; that you had your own life to live, but that I was glad you had chosen a man whom I could trust and like; for I have liked him, Amy. Then, of course, he thanked me and talked about you and his plans for the future. He said that he was in rather a tight place financially just now, but that he hoped to have matters straightened out soon, and he hadn't meant to speak to you, he said, until everything was all right; but somehow he had forgotten himself."

"Yes," Amy acquiesced, with a little smile, "he certainly did forget himself if he hadn't meant to say anything to me yet, but it doesn't really make any difference, you know. What next, auntie?"

"Oh, that was all. He sat and talked about you, of course, and he thanked me, and then he left. I just went to the door here with him. He wouldn't let me go to the porch. He said that he should be here so much now that we mustn't stand on ceremony with him."

"Well!" impatiently.

"Well, then I came back and sat down to think it all over. All of a sudden I remembered that money and it wasn't on the table. I couldn't believe it at first. I just remembered

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what Robert Armstrong said about being in financial trouble, and——"

In spite of her extreme vexation Amy Howard laughed outright. "My dearest aunt, Rob is worth nearly a million pounds, and your little hundred pound note wouldn't help him much."

But Miss Jessie shook her head wisely. "You can't tell me that, Amy; perhaps he needed that amount to-day."

"If he did there are a thousand places where he could get it honourably. But if there were not, and if he needed it—which he didn't in the least, I can assure you—he would lose every farthing he had rather than get it dishonourably. Now, Aunt Jessie, I am not going to get angry with you if I can help it, because you have been too good to me all my life for me to do any such thing. But you mustn't make any insinuations, auntie. Now tell me exactly what you did when you found that the money wasn't where you thought it was."

"I looked round for it at first, but you can easily see that it isn't in the room. Then I stepped to the door, and told James to call you. You see, Amy," poor Miss Jessie concluded tearfully, "I haven't been an inch outside this room since Mr. Tenney gave me that wretched money, and not a soul besides was in here until you came in just now—except Robert Armstrong."

"Then it is in this room now," said her niece, emphatically.

"Where?"

Amy looked round the small, square room that was commonly known as Miss Howard's "den," and mentally acknowledged that there were few hiding places in it. In fact, it was little used. In one corner stood a huge desk with a rolling cover, and this might have afforded a thousand possible hiding places, but Miss Jessie asserted that the desk was locked and the key in her box upstairs; that she had not been to the desk for two days. Amy tried the top and the drawers of the desk only to find that everything was locked as securely as Miss Jessie had stated. She looked beneath it and over every inch of the carpet. She shook out the folds of her aunt's dress and hunted in every corner, but all to no purpose. Aside from the desk just mentioned, the only furniture in the room consisted of a few chairs and a table on which were a couple of newspapers. Amy unfolded the papers over and over, but no money was hidden in them. At last she stopped in sheer disgust and perplexity. Her aunt had been watching her anxiously. "It isn't here, is it, Amy?"

"I certainly can't find it, Aunt Jessie," the girl acknowledged frankly, "and I have been over every bit of this room at least a dozen times. It must have blown up the chimney or out of the window."

"The chimney has been closed for weeks," her aunt said drily, "and while the window is certainly raised, there is a screen in it. The note couldn't have blown through that even if there were a bit of air stirring to-day, which there isn't."

"You are sure Mr. Tenney paid you, Aunt Jessie?" her niece asked hesitatingly.

Miss Jessie's eyes flashed ominously. "Am I a fool, Amy Howard? I have been called a good business woman for more than twenty years now, do you suppose I don't know what money is given me? Mr. Tenney had the receipt all made out, and I signed it with his fountain pen. There is the ink it left on my fingers now. I hate fountain pens! But you needn't insinuate that I am an idiot, Amy, I don't deserve it from you."

Amy took the reproof meekly, for she felt that it was not undeserved. Miss Jessie, as she herself had remarked, had now the thoroughly merited reputation of being a good business woman. If she declared that money had been paid her, then it had, and there was no more to be said on that phase of the subject. Still, Miss Jessie had undoubtedly been completely upset by Robert Armstrong's avowal, and possibly her practical wits were not so alert as usual. Yet, with this admitted, even by Miss Jessie herself, Amy was no nearer the solution of the problem than before, for Miss Howard could swear to the payment of the money, to placing it on the table after Robert Armstrong had entered, and to the fact that no one except himself had entered the room, while she had not left it.

"It is certainly worse than a Chinese puzzle," Amy declared indignantly. "Rob is coming this afternoon to take me driving, and I shall just tell him the whole story, and perhaps he can throw some light on it."

Miss Jessie fairly gasped with surprise. "What! shall you tell him that you think he must have taken the money."

"Of course not," Amy rejoined, indignantly. "That would not be the truth, so why should I say it? But I would like to know if Rob saw the money, and if he noticed anything about it. And I shall ask him."

* * * * * * *

And ask him she did that very day. It was an annoying little episode, and if possible she did not want the early days of her engagement to be troubled any more by it. She told her lover all about the mysterious disappearance of the money, and begged him to search his memory and see if he could recall anything at all about it. Of course Amy said not a word about her aunt's suspicions.

"Why, yes, dear," Armstrong said promptly. "I do remember all about it. Miss Howard laid the note on the table just as she told you she had done. After I had told her my little story, she took it up in her hand, and, after twisting it round in her fingers a few moments, she put it into her pocket. I thought that she was not half conscious of what she was doing at the time. Naturally I had upset her considerably."

Amy laughed in sheer relief. "Poor Aunt Jessie, she must have been disturbed indeed to forget what she was doing in that fashion. I presume she even forgot that she had a pocket. In fact, that is the only pocket she possesses, and she had a great fight to get that. You must know, my dear, that fashion nowadays does not allow us poor women to have pockets, and auntie's dressmaker was indignant when she insisted on having one."

Poor Miss Jessie was overwhelmed with mortification when Amy told her tale, and the missing bank note was found safely, even as Armstrong had said, in the one solitary pocket that she possessed.

"Will he ever forgive me, Amy?" she cried, plaintively.

"He doesn't know that he has anything to forgive, and we will not enlighten him, auntie," Amy said, adding maliciously: "His financial troubles have all vanished now, Aunt Jessie. He found a letter after he left you this morning, telling him that those people who have been trying to steal his South African mines have given up the fight. So, you see, Rob doesn't need your hundred pound note."

M. J.

The Modern Novel.

"Tell me honestly," said the novel reader to the novel writer, "did you ever see a woman who stood and tapped the floor impatiently with her toe for several moments, as you describe?" "Yes," was the thoughtful reply; "I did once." "Who was she?" "She was a clog dancer."

Nice for the Shopman.

Mrs. Upton: "I don't know what to do with myself this afternoon. Give me ten shillings for a ticket to the concert, and I'll go there." Hardy Upton: "Really, Clara, I have but fivepence-halfpenny in my pocket, and——" Mrs. Upton: "Oh, well, give me that, and I'll spend the afternoon shopping."

A Wonderful Gift.

Fortune-Teller: "You may in time make a good income, but you will never be rich." Young man: "Eh? Why not?" "You are wasteful. You are wasteful." "My! my! I'm afraid that is true. You have a wonderful gift. How did you know I was wasteful?" "You have just wasted a shilling getting your fortune told."

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A DAMAGED PICTURE.

Telling of a Girl's Devotion.

MARGARET CLAYTON put down her palette and surveyed her handiwork with satisfaction.

"That's splendid," she murmured, "the Beggar Maid's expression is perfect, I know. Dear me, what weeks of genuine hard labour that face alone represents—over and over again I've painted it. Harold will be so proud too. He knows just enough about art to appreciate my best work. I will go and bring him to see it."

Glancing round her studio she decided to move the easel to another position.

"He will see it directly the door is opened," she reflected, "and I can move it round for him to see the details."

With a happy smile upon her face she left the room and put on her hat to tell her success to the man who loved her work only less than he loved herself.

Passing a closed door on her way to the hall she hesitated. If she told her blind mother that the great work was finished, would her pleasure for her daughter's success counterbalance her grief at not being able to see the picture? After a moment's consideration she opened the drawing-room door.

"Mother, dear," she said gently, "I am going to ask Harold to come while the light is good to see the picture. It is finished."

"I am so glad, dear child. I know by your voice it is good. You are pleased. I wish I could see it, Margaret, but you must tell me exactly what it is like when you come back."

The old lady's excitement and pleasure were as manifest as her daughter's.

Margaret ran to her and putting her arms round her, kissed her.

"We will go to see it at the Academy, mother, and listen to the remarks of the crowd. It is my best work by far. I can promise you the treat safely. Two months from now. Am I conceited mother, mine?" she added laughing.

"I will look forward to it every day." Mrs. Clayton's fingers busied themselves with the knitting which was their invariable occupation, and with a delightful nod she told her daughter to hurry for Harold who must leave his books for that afternoon.

But the mother's interest was too great for her to be content to sit still when left alone.

"I will be there to hear his praises," she thought, "I know where the easel stands facing the window. Yes, I will go up and be there when they come in."

Carefully she felt for her stick and moved towards the door. She groped her way safely upstairs but it was the work of some minutes. She entered the studio and waited just inside.

Presently hearing the front door open and shut she advanced into the room.

"I must not be in the light," she reflected, "I will go to the other end. Now, he can see it quite well. Here they come."

As they opened the door there was a resounding bang, for Mrs. Clayton accidentally struck her foot against the easel, and upset the picture. Unfortunately it fell face downwards on the carpet.

"What is that?" asked the blind woman quickly, "not anything valuable I do trust? I was trying not to be in Harold's light." Then as they did not answer she became alarmed.

"Oh, Margaret, dear child, surely it is not your picture? Say I have not spoiled your work?"

Margaret glanced from the smudged canvas which she had picked up to her mother's supplicating, grief-stricken face. Stifling her cry of disappointment she said in a cheerful voice:

"All right, mother, this is not the Academy picture." Alas, it looked as if that were true.

The old lady's face radiated with joy.

"I am relieved. What a shock I had," she exclaimed. "And what do you think of Margaret's work, Harold? Is it not good and worthy of her? I came up to hear your praises."

"It is very, very good, Mrs. Clayton," was the emphatic reply, as he looked his admiration into the eyes of the woman he loved.

"And I am going to the Academy to see it," continued the blind woman fondly. "I have only two months to wait. Now I will go down and leave you. I am sure you have a lot to tell her, Harold, to say how pleased you are with her."

"The face is all smudged," cried Margaret when the door had closed behind her mother, "it is quite spoilt and the wet paint has gone over her dress and all. What shall I do? And you didn't even see it."

"You have done more than I could have done, little girl already. A V.C. isn't good enough for you, and I know you can do more. Paint the face in again and take her to the Academy to 'see' it."

"Oh, Harold, I can't. I can never touch it again."

"There, let us begin at once," and kissing her tears away he handed her the palette and brushes.

The little gods who reward the brave did not fail to do their duty in this instance. To Margaret's delight her second finished face was equally as good as the first and the smudges on the dress were soon painted over.

She was happy when she felt her mother's arm tremble with joy when she overheard the appreciative remarks of the crowd gathered round "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid," the picture of the year. But she was happier still when she read Harold's love and pride in his face.

Rita Cay.

OUR THRILLING COLOURED COVER FOR NEXT WEEK.

In her sleep she silently glided over the housetops.

An incident from the powerful story, "Through the Peril of the Night," in next Tuesday's issue.

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OUR . . THRILLING SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By Henry Farmer.

Crump Makes a Discovery and Visits Scotland Yard.

Crump had been busy, very busy indeed, since his return from Gurlston Bay; yet not so busy but that he had been able to find time to write daily to Esther. She was rapidly improving now; though some time must elapse before it would be possible to remove her to Warham. And it was as well—so Crump told himself. John Mansfield was a changed man since the interview in which Crump, without setting before him actual proof positive of Scarsdale's innocence, had thrown light on the character of the man on whose testimony he had been convicted. He had kept nothing back, not even the deductions that he had drawn concerning the manner in which Alice Vance had met her death. The banker had been astounded, horrified beyond words. Believing the right moment to have come, Crump had not hesitated to take him into his confidence. When it came to a question of whom to trust and whom to distrust, the little man never made a mistake. He knew that the banker's secrecy could be relied upon.

Certain communications had reached the little man from abroad of a very satisfactory nature about Signor Balderini. He had also succeeded in obtaining a copy of a certificate of marriage between one James Balder and Alice Vince. He had further, after much trouble, succeeded in unearthing one of the witnesses of the marriage. Crump was capable of doing a tremendous amount of work, and doing it without flurry, and could always find the time to be amiable and courteous.

The little man was taking an early breakfast in his room at Woodbine Cottage. The day before had been spent in a remote country village, the birthplace of Alice Vince. From Railton, through Fred Wilton, he knew that Revelle and Faversham were expected at The Firs that afternoon. On the table, beside him, was laid his map of Avesham Common with its crosses and pencilled notes.

He pursed up his lips. To himself it was perfectly convincing. He was in a position now, when called upon, to produce witnesses who would be able to identify Seaton Revelle, Esq., of The Firs, as a man who, some eleven years back, had been known both as James Balder and Signor Balderini; he had proof to hand that James Balder had married Alice Vince, and that Alice Vince and Alice Vance, late parlour-maid in John Mansfield's service, had been one and the same woman. Then there was the evidence of the torn fragment of dress, fitting a tear in the dead woman's dress, and of the material of which the asylum uniform was made, discovered clinging to the gorse near to where the first bag of ballast had been found, where, also, a tuft of gorse had been uprooted; and there was the extraordinary position of the dead woman's body in the reservoir and her broken limb. Yet the little man told himself that all these points were not sufficient to secure a verdict of "Guilty!"

"Scarsdale's innocence," he muttered, "and absolute proof of it, so that the most sceptical shall not be able to entertain a tittle of doubt on the subject, is the most important, because the happiness of the living depends upon it; but it will be most grievous if this vile scoundrel should escape the penalty of this greater crime."

Then, suddenly, the little man struck his forehead sharply and gave vent to an ejaculation of annoyance.

"A most criminal piece of negligence on my part!" He shook his head more in sorrow than in anger. "I am past this kind of work, that is what is the matter with me. Now, if I had read in the papers of such a piece of neglect on somebody else's part, I should have been merciless in my condemnation. Yes, sir, I am guilty. I shall not attempt to plead extenuating circumstances!"

Then he pulled out his watch.

"But I shall endeavour to atone."

He tapped his forehead with a finger as if trying to recall something.

"Ah, yes! Spender—Messrs. Spender and Sons supplied the balloon and all the accompanying tackle. Oh, but indeed, I have been guilty of a most criminal piece of negligence, and had it been anyone else I should have been so merciless."

And had anybody heard Crump mutter the words, not knowing him, he would have imagined him to be one of the most merciless of men.

"Come in!" he cried, in answer to a knock on the door.

Pollie entered, carrying the toy tea-service that Crump had given her.

"Oh, Mr. Penworthy, you haven't quite finished your breakfast, have you?"

The little man glanced surreptitiously at his watch. He had a train to catch; but there would be just time to play the game that instinct told him Pollie desired.

"Well, Pollie dear, I have to go to London this morning, on business; but there will be just time for you to make me a cup of tea!"

Then Crump, chuckling to himself, poured some real tea into the miniature tea-pot, and some real milk into the jug, and was presently gravely drinking from a cup but little larger than a thimble.

"Might I trouble you," he said, "for another cup of your most delicious tea, Lady Mary? It is a beverage for which I have a great weakness."

All of which was very delightful to Pollie.

"And now, Lady Mary, a thousand pardons; but will you excuse me? Business is unfortunately business!"

Crump caught his train; but it was by the "skin of his teeth!"

He was fortunate enough to obtain an interview with Mr. Spender himself, head of the firm, to whom he revealed himself in his true character.

"The balloon and apparatus used recently at the *fête* at Warham were supplied by you, I believe, Mr. Spender?"

"Yes."

"Has," continued Crump, "has the balloon been used since?"

"Not to my knowledge; but I'll find out for certain."

Inquiry confirmed the statement. The balloon in question was stored on the premises.

"I should like," said Crump, "to examine it, and I should be very grateful if you would consent to be present, Mr. Spender."

The wicker car had been detached from the silk envelope. Crump entered it, and proceeded to make a very careful

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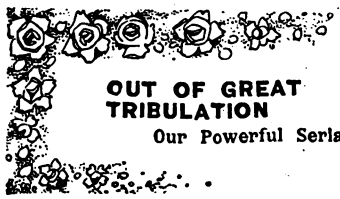

examination. It was in much the same state as when Revelle had left it at Ocklington. The two anchors had been placed inside. They were three-pronged, and looked like grappling irons.

Crump turned his attention to them, last of all. He had obtained from Mr. Spender a pledge of secrecy.

The ends of the prongs were shaped like fish-hooks.

"Ah!" exclaimed Crump; then, addressing Mr. Spender, "I wish to call your attention to this fragment of dark material—serge, I think—that is fixed on this hook, before I remove it. I have frequently known counsel for the defence to insinuate that the police are capable of manufacturing evidence."

Mr. Spender looked at the strip of cloth; then Crump removed it, and, having taken out his pocket case, drew therefrom another strip of cloth, that found on Avesham Common. The two strips were of the same material.

Crump had given no reasons for his examination.

"You said, 'counsel for the defence,'" said Mr. Spender, "is a law case likely to arise out of this?"

"I think so, Mr. Spender, I very much think so, a most staggering case; but until you hear from me, I can rely upon your silence!"

Some ten minutes later Crump was on his way to Scotland Yard.

"Dear me!" he sighed, as he alighted from his cab. "How time flies. It only seems yesterday——"

"Now then," said a young constable, on duty in the entrance, "what's your business?"

The little man smiled faintly. A few years ago, he would have been spoken to very differently, and to the accompaniment of a salute.

"I wish to see," answered the little man quietly, "Sir William Saunderson."

"Perhaps," said the constable sarcastically, "you'd like me to send round a message to the Home Secretary, telling him that you're here, and want to see him at once."

Sir William Saunderson was the head of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"Young man," said Crump, taking a card from his pocket, "avoid flippancy when on duty. Though the most troublesome old lady, or old man, in the world should come along and overwhelm you with trying questions, be polite, avoid sarcasm. When you feel tempted to exercise your undoubtedly brilliant wit, check yourself with the thought that, when on duty, you are the servant of the public. I won't trouble you to send for the Home Secretary at present, though very probably I shall be in communication with him before long." He paused to scribble something on his card. "Now will you kindly see that this card is delivered to Sir William?"

At that moment a gentleman, who had driven up in a closed carriage, passed into the entrance hall.

The constable went stiff and saluted. Then, the next moment, to his intense surprise, Sir William Saunderson was heartily shaking the insignificant, homely little man by the hand.

"Why, Crump, this is a most delightful surprise."

"Crump—*the* Crump!" thought the constable. "Oh, my Lord! But I've put my foot in it nicely, this time."

But when Crump, Sir William's arm linked in his, passed the constable, he nodded to him in a friendly way and with a quizzing glance in his small eyes that seemed to say: "Don't be downcast, young man, we all of us make mistakes sometimes."

For over an hour Crump was closeted with the great man.

"And that," said Crump, at the conclusion of his narrative, "is how matters stand at the present moment, Sir William, I have behaved, I know, in an unorthodox fashion. I ought, perhaps, to have communicated with you long before this; but, rightly or wrongly, my object has been, and is, not so much the unmasking of the scoundrel who is now posing as a gentleman at Warham, as the righting of an innocent man, though, at the same time, before I have done with him, I hope to have the supreme satisfaction of seeing that infamous blackguard adequately punished."

"Crump," said Sir William, "there is no need for you to make excuses. You will continue to conduct this case in your own way, and the services of Scotland Yard are at your disposal."

"Thank you very much indeed, Sir William," said the little man gratefully. "I shall not hesitate to take advantage of your kind offer!"

"I shall give instructions that all orders received here from you, Crump, are to be obeyed as implicitly as though you were still chief inspector, and, I assure you, I have often regretted your retirement."

"It is most kind of you to say that," answered Crump, with considerable embarrassment.

"Mind you, Crump, with regard to the murder—and I am as much convinced as yourself that it was murder—I don't think that even now there's enough evidence to insure conviction."

"Quite so. I have the same doubts—at present; but I do not despair of ultimate success. And I certainly feel that to-day a step forward has been taken. And now, Sir William, I must take my leave. Mr. Revelle and Mr. Favorsham are expected back at Warham this afternoon."

"Well, good-bye, Crump. I wish you every success!"

There was a little twinkle in Crump's eyes as he passed the constable in the entrance hall. The man hung his head rather sheepishly.

"I'm very sorry for my mistake, Mr. Crump, I'm sure!"

Crump patted him on the shoulder.

"I quite enjoyed it," he said, with a little chuckle, "don't distress yourself any more about it. Good morning!"

But, once outside, the amused smile died away, and the little man's face assumed a grave look.

"If," he muttered, "my conclusions should turn out to be wrong! I—I am feeling as nervous as a kitten! Yet they are pressing Revelle horribly for money. Unless he settles with his creditors soon, his position will be untenable. From the trouble that Tomlinson has been to in order to pump Fred and Tom on the movements of the police in the Warham neighbourhood, from his frequent visits to the Towers, I can't help thinking that his master means the Normanhurst jewels to supply him with the capital so desperately needed. Or if I am wrong in that respect, at all events he is meditating a *coup* somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood, and if he means to keep his head above water he must bring it off soon. I feel that the crisis on which everything turns may be now daily—or rather nightly—expected. I have practically promised that dear young lady that all will be well ultimately, and it's this that is making me feel so unpleasantly nervous. I am glad that Sir William approved of my policy of allowing the scoundrel sufficient rope in the belief that he will hang himself. It is good of him to allow me a free hand."

On his arrival at Warham, he returned to Woodbine Cottage, where he locked away the shred of cloth taken from the prong of the anchor. Not long after he received a telegram. It was from Grogan, his one-time colleague at Scotland Yard, who was keeping Benny Beard under surveillance.

"That's all right!" muttered the little man.

The telegram had been dispatched from a London terminus, and stated that B. had booked for Warham.

"And now," said the little man, as he leant back in the arm-chair, and covered his face with his handkerchief, "I may as well snatch a little sleep, seeing that I shall have no opportunity during the greater portion of the night."

A few moments later he was sleeping peacefully. When he awakened, Tom Jackson was entering the room. He was in mufti.

"Well, Tom, my lad?"

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"I've just seen Railton. Faversham's come, and gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes"

"Dear me!"—Crump cogitated for a moment—"I wonder if there has been a split, or a change of plans? Tom, you will be doing me a great favour by taking a telegram for me?"

"Certainly."

"Did—Railton," said Crump, pencilling a message at the same time, "give you no particulars?"

"No. Only that Mr. Faversham had returned again to London."

"It isn't laziness, Tom, on my part, asking you to dispatch this message, but the fact the address is that of a private detective agency. You will be delighted to hear that the latest news from Gurlston Bay is that Miss Mansfield continues to progress most favourably."

The telegram was to Grogan, informing him of Benny's return to London, and asking him to get in touch with him again at once.

That evening Crump went out, taking his latch-key with him, after telling Mrs. Cobb not to sit up for him. He only returned to the cottage shortly before dawn. The night had been spent in watching The Firs; but without result.

A telegram reached him as he was sitting at breakfast.

"F. returned to his old quarters."

Had there been a quarrel? Or did it imply a change of plans?

"At all events," reflected Crump, "I can rely absolutely on Grogan. And that reminds me. I must send him a cheque on account of expenses. He's a good fellow, and wouldn't think of asking for such a thing; but business is business, and his time is money!"

And in the letter that accompanied the cheque, Crump conveyed the idea that he was acting on behalf of a third person. It was characteristic of him. Then he yawned; but he mastered his sleepiness, and proceeded to pen a long letter to Esther.

"I am so pleased to think," he said to himself, "that the misunderstanding between father and daughter no longer exists. She will not be nearly so lonely now!"

His letter to Esther finished, he penned another to her father. His correspondence posted, he paid a visit to The Woodlands, where he spent some time with Banks, the gardener, and expressed his satisfaction at the way in which the alterations were progressing.

"Another week, Mr. Penworthy, will see the job done, I'm thinking. I'm sure it's been a pleasure to work with you."

"It's very kind of you to say that, Banks."

"But since we started on it, Mr. Penworthy, a lot o' sad things have happened, haven't they? Poor Vance gone, and now all these terrible things have been taking place at Gurlston Bay. Heart-breaking for Miss Esther! I'm sure it cast a regular sadness over everybody round about here. You know, we all worship her. And it's curious, too, how opinions change. At the time of the robbery, there was scarcely a soul that had a good word for Alec Scarsdale, now there's a change in his favour. You see, he's showed himself such a plucky one."

The two men were standing with their backs to the gate.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Banks," said a voice from behind them, "busy as usual!"

And Railton, otherwise Tomlinson, Revelle's silent valet, leant over the gate.

Banks had turned round sharply. Crump—his acute faculties had served him well—had recognised the voice, though, with the exception of that one occasion outside The Firs when Tomlinson had all but collided with him in the dark, he had not heard it for years. It was a crucial moment. He had altered his appearance; but Tomlinson was remarkably cunning, and not likely to forget the man who had been the means of sending him to seven years' penal servitude. And Crump realised that recognition would spell disaster to his hopes. But the little man showed no outward symptoms of flurry. His back still turned, he scratched his head thought-

A Wise Schoolboy.

Ten-year-old George Chambers, the son of a well-known Dublin veterinary surgeon, asked at school to construct a sentence in which the word "cure" appeared, promptly wrote "Bile Beans cure Biliousness." As proof of the wide recognition of this important fact, it may be stated that the master accepted the sentence as a perfectly matter-of-fact one, just as if the boy had written, "Nature's remedies are the safest cure for Nature's ills." Bile Beans are purely vegetable, and in all cases of biliousness and liver disorder are unequalled. All chemists stock them at one and three-halfpence or two and nine per box. Mrs. E. Simmonds, of Parfett Street, Commercial Road, London, E., says: "After the birth of my first child I frequently suffered from bilious attacks, together with constipation and piles.

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fully; then walked up to the labourer who was digging some little distance away, and entered into conversation with him.

"Who's that?" questioned Railton.

"Why, Mr. Penworthy. Haven't you seen him before?"

"No."

"A rare nice sort. And how are things going at The Firs?"

Railton was staring rather fixedly at the little man's back view.

"I am sorry to say," he answered, his eyes still riveted on Crump, "I am sorry to say that Mr. Revelle is far from well this morning. He has not felt up to leaving his bed. The doctor has been in to see him, and seems to fear that he is suffering from influenza."

Crump, having finished his conversation with the labourer, tilted his soft felt hat to the back of his head and clasped his hands behind his back, then strolled away thoughtfully and disappeared into a shrubbery. Railton followed him with his eyes. His usually expressionless features wore a puzzled, rather uneasy look. Somehow the figure seemed familiar to him.

"Mr. Penworthy," he muttered half to himself, "he's the horticultural specialist that I've heard my master mention. Of course, he's lodging at Woodbine Cottage. Of course. Well, I must be getting along. I don't suppose my master will be leaving his bed for the next day or two. Good morning, Mr. Banks."

Some few moments after Railton's departure, Crump, seemingly wrapped in thought, emerged from the shrubbery.

"So you don't know Railton?" said Banks.

"Oh," said Crump, "was that Railton, Mr. Revelle's valet? And how are matters at The Firs. I had hoped that Mr. Revelle was going to intrust me with the laying out of the grounds there; but it doesn't look like it now."

"Railton tells me that Mr. Revelle's laid up in bed, supposed to be the influenza. He's not expected to be out for a day or two. Queer thing, that influenza—you never know how it's going to take a man!"

Crump's eyes were twinkling brightly.

"You are quite right, Banks. It is a curious complaint!"

Was it influenza, the little man was wondering, or a false report that Revelle, for purposes of his own, wished to be disseminated?

"My habit," he said to himself, when later he was returning to Woodbine Cottage, "of jumping at conclusions is past cure. I can't help myself. Is this report being put about, with the view of being able to establish an *alibi*, should such a thing be required?"

He gave a little laugh.

"Dear me! What a terribly suspicious person I am! At the same time, I think I shall take advantage of Sir William's kind offer. Tom and Fred would have answered admirably; but they are hampered by their duties."

Once within the cottage, he referred to a very worn pocket-book that he carried, and presently worked out a cypher message on a sheet of paper. When, later, Fred looked in, the little man requested him to dispatch a telegram for him.

Shortly after dusk, two ordinarily dressed, quiet-looking men called at Woodbine Cottage and asked for Mr. Penworthy.

"Two old friends of mine," Crump explained presently to Mrs. Cobb, whom he found alone in the kitchen, "they are homely fellows, and wouldn't mind sharing the same bed. Do you think you could put them up for to-night, Mrs. Cobb, without unduly inconveniencing yourself? I am quite sure they would be very happy and comfortable in that little room upstairs. Could you manage it? I should be exceedingly obliged to you!"

Had it been anyone else, Mrs. Cobb would have probably refused there and then; but, seeing that it was Mr. Penworthy, it was altogether another matter. Crump, like Father O'Flynn, had such a wonderful way with him.

"Seeing that it's to oblige you, Mr. Penworthy, and if you think that they'll be comfortable, why certainly!"

"That is very nice and kind of you, Mrs. Cobb!"

"It's a pleasure to do things for him," reflected the old lady, after Crump had joined his friends.

"That is settled," exclaimed Crump, as he closed the door of his room behind him, "and now, gentlemen, I will explain more fully the plan of campaign."

BENNY WRITES A NUMBER OF LETTERS AND DESTROYS THEM.

HAUNTED by his conscience, as well as feeling that, for all his seeming friendliness and unconcern, the Marquis had "got his knife into him," Benny Beard had returned to London in a restless, unenviable frame of mind.

"He'll be trying to get even with me, sooner or later," he told himself, "for having given him the chuck. I know the Marquis. I wish to Heaven now that he'd never crossed my path. I've been a weak fool. And there's that poor wretch gone back to prison, and they'll make it doubly hot for him, after this escape of his and his other goings-on. It'll break him, body and soul. Five years nearly did for me. And there's that poor girl, eating out her heart, and ill. Her face, those dark eyes of hers, are everlastingly haunting me! And when I came that cropper, she behaved to me like an angel, and yet I'm positive that she suspected me; I'm positive that she's seen through the Marquis from the first. It was always there in her eyes, that mute look of reproach. And for all his devil-may-care manner, I believe the Marquis realises now that, as far as she is concerned, the game's up. He won't give in; but he's desperate. They're howling for money. If he could have given proof that he was really engaged to her, Masters would have advanced him the money right enough. But now he refuses to let him have a penny. It is a case of the Normanhurst jewels, or smashing up. He'll pull it off right enough. He's a genius at that sort of game; and that poor wretch will continue to stick in prison, and that poor girl will go on eating out her heart, unless——"

Benny was making his way on foot to his rooms—he had recently changed his quarters. He glanced nervously at the passers-by, as though afraid that they might have read his thoughts.

"And I can't help thinking that, sooner or later, he'll be trying to get even with me, unless I—I get one in first!"

He paused to buy an evening paper. A man sauntering along, some little distance behind him, paused also, to light a cigarette. Benny shivered as he went on his way again.

"He's as much in my power as I am in his. There'd be only one way of shutting my mouth. 'The man who sells me, will be signing his death-warrant at the same time!' that's what he said."

It was only when he had reached his rooms, situated in a quiet street in the north of London, that he glanced at his paper.

He winced as if he had been suddenly pricked with a knife. A short paragraph, tucked away in a corner, told him that convict 35 had been sentenced to a long spell of solitary confinement and punishment diet, and that the remainder of his sentence would have to be served in full!

"God help him!" he whispered hoarsely.

A moment later, he was pacing the room feverishly, remorse gnawing at his heart strings. Suddenly he sharply covered his eyes with his hands.

"I can see the look that will come into her eyes when she reads this! Why, in Heaven's name, am I cursed with a conscience?"

The room that he was in was on the ground floor. The house stood a little way back from the pavement, a dingy little patch of garden in front. As he sprang to the window, and pulled down the blinds, a man sauntered past; but Benny

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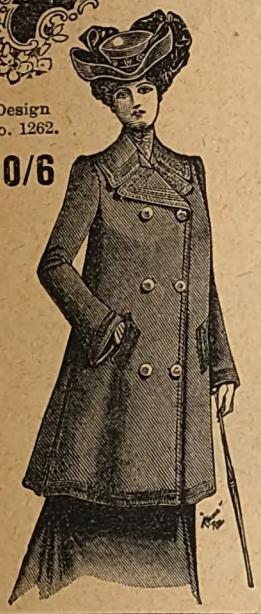

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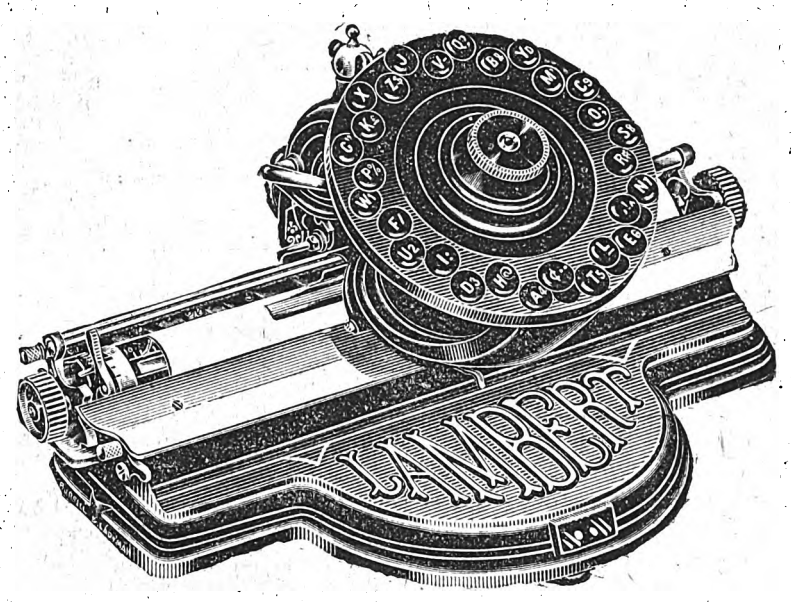

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scarcely noticed him. He lighted the lamp; then, after more feverish pacings, fetched writing materials.

For a long time he sat, biting his penholder; then he wrote a few sentences, immediately afterwards tearing the paper up into tiny fragments. Then he drew out a bank-book, and studied the state of his account.

"I should be well across the water before the letter was delivered. There's still a tidy sum to my credit at the bank, and——"

He pulled out his watch. It was not going. A glance at the blinded window, then he opened the back of the watch. The works had been removed. In the cavity, in cotton-wool, lay three stones—unset diamonds!

Had Crump but suspected the existence of these, Mr. Faversham's pocket—for all the stout strap that was attached to the watch—would have been picked, months previously! Of the loot taken from John Mansfield's safe all had been disposed of but these three stones. They represented a portion of Benny's share of the plunder, and constituted a reserve fund upon which to fall back in case of accidents. In the event of an embargo being placed upon his banking account, and himself perhaps compelled to fly the country, Benny would have still had the equivalent of three or four hundred pounds about him.

"With what's in the bank, and what these would fetch," muttered the dapper little cracksman, "I could keep things going abroad for some time comfortably. And once across the water—no, I don't think they'd be likely to find Benny, I don't really!"

He snapped to the coverings of the watch case.

"Masters would let me have three-fifty down on the nail for these!"

He was pacing the room again restlessly; then he commenced another letter, only to tear it up into tiny fragments.

"Too late to catch Masters at his office to-night; but I'll get round there some time to-morrow, and I'll also have what's left out of the bank, then——"

A third attempt to write a letter ended as the others had done—in tiny fragments.

"I'm not pleasant company for myself, somehow. I'll try a music-hall!" he whispered desperately.

The following morning, shortly after ten o'clock, saw him in a cab, bound for Chancery Lane. Some distance behind, another cab followed.

Alighting outside a big block of buildings let out in chambers, Benny passed up on to the third floor, and rang the bell outside a door on which was painted "Lewis Masters, Turf Accountant & Commission Agent."

He was still awaiting the opening of the door, when a man reached the landing, and continued on his way up the next flight of stairs. A pale-faced office-boy opened the door.

"Mr. Masters?"

"Not in, sir. Out of town, and won't be back till to-morrow."

"What time?"

"Couldn't exactly say, sir; but I don't think it will be before the afternoon or early evening."

After a visit to his bankers, Benny returned to his rooms, and spent the rest of the morning writing letters—and tearing them up.

The man's whole bearing told of mental restlessness and indecision.

"The Marquis is going to pull that job off to-night!" he muttered to himself, more than once, "I wish to Heaven he'd never crossed my path, or that poor girl's! And if I don't get the best of him, he'll be getting the best of me!"

He wrote another letter only to tear it up.

"The man who sells me will be signing his own death-warrant at the same time!"

These words, continually ringing in Benny's ears, were perhaps responsible for such waste of ink and paper.

(Next week more links are added to the chain of evidence which is to convict Revelle.)

New Methods in the Treatment of Deafness.

In a recent medical publication we find a description of a new way of treating deafness which is rapidly taking the place of the old methods. In fact, the records of the Institute where this new treatment is used, show many remarkable instances in which the hearing has been restored after the patient has been pronounced incurably deaf. Those who are interested in this subject are referred to "The Journal for the Deaf" for July, in which there is a full description of the new treatment. A free copy of the Journal, containing a description of this method, can be obtained by addressing the Editor, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. With the "Journal" is enclosed a "Supplement," containing details of upwards of forty cases cured during the past month, and also a Patient's Report Form, which enables anyone to receive free advice as to the application of the treatment at home.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

An Out-of-Date Fad.

"ELSIE H." hates smoking, and before her marriage her husband made a point of not indulging himself in a weed while with her. Now they have been married some time, he invariably lights his pipe in the evening, much to his wife's annoyance. She thinks the way men smoke in the house is very ill-mannered, and adds: "How would they like it if women were to spend their whole evenings eating chocolate, which is supposed to fill the same function as does smoking to men."

* * * * *

I think "ELSIE" is a little hard on her husband. Very few women nowadays have this objection to tobacco, under proper circumstances. So far from its being selfish on their parts, men usually get far more amiable and talkative when smoking than when not doing so. "ELSIE" should be rather glad to think that her husband is content to sit at home and smoke than to wish to go out to a club or elsewhere and indulge his fancy. Rest assured that if tobacco were prohibited at home, her husband would before long develop a distinct desire to go out, which would be far less pleasant for "ELSIE" than those few fumes at home. She should learn to get accustomed to smoke, which has become more and more a necessity of man's strange organisation than it used to be.

❦❦❦

Looking After the Pence.

"S. D." has my deep sympathy. He is a sensible young man who does not let the imaginary duties of love blind him to the need for increasing his income. The circumstances are these: He has the opportunity of taking up evening employment which will considerably add to his income. But this means that he will only be able to see his sweetheart on Sundays. This causes her no little regret, but "S. D." by taking on this employment will be able to make enough money to start a home, which will make the future look brighter for both of them.

* * * *

Yes, "S. D.," you should talk very seriously to her about the matter. The secret of your happiness in married life must so greatly depend on your position that she should certainly see that it is her duty to sacrifice those week-day evening meetings, however sweet they may be.

❦❦❦

Friendship or Worse?

"PERPLEXED" is engaged to a girl, but is only able to see her once a fortnight. The engagement is as yet a secret. During the intervals between their meetings, the girl has been seeing a good deal of a man very much her senior. She asked "PERPLEXED'S" permission to see this man, which the latter generously gave. Since this, however, they have begun to see each other every day and go for walks together. Should "PERPLEXED" ask her to discontinue this, or do I think he might allow it to go on, trusting in his sweetheart's fidelity? The man is forty-one, the girl twenty-one, and the feeling between them may be merely friendship.

* * * * * *

I am a great believer in friendship, but quite realise that in some cases it is a dangerous toy. Whether "PERPLEXED" allows this intimacy to proceed between his sweetheart and this man must depend on, firstly, her own character, and secondly on his. If the girl is, let us say, thoughtful and cultivated, and enjoys friendship for its own sake, and the man is a gentleman, and not likely to act dishonourably, I think "PERPLEXED" need have no fears. But he should most certainly make his engagement known as soon as possible, as unless he does so, complications may arise which will be very difficult to get out of.

❦❦❦

Unacquainted and in Love.

"A. W." goes by the same road to business as a young lady. When they pass they have been in the habit of exchanging familiar, and even wistful glances. Would it be conformable with propriety for him to openly acknowledge her? "A. W." is attracted towards her.

* * * *

Those "wistful" (expressive word) glances suggest that she would not dislike to know "A. W." I should not advise him to be too sudden in making her acquaintance. Supposing his glances grow less wistful as time goes on, and that something like a smile begins to discreetly dawn on his countenance? The smile might be gracefully modulated into an acknowledgment, and when that stage is reached, "A. W." should simply talk to the girl without further ado. But it is always well to know definitely that one is not looked upon unfavourably before acting in this forward manner.

❦❦❦

A Very Silly Quarrel.

"FRED" was rather late in meeting his sweetheart "GERTRUDE" the other day. She appeared to be annoyed at his delay, and "FRED" resented this, saying that it was time to "look out for a fresh girl." "GERTRUDE" at once gave up going with him, and started acquaintance with a friend of his. Now "FRED" wants to get back into her good graces without upsetting his friend. How should he proceed?

* * * *

"FRED" showed that he looked upon the girl as a mere convenience when he said he would have to look out for someone else. It was a clear suggestion that he had no real affection for her. It is not surprising that she sought the friendship of another. I do not know how "FRED" can win her away from his friend without a quarrel. He was foolish to be so careless of retaining her affection in the first instance. All he can do is to see how the affair with the friend progresses, and await his chance to reinstate himself in her good books.

❦❦❦

An Engagement to be Broken.

"CHARLOTTE" has been meeting "WALTER" for six months. At first she thought she was fond of him, but now she sees that there are points in his character which would mean an unhappy marriage. At the same time he is very fond indeed of her, and she fears it would break his heart to tell him that she no longer thinks of him as a future husband. Is a girl justified in giving so much pain to a man?

* * * *

Certainly, "CHARLOTTE," if you really feel that a life with him would be an unhappy one. You are compelled by duty to break off the engagement if you no longer love him. Your duty, however, is to lighten the load of parting so far as you possibly can. It would be better if you were to take a holiday for a time, and, if possible, spend a month away from home. Your letters should be less frequent than is usual, and perhaps couched in a cooler strain. Then you might break the news to him of the cessation of the engagement. In this way the shock would not be so sudden, and, having anticipated its approach, the man would be more likely to take it coolly than if it were broken to him without notice.

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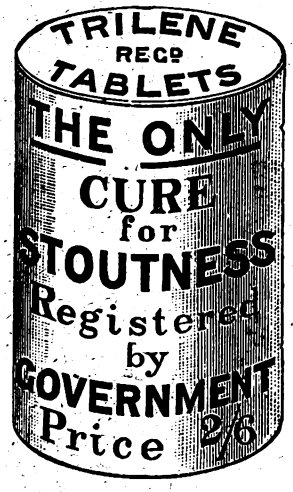

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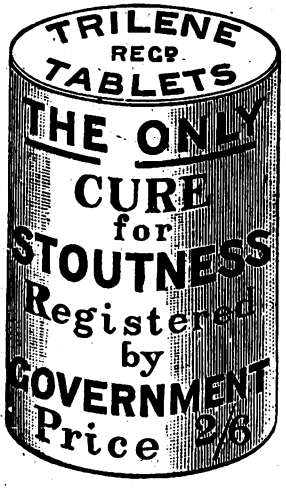

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. E. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

MRS. D. BURTON, of Silvercleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 6lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

MRS. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

MRS. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes, Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MRS. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

MRS. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

MRS. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

MRS. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER, of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

MR. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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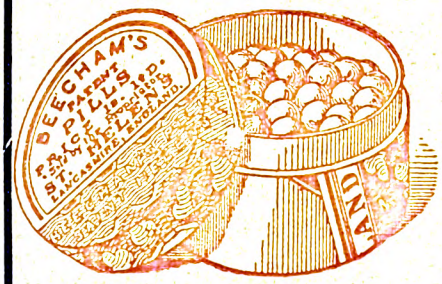

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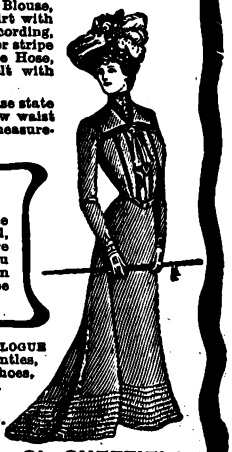

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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I.—The Temptation of Stephen Crawford.

Sir James Crawford was dead—people whispered that it was almost by his own hand, for if he had not driven so madly, the accident would not have occurred which killed him on the spot, and which so severely injured his wife that if she did not die, she would be a cripple for life.

Still the verdict had been accidental death, even though there were a lot of strange rumours about, and now Lady Crawford lay looking up wearily at her stepson who stood at her bedside. He was not a pleasant-looking man. His skin was thickened and roughened, and his eyes, which shifted restlessly whenever one looked straight into them, were blood-shot with dissipation.

"I know what it means, Stephen," she said slowly. "But I do not fear death. It is not that that worries me, it is something else, Stephen."

Stephen stirred impatiently and swore under his breath. He had a hatred of worry of any kind, and he had surely had enough lately to send him into his grave.

He looked round the great, luxurious room at the thick carpets and heavy hangings and signs of wealth that were everywhere about, and remembered what they were already saying of his father, that his death had been well-timed, that another week or two would have seen him in the dock, a branded criminal and a bankrupt.

Stephen shivered a little and looked round desperately. He was in no mood to be lectured, and he supposed it *was* a lecture he was going to have—something about his drinking and card-playing of course.

Lady Crawford was looking at him with wide, pathetic eyes.

"You'll listen to me, Stephen? It is hard for me to have to tell it—oh, have a little pity on me, Stephen, and help me now that I am dying."

Help her? Stephen looked down with sudden interest. Then it was not a lecture after all.

"Well?" he said.

Lady Crawford sighed. Stephen was his father's son—hard, cold, and cruel, and she set her teeth as if the courage which she had tried to summon before when Sir James was alive might fail her even now. She looked up uneasily.

"Stephen, I must tell you," she cried, "I've tried often and often to tell your father, but I could not. He frightened me. But he is dead now and I am dying. I must unbosom myself to someone. I must speak before I die."

She tried to draw herself closer to the edge of the bed—closer to Stephen, and failed, and lay back helplessly. Stephen looked at her without any pity or tenderness in his face. He was hard, as his father had been before him, and it was only desperation, now that she was so close to death, that made her go on.

"I've tried to love you as though you were my own son," she gasped breathlessly, "and because of that I ask you to help me now. You promise, Stephen?"

He bit his lips impatiently.

"Well?" he said. "Go on."

It was hard to go on. Lady Crawford's lips quivered and set, and she made another effort.

"I could only come to you," she said. "You are almost my son. I married Sir James when you were six years old, and you scarcely knew another mother, and I—I was going to say I have known no other child, but it is that that I have to tell you, Stephen."

Her voice sank and Stephen looked up with almost a start.

"Go on," he cried roughly.

"It is a confession," she gasped, "that I could never make to your father. Stephen, I've got a child—a little girl—at Worlden Hill."

Stephen started in earnest.

"A child," he cried, "at Worlden? What on earth do you mean?"

Lady Crawford's fingers clutched desperately at the counterpane.

"My little child," she whispered. "I was married before I met Sir James. He was a good man—a good man, Stephen, but poor, and when he died—we had so little to eat—Lucy and I—that we nearly died too."

She closed her eyes to shut out Stephen's hard face. Her face seemed white as the sheet itself, and it required all her courage to speak even now.

"It was terrible," she went on, breathing heavily. "I

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tried to get a living by singing, and that is how I met your father—at an 'At Home' we met often—he didn't know that I had a child—I never told him—he would not have married me if he had known, and Lucy was a delicate girl and almost starving, and I married Sir James for her sake.

"I found a nurse and put her in her hands—I always paid her well. Her name is Martha Steadwell, and she lives at Worlden."

Stephen looked aghast. Worlden was the place where his father's ironworks were.

"How on earth did you prevent anyone knowing it?" he asked.

"It was not difficult," Lady Crawford answered. "When I handed over the child it was dark and I wore a veil and Martha did not know me. I have seen her many times since, and she has not recognised me. I have seen Lucy too—my poor little Lucy! Stephen, what I want you to do is this—to go to Worlden and fetch her to me before I die? You'll do it, Stephen? Oh, you will, you will; you need not be ashamed of her. She has been well educated, and she is a good, dear little soul, and she will be rich. She will not be dependent on you, I have seen to that. When we married, your father settled twenty thousand pounds on me. I have never touched it, and the interest has been accumulating all these years—twenty years—Stephen, and I have left it all to Lucy. You will not want it. The solicitor who pays Martha has my will, and he will see to everything—you will have no trouble only—I want you to fetch her to me before I die."

A change had come over Stephen's face. There was a sullen light in his eyes and his lips looked thin and cruel.

Twenty thousand pounds! And in a week or two when his father's affairs were wound up he would be almost penniless! He ground his teeth. The money that Lady Crawford was leaving to this girl ought to belong to him—it *would* belong to him if she died—it *should* belong to him. Twenty thousand pounds all going to a chit of a black-country girl—an ignorant girl, of course—a little fool who had never dreamt of such a sum in her life, perhaps, and if she were dead the money would be his! Bah! It was maddening.

He bent over Lady Crawford, and, with a strange glimmer in his eyes, promised he would go to Worlden and bring back her daughter.

Lady Crawford put her hand under her pillow and drew out a letter.

"I have written to her," she said faintly. "This will tell her everything. And oh, thank you, Stephen—thank you, and bless you."

Stephen turned away with his face set and his eyes dark. He was wondering how he could get hold of Lucy's money.

II.—A Miracle in the Darkness.

"Lucy, Lucy, don't tell me that—don't say no again. Darling, you can't mean it?"

Lucy lifted her face—such a girlish, pretty face, to the man who stood holding her hands in his. He was young, with a fresh, open face, and the handsomest pair of eyes in the county.

"Oh, don't, Harry," she cried. "Don't tempt me. I couldn't. I'd rather be dead."

His face whitened.

"Rather be dead than marry me?" he cried.

"Oh, you know what I mean," Lucy said hastily. "You know I couldn't marry you. You're the son of a gentleman—you live in a Hall that has been owned by your family for hundreds of years, and I'm only a poor girl—a—a—shameful girl perhaps," her voice broke, "for I don't know, and Martha doesn't know, who my mother and father were."

Harry Linton went very close to her.

"My darling, I don't care for that," he cried. "I've not got much to boast of. We're as poor as rooks, and I don't care what you are, and if you'll only marry me——"

She stepped back from him.

"Don't—don't say it again," she cried. "I can't. No no, Harry, I never could."

He caught her hand in his, and drew her to him again.

"But if I were nobody you would?" he asked. "If I were not Harry Linton of the Hall, but a clerk or a nail-maker in the Crawford Iron Works you would, eh?"

A sob choked in her throat.

"Oh, if you were!" she cried.

He looked at her long and steadily.

"Lucy, I can't give you up," he cried. "I won't!"

She wrenched her hand free.

"Don't speak of it again!" she said; "and now I must go. Martha's got a new lodger—a man from London—and I must go and help her."

"A man? What's he like? Not young, or nice looking?"

"I—I don't know. I think he's young. But he's not nice-looking. Oh, no, he's horrid looking, and he drinks!"

She shivered a little; she did not know why, except that the stranger had had a strange effect upon her. His eyes had frightened her. She looked down the miserable black-country street, with its dirty little houses huddled close together, and then back at Harry.

"Somehow, I'm frightened of him!" she cried suddenly. "I don't know why—it's stupid, of course, but I—I don't like him."

She drew a deep breath.

"Oh, it seems almost as if he hated me and wished me ill!" she cried.

Harry looked at her thoughtfully. An idea had occurred to him, and he was wondering how it would work.

"He shan't hurt you, Lou," he said. "I—I'll take care of you, and, darling, you'll trust me always, won't you, whatever happens?"

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Of course," she said. "You know I will."

Harry said nothing more, but his handsome face had a smile upon it as they walked up the narrow entry to the back of the house in which Lucy and Martha lived.

It was only a small house like the others in the straggling, dirty street, but it did not look like the others. It looked cleaner, sprucer, and the coal dust which seemed to linger on the steps and sills of the rest seemed to have escaped this.

It was getting dusk, and heavy shadows hung about the narrow yard as they passed into it. Harry caught Lucy's arm, and then started, for as he did so, something shot from the roof and clattered at their feet.

Lucy gave a little cry, and Harry looked down with his face grown white. A slate from the roof! An inch nearer and it would have killed her.

She shuddered and stood quite still, looking into Harry's face. A sudden cold terror crept into her heart, and a vision of the lodger's face flashed for a moment between her and Harry.

Harry caught her to him.

"Lou! Lou!" he cried.

She looked up.

"It—it wasn't an accident!" she breathed. "It was done on purpose. Oh, Harry, I'm afraid—I'm afraid!"

Harry bent his head in reply, but before he could speak the door behind them had opened and a face peered out.

It was an ugly, menacing face that fell back startled at the sight of Harry. The next instant, however, he had recovered himself and come forward.

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"The new lodger," Lucy whispered nervously, and as he passed out she saw his eyes on Harry's face, and she saw something ugly and desperate and savage flash into them, and her heart stood still.

She held her breath for a moment, until the sound of his footsteps had died away, and then turned to Harry.

"Oh, he means ill to us," she cried. "He looked at you as if—as if he would have liked to murder you!"

Harry laughed.

"You foolish baby!" he cried. "Why on earth should he mean ill to me? I never saw him before in my life."

Lucy shook her head.

"I don't know—I don't know!" she cried, "but he means ill to me—to you and me! He means ill to us both!"

Harry laughed again, and tried to drive the foolish idea from her head, but it was no use—it stuck there, and during the next two days it seemed almost as if she were right, that the man did mean some evil after all, for she began to meet with curious accidents, and always the new lodger was somewhere in the neighbourhood. Twice she fell downstairs, twice she met with an accident in the street, and at last Harry began to be thoroughly alarmed. He determined to watch this stranger and find out something about him, and the thought that had been vaguely in his mind a day or two before took shape.

"I'm going away, Lou," he said abruptly. "I don't know how long for, but it may be some time. So it will be good-bye to-night."

She looked up at him with her heart sinking, but with a sudden sense of relief too.

"I—I'm almost glad," she said, "for that man would murder you if he could. I'm sure of it. I saw him look at you again just now, and he means ill—I know he means ill—and—and perhaps it will be good for you to go away for a bit."

Harry laughed, as he had laughed before, and bid her good-bye. He said nothing more about coming back, he said nothing more about making her his wife, and though she felt that she could never be that, yet her heart was heavy as she turned back into the house. If only she could have told him how she loved him! If only there had not been that uncertainty about her birth! If only she had been his equal how different things might have been!

How different! She never dreamt what a difference his going away would make to her! She never dreamt that she would miss him so!

She missed him every hour of the day, and when the post brought her no news of him her heart grew sick with disappointment. Yet, after all, what had she expected? She had refused him. She knew she could never be his wife, and surely it was better that she should not see him again?

All the same her face grew very white, and Martha looked at her in alarm.

"It's that man upstairs as has brought us bad luck!" she said; "and his drinking and mad ways is frightening you, I can see. I wish I'd let the rooms to that nice young man as called two days ago. He'd got a wig on, I'm certain, but he was respectable, and it was a great pity I had to send him to Mrs. Neal opposite. I shall turn this drunken wretch out. He gets worse. That's my firm belief."

He did; and the ugly fear settled at Lucy's heart, and no news, no message came from Harry. He had gone, and though she did not know why, she felt, that somehow, she was at the mercy of the man upstairs.

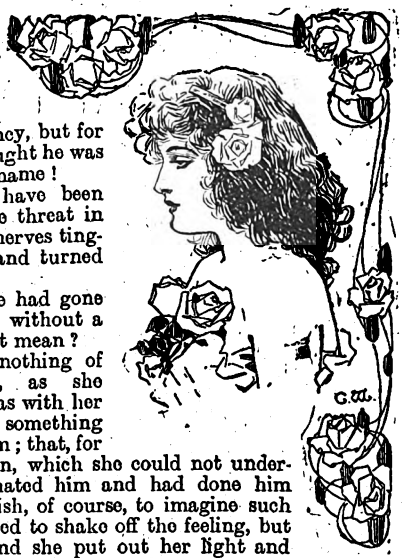
"I'd give my 'ead if we could change him for a lodger like Mrs. Neal's!" Martha cried. "He just sits quiet all day—writing or summat, and isn't a bit o' trouble."

"He's only been there two days," said Lucy, "and he may—Oh, hark, Martha! he frightens me!"

The man upstairs were tramping up and down muttering to himself. His heavy feet treading the floor sounded terrible in the little sitting-room. Lucy got up with a shiver.

"Oh, Martha, he frightens me!" she said. "Let's go to bed."

Martha dragged herself up from her chair, and Lucy crept upstairs silently on tip-toe, and ran quickly past the lodger's room.



As she went, his voice, hoarse and unsteady, came out to her, and for a moment she stood still. It could have been only fancy, but for a moment she thought he was repeating Harry's name!

It surely could have been only fancy, but the threat in his voice sent her nerves tingling with horror and turned her blood cold.

Harry! And he had gone away abruptly and without a word! What did it mean?

It could mean nothing of course, and yet, as she undressed, there was with her the ugly fear that something would happen to him; that, for some strange reason, which she could not understand, the lodger hated him and had done him harm. It was foolish, of course, to imagine such things, and she tried to shake off the feeling, but it would not go, and she put out her light and drew up the blind with it still upon her.

She looked across the street, at the silent houses, at the blank, dark windows, and as she looked she gave a start, for she almost fancied for a moment that she saw Harry's face looking back at her from Mrs. Neal's house!

It was only a trick of the nerves, of course, and she drew back shivering and crept into bed. She lay trembling under the clothes, her heart beating heavily, the terror strong upon her.

When she fell asleep at last it was to dream wildly and horribly, and always of some danger that threatened Harry.

She sat up hurriedly at last. Surely she had heard him call her? Surely she had heard his voice? She could not be mistaken!

She slipped out of bed—still asleep—and stood for a moment in the centre of the room. She stretched out her hands and turned slowly towards the door. Her eyes, wide open, saw nothing, but she went steadily across and turned the handle.

Outside the landing lay in pitch darkness, but she did not hesitate. She was fast asleep; but in her sleep she could hear Harry calling her, and she went steadily towards him.

But she went a strange way. The voice she heard in her sleep seemed to lead her to a perilous path, for she turned away from the stairs, the head of which lay close to the lodger's door, towards a ladder that led to the roof.

She mounted it steadily—her bare feet did not falter—and pushed open the trap door.

The cold night air blew through on to her face and drifted through her long, dark hair that curled about her shoulders, but it did not wake her, and she went on.

It was a strange path to choose, but perhaps her brain acted unconsciously, for she disappeared through the trap door. A door below opened, and the lodger crept out.

He stole on tip-toe towards her room. He swayed drunkenly as he went, and his eyes, glazed and bright, saw nothing, although he was wide awake.

He drew a sharp breath as he pushed open the door, and brought the knife he carried a little closer to his side.

A moment later he came out again, leaving the knife stuck fiercely through the bedclothes on the spot where Lucy had been lying a short time before.

* * * * *

Meanwhile Mrs. Neal's lodger sat at the window opposite as he had sat for the past hour.

He was staring across the street at Lucy's room—staring as

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though the white figure he had seen draw up the blind an hour ago might reappear.

He was getting stiff when something—a sudden flutter of white on the flat roof startled him. He peered forward sharply. Something was moving along the leads—he could not see clearly what it was, and he rose to his feet and pushed open the window.

It was something white. That much he could see, And then suddenly he gave a startled exclamation. It was a woman!

He leant forward breathlessly. She was standing upright now—a slight figure in a soft, white gown, standing upright and still on the treacherous tiles—standing as unconsciously as if she had been on the flat pavement.

His heart stood still and stopped beating for a moment, and he leant on the window sill, motionless with horror, waiting for what would happen.

That she would fall headlong in a moment seemed a certainty, and a strange sickness overcame him. A girl—a young girl, too, she looked, but he could not see clearly for a moment. Then slowly she turned until she stood with her face towards him, and then suddenly the red flare of one of the black-country furnaces flashed up and threw the light on her face, and he gave a hoarse cry.

Lucy!

For a moment everything went black before him. For a moment the dark sky studded with stars, the thick smoke and the red fires that leapt day and night from the furnace chimneys swam hideous and confused before him. Then he realised that she was walking in her sleep, and he gripped the window sill with both his hands and set his teeth with all his will bent to hers—to send her to safety by the force of it if such a thing were possible.

It was the only thing to do—to stand there and watch and wait. He dared not lose sight of her. He dared not move. And yet—to see her there, in peril of her life, seemed to send him near to madness.

He ground his teeth and held his breath when she moved at last, and his heart leapt into his mouth when he saw her move slowly towards the edge of the roof and balance herself upon the narrow coping.

Was his will no good? Could he not drive her below?

He waited, and then a hoarse sob broke from his throat; for instead of going below she was making her way back along the roof towards a telegraph post which stood upright against it. In another moment she would be out of his sight—in another moment she would be where his eyes could not follow her, and the sickness and giddiness swept over him again.

Then suddenly he started. Did he see aright? She was mounting the pole—creeping up to the wires that stretched away from it across the dark roofs. God help them both, what did she mean to do?

He watched her breathlessly. She had reached the top, her small fingers had gripped the outstretching bars, and Good Heavens! she had mounted the wires—had balanced herself, and was swinging to and fro upon them—was starting to walk across them.

God help her! His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

For a moment it seemed to him that it was a horrible, hideous nightmare, and he stared up with his face growing white and strained as she came steadily on.

She did not falter. It was wonderful how calmly she came. In her sleep she glided silently over the housetops—over the smutty roofs, over the street towards the next post that stood at the corner of Mrs. Neal's house. The wires swayed wildly backwards and forwards, in and out, but a strange power guided her that night, for she did not slip and the wires held her safely.

As she came nearer the man watching her drew a heavy, hoarse breath, and rousing himself sharply, turned and ran from the room, making for the trap-door in the roof, intent only on one thing—on reaching her when she got to the post on Mrs. Neal's roof.

He rushed out and leapt up the ladder. His breath seemed to fail him, and an odd feeling of faintness came over him as he reached the leads and crept along them, and then once more the sob broke from his throat.

He was just in time! She came on, swaying and swinging on the wires, her face white, her eyes now half closed, and her thick, dark hair curling gloriously about her shoulders.

She came on by a miracle, and the man leant forward.

His shaking fingers touched the hem of her nightdress.

He looked up breathlessly, and then—he was just in time. She swayed suddenly—a word fell from her lips, and the next instant she was in his arms, and he was sobbing over her and dragging her slowly down the ladder to the landing below.

She opened her eyes with a start and a cry of dismay, and for a moment the old fear seized her. Then she saw that the man was a stranger, and she looked round, bewildered, at the unfamiliar room.

"I—I—oh, where am I?" she began, and then she started again, for the stranger had wrapped something round her, was holding her in his arms with his face close to hers, was pulling off his wig and his beard.

She started up, and her heart gave a leap.

"*Harry!*" she cried.

* * * * * * *

A little later they found the man they had known as Martha's lodger huddled in his room, staring wildly at something unseen that threatened him, and when Lucy confronted him he fell back from her, shouting that he had killed her! He was removed to an asylum, declaring that the dead had come to life, and a few weeks later he died, a raving lunatic.

But before that they had found in his pocket a letter addressed to Lucy, and when she read it her last scruple about marrying Harry vanished. She had found her mother!

It was Harry who took her to London, and put her in the dying woman's arms, and it was Harry who, later on, promised solemnly to love, cherish, and honour her, and who has since faithfully done so.

As for Lucy, she has amongst her treasures a wig and a beard. They remind her of a time when her husband was "Mrs. Neal's lodger," and when he saw her pass through a strange and terrible peril of the night. That he saved her from death twice that night she always declares, for she had heard him calling her in her sleep, and if it had not been for that she would never have got up as she did, and Stephen would have killed her as he had intended to as she lay in bed.

That was so; and Harry has never ceased to be thankful that he disguised himself in order to watch over the girl he loved.

But that night left a grey hair or two amongst his black ones.

Annie O. Tibbits

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A Frustrated Plot.

A Pretty Little Narrative of a Girl's Love.

A SUNBEAM that had lost its way in the golden tangle of the laburnum suddenly shone upon a girl's fair head. There was a smell of fresh-turned earth, mingled with the delicate scent of Spring; and the swaying figure in the blue print gown, tip-toeing for a branch of pale pink apple-blossom, made one think of wild hyacinth under a rose-flushed sky.

The gate clicked and the colour deepened in her cheeks. The apple blossom seemed more difficult than ever to obtain. Perhaps she knew that the sunshine was turning her hair to gold and that the breeze, scattering the petals upon her upturned face, was playing such lover-like tricks as would drive a man wild with envy. But she was innocence itself with her little start of surprise when Ted Gardiner spoke.

"It was," he suggested, "an evening made for a ramble in the fields."

"Well, if Ted would wait until she changed her gown?" with a glance at her skirts and another at his admiring eyes.

But he shook his head. "It's the one I like to see you wear better than any," he told her.

"Bad taste," she answered, wrinkling her forehead.

"Maybe, but it's the gown you wore the day——"

"The day you met me at the picnic and behaved so badly," she returned. "Never took notice of the vicar, his wife, or anyone else for that matter."

"Well, you were there—that was enough for me."

Elsie Dent lowered her eyes reprovingly.

"You know you promised not to talk in that way, Ted; at any rate, until father is willing."

"Leave your father out of the question for to-night, Elsie. I have much to say."

By this time they had left the garden, and, skirting the meadow where the farmer and his men were still at work, walked towards Norton Woods, a mile or so from the old homestead, where for generations past a Dent had lived.

"Your father won't have anything to say to me, Elsie, until I can show him a nest-egg, a hundred or two in the bank or some adequate provision for the future. I don't say but what he's right; a man should not marry until he can keep his wife in comfort. But he won't even hear of our being engaged."

"I told you so, Ted. I warned you that it was no good to speak."

"All the same, Elsie, I mean to make him take me for a son-in-law. But to do that I must have money, and to get that I must go to London. To tell the truth, Miles Foster offered to get me a berth at Sheldon's, the big horse dealers, the last time he was down here. I should have to 'try' the nags, show 'em off, you know, and put 'em through their paces. It would suit me down to the ground, and Miles says I should get well paid."

London might have been as far away as Texas by the distress displayed by Elsie at the notion of Ted's going there. It would be impossible for her to endure life with any degree of comfort, let alone happiness, with Ted in London. Besides, people said queer things about Miles Foster, no good would come of anything *he* recommended, she was sure.

The young fellow listened to all her objections, and soothed, or tried to soothe, her grief. But his determination remained unshaken. He wanted Elsie, but without money he could not have her. Therefore it was only common sense to seize the opportunity Foster had put in his way. He would go to London and take Sheldon's berth, and come back prosperous and triumphant like the good youth in the fairy tales.

"Cheer up, Elsie. I'll soon be back. Come, dry your eyes and let me see the bright face that I love so well."

"You'll often write, Ted?"

"Of course I shall. Give me a kiss and say 'Good-bye.' You'll be faithful to me, Elsie?"

"You know *that*, Ted."

He nodded, and caught her in his arms.

The next minute he strode off quickly—almost cheerfully, the girl thought. Well, perhaps she could understand it. The village was small, the interests petty, the life dull. In London there would be things to see; fresh people to talk to. She sighed regretfully at the fate that sends men out into the world to work, and keeps women in the home to make beds, darn socks, and weep when there's a spare five minutes.

It was quite as well for Elsie that those five minutes were few and far between. At Dent Farm there was much to do, both in the house and diary, and few hands to do it. Farmer Dent was a warm man, so far as money went, but an uncommon close one. To save a penny he would expend a vast amount of energy, and he expected others to do likewise. Elsie was hard at it all day long. An hour or two in the evening was all the time she had to herself.

Some month or two after Ted's departure she found even this little leisure threatened. Of all things in the world, her father announced his intention of taking a farm pupil!

He advertised to that effect in the local paper, and had received a favourable reply. In less than a week the thing was settled, and the beginning of October Ralph Houghton was an inmate of Dent Farm.

All the day he studied agriculture, gazing at crops with great determination if little energy. And in the evening he expected Elsie to amuse him.

At first she resented his intrusion, but after a time she grew to like the quiet, self-contained young fellow. He lent her books, taught her games, and was so unfailingly cheerful and attentive that Elsie had but little time in which to grieve for Ted.

That young man was doing very well. He had proved invaluable to Sheldon's, and had had more than one offer from

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a rival firm. He hoped to run down and see Elsie at Christmas. Ralph Houghton had heard of Ted through village gossip, and professed great interest in his prospects. Elsie was drawn to make a confidant of him, and discussed her plans and hopes for the future very fully.

Just about this time Miles Foster reappeared in the village. The redoubtable Miles was a sharp, wizened little man, with a tongue like vinegar and a temper hot as pepper. He had been a jockey in the days of his youth, but various malpractices had resulted in his being warned off the turf. Since then his mode of life had been a mystery. He came back to the village occasionally, and put up at the Crown Inn, where he was both liked and feared.

The more respectable part of the community fought shy of the ex-jockey, and it was a vexation to Elsie that Ted should have obtained his situation through such a channel.

Ralph Houghton, however, professed himself much amused at Miles; the man was an oddity, he declared, and worth studying. Elsie marvelled at his taste, but discreetly held her tongue.

One evening she came across the two, Houghton and Miles, in close conversation. She passed them in the woods, bare and leafless now, and giving little cover. The strangely-assorted pair to all appearances were not on the best of terms.

Houghton, his face set in an ugly and determined fashion, leant against a tree. Foster, giving full play to his peppery temper, was snarling out sharp sayings at a little distance.

"A hundred pounds I'll pay you if the job comes off, and not a penny more," said Houghton.

"What, me take a sum like that?" replied the other. "You're too big for your boots, mister, and that's a fact. I won't lend a finger under two hundred and fifty pounds, and you can't play the game without me. At a word from me the young man would take fright and warn the boss."

Houghton tightened his lips.

"A hundred is my price; take it or leave it."

"Think what it will mean to you if the job comes off. You'll be a millionaire. I tell you the nag is the fastest thing I've ever seen. He's bound to win, unless——"

He stopped and grinned significantly. "If the horse doesn't start you'll rake in thousands. If we nobble the man and doctor the nag you'll be on velvet."

"And if it *doesn't* I shall be—somewhere else," said Houghton grimly.

The ex-jockey laughed. "Stone Jug's not a nice place, I grant you, mister, but there's no fear of your being put away if you'll act straight with your pals. Come, I'll meet you half way. Give me fifty quid on the nail and the other fifty shall stand over."

"Very well, you shall have the money to-night. When do you say the young man goes to the stables?"

"Next week."

"And the nag?"

"Arrives soon after him. We've six months to work the job in, mister, and I bet my life we shall succeed. A man'll do a lot for money when he has a pretty sweetheart whom he wants to make his wife."

Houghton nodded.

"I'll see you this evening at the Crown, Foster," he said, and the two men separated.

Elsie felt considerably puzzled at this conversation. That some evil was afoot she felt sure, though it was difficult to suspect Houghton of underhand dealings.

On arriving home a more pleasurable matter took her attention. She found a letter from Ted, announcing his return to the neighbourhood. A gentleman had engaged him to act as trainer at some small stables close to Norton. The salary was fair, the work congenial, above all he would be near his darling Elsie.

The girl was too delighted with the news to immediately connect it with the conversation she had overheard. Later, however, she wondered if Ted would by any chance be the young man referred to.

When she learnt that her lover had been specially engaged to look after a two-year-old, of whom great things were expected, and who was entered for the next year's Derby, she felt persuaded that that was the case.

There was, she feared, a plot on foot to injure both Ted and his charge. But of the nature of the plot she could not form a notion.

* * * * *

For the next three months things went smoothly both with Ted and Elsie. Since the former had been engaged by Sir Charles Denvers, Farmer Dent had modified his views concerning him, and the young people met with his consent.

Elsie had not told her lover of the conversation she had overheard between Miles and Houghton. The former had disappeared from the neighbourhood, and Houghton was apparently engrossed in agriculture. It seemed best to let things be; Ted had a fiery temper, the chances were that if she told him her suspicions he would have taxed Houghton then and there. This would have brought about a scene and made everyone uncomfortable. She wanted nothing to disturb her father's friendly attitude to Ted.

Christmas came and went, bringing good cheer to Norton generally, and an extra share of happiness to Elsie. Sir Charles had expressed his satisfaction with Ted and raised his salary. The young man was saving and steady. It seemed as if his marriage with Elsie was not so far off after all.

And then in the midst of their planning fell a bolt from the blue; Ralph Houghton asked Farmer Dent for his daughter Elsie! The farmer, as might have been expected, listened to his suit. Houghton, to all appearance, was a wealthy man, and Dent loved and reverenced wealth.

To make a long story short, Ted was told to go, and forbidden to show his face again as Elsie's suitor unless he brought two hundred pounds—that being the sum Houghton had promised to give the astute Dent should he win Elsie for his wife.

It was just about this time that Miles Foster reappeared, and that Sir Charles charged Ted to look after Gladiator, the two-year-old referred to, even more carefully than before.

"It's a great responsibility," the young trainer confided to his sweetheart at one of their stolen interviews. "I don't mean the care of the horse exactly, but the fear that some harm may come to him while under my charge. You see Gladiator is entered for the Derby. He's a flyer and will carry all before him. Sir Charles stands to make a pot of money over him. If he wins, the bookies will be hard hit indeed!

"Now, there's a combine against Gladiator," he went on; "that is to say, a lot of money's being laid against him. What I fear is that somehow or other the horse will be got at—doctored, you know, and injured so that he can't start for the race. It will be ruin for me if anything happens to Gladiator. Sir Charles would never forgive me."

"Keep watch and ward over him, Ted," said Elsie excitedly, her mind recalling Houghton's conversation. "We've got enemies, you and I. There are those who would like to harm us. For Heaven's sake, don't lose sight of Gladiator for a moment!"

So impressed was Elsie with the sense of threatened danger that she begged her lover not to leave the stables unless actually compelled. She would contrive to slip over to see him there, he must not risk anything by meeting her elsewhere.

Still, however, she did not tell him of her suspicions in regard to Houghton. The time for that, she thought, had passed. There was enough ill-feeling as it was between the two young men.

Houghton was an attentive but by no means an annoying suitor. He had taken Elsie's somewhat furious rejection

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of his proposal in good part, merely observing that she might possibly alter her determination.

"Never!" she said defiantly, "so far as *he* was concerned."

The weeks slipped quickly by, Elsie still worried and anxious about Gladiator; Ted tired by his constant watching and somewhat gloomy in consequence.

One Thursday afternoon Elsie received a pencilled scrawl urging her to come at once to the stables. Full of foreboding she obeyed the summons.

She found Ted in a terrible condition of excitement. He spoke thickly, and was not at all like himself—almost as if he had been drinking. He poured out an incoherent statement as to Sir Charles' ingratitude, and the world's injustice.

"I took no more than a glass of ale, Elsie, at the Crown—uncommon bitter it was too. It made me feel a bit queer, somehow, and I got back here as soon as possible. The master had just arrived, and he stormed at me like a pickpocket; vowed I was a drunken vagabond, and that he'd a good mind to dismiss me then and there. You know whether or not I've done my duty to Sir Charles and the horse? Hardly a wink of sleep I've had this month past for anxiety and worry. I've not trusted one of the stable boys to so much as feed Gladiator without I stood by, and now I'm abused for my pains because I took a glass of ale."

"Sure it was only one, Ted?"

"I swear it. You can ask Foster, he was with me at the Crown."

"Ted, don't think me foolish, but—but——" she paused. "Do you think Foster drugged the beer?"

"Now what on earth should he do that for? Poor old Miles has been a good friend to me. A better friend than Sir Charles, anyway. Look here, Elsie, you and I have waited long enough. We must get married. Your father wants £200, and I've a mind to get it. Why am I to wear myself to death looking after Gladiator? I won't do it any more. I'll go to sleep to-night and"—he looked mysterious—"if anything should happen to him before the morning I shan't be any the wiser, and"—he nodded—"I shall have——"

"No, no, Ted, you mustn't say it!" screamed the girl, putting her hand over his mouth. "You can't know what you're doing. You must be *mad*. Go and lie down and get some sleep, and I'll watch here for the next hour or two. Don't argue"—with a stamp of her foot—"do as I tell you, or goodness knows what may be the consequences!"

Ted finally allowed himself to be persuaded, and retired to rest. Elsie took up her position in the stables, perched on a box in Gladiator's comfortable stall. The Danvers' establishment was but a small one. Ted, a young groom, and two boys comprised the staff. There were two other nags besides Gladiator, neither of much account, but very useful for trial purposes. Sir Charles was not a rich man, unlucky speculations on the turf had indeed made him comparatively a poor one. He looked to Gladiator to redeem his fortunes.

Ted reappeared after some hours' repose, much refreshed, and considerably quieter. He had lost the strange excited look which had so alarmed Elsie, and seemed much ashamed of the wild things he had said.

One evening she came across the two, Houghton and Miles, in close conversation. The strangely-assorted pair, to all appearances, were not on the best of terms.

Elsie made no reference to what had passed until just before she left. Then resting her hand on her sweetheart's shoulder, she said softly: "You'll look after Gladiator, Ted?"

"On my word!" he answered slowly, "and—I'll not be seeing Foster till after Monday, Elsie."

The assurance gave her comfort. Monday was the day on which Gladiator would leave the stables for Epsom.

Friday and Saturday were anxious days for Elsie. She sent a cheering note to Ted each morning, but he replied in a despondent vein. He had reason to suspect the groom of designs upon Gladiator, and had incontinently dismissed him. The man was insolent, and had hung about the yard all day in conversation with the boys. The news came from London that the odds against Gladiator were increasing daily. Sir Charles had wired Ted that he was arriving at The Firs, a country house near Norton, on the Sunday; until then the young fellow had the responsiblity alone.

Sunday morning Houghton announced that he was going away for a day or two and did not expect to return till Tuesday. After he had gone Farmer Dent decided to go over to his sister's, some few miles away. Elsie was left alone.

She rushed through her household duties and arrived in the stables early in the afternoon. Ted was looking ill and fagged, and feeling very miserable.

"I can't keep it up much longer," he said. "I'm about done up. I wrote to Sir Charles and told him I was worried about Gladiator, and he wired back saying I was a fool! No one could harm the horse if I took proper precautions. On top

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of that I get a note from him to-day sent from The Firs, where he arrived last night. Read it, Elsie, and say what you think."

"Bring Gladiator over here this evening about ten. Am anxious," said the note.

"It will knock the horse up a bit, won't it, Ted? It's a matter of five miles to The Firs."

"Won't do him any good. Still the master knows what he's about. It will give me a night's sleep, anyway. I tell you what, Elsie, this place has got on my nerves. I suggest that I walk home with you, put Gladiator in the farm stables for an hour, and go on later to Sir Charles."

Elsie thought it a very good suggestion, and presently the two set out, Ted leading Gladiator with all the care he would have given to a child. They went by slow degrees, the horse must not get tired, so it wanted a quarter to nine when Dent Farm was reached.

The horse was put up in the old stables, Houghton's chestnut being turned into the field to give the favourite more room. With a sigh of relief, Ted followed his sweetheart into the comfortable kitchen.

"When do you expect your father, Elsie?"

"Not till the morning, Ted, and Houghton has gone to London for a couple of days. It's quite like old times, you and I sitting here together."

Ted responded in a suitable and lover-like manner. Presently Elsie went upstairs to put on, with girlish vanity, a more becoming blouse. As she stood before the glass admiring her pretty face and dainty figure she fancied she heard footsteps, stealthy, muffled, creeping down the passage leading to her room. She felt frightened, and moved towards the door. Just as she clenched the handle, the key was turned upon the other side!

In another minute Houghton's chestnut had taken Gladiator's place in the empty stable.

Someone had locked her in the room!

Her first impulse was to scream, then she remembered that Hannah, the domestic help, was not in the house, nor any of the farm hands. Ted could not hear her from the kitchen. It was more than probable that the thief—for surely a thief it must be—would come in contact with her sweetheart soon enough without her intervention.

The thought brought with it a vivid sense of apprehension for her lover. Somehow she must get to him, it was maddening to stay there locked up while he was in danger. She threw open her window, the branches of an apple tree growing close to the house swayed towards her.

As a young girl she had often clambered to the ground down that very tree. Why not now?

A minute later, breathless and excited, she had put her project into execution, and stood in safety on the ground.

The kitchen window was closed, the curtains tightly drawn; not a sound to be heard, not so much as a ray of light to be seen. The front door was bolted. Creeping to the back of the house she found the door of the dairy left ajar.

On tiptoe she entered, passing softly down the passage till she reached the store room, which led into the kitchen. The door between the two rooms was ajar—she could see and hear all that passed.

Ted was standing on one side of the table. Facing him, an ugly look in his eyes, and a look of determination in his square, strong figure, was Ralph Houghton. Miles Foster watched them both from a seat by the window.

"You may just as well listen to reason, Gardiner," said the "farm pupil." "You are absolutely cornered. I've got you tight. Shout if you like but it won't do you any good. There's no one to hear but Elsie, and she's locked up in her bedroom. If any of the neighbours should look in my tale's ready. I found you here in the farmer's absence, against his express commands. As for fighting your way out—we are two to one"—he glanced at the ex-jockey, "and—well——" he paused, and lifted a revolver significantly. "I'm in dead earnest, Gardiner, and at the worst I wouldn't hesitate to put a bullet through you."

"What do you want with me?" said Ted sullenly.

Houghton paused.

"I want you to give Gladiator a bran mash," he said; "specially flavoured."

"You blackguard," was the answer; "I'll see you hanged first."

Houghton smiled.

"You'd much better listen to reason," he said once more. "In any case you've cooked your goose with Sir Charles. He isn't likely to keep a man in his employ who'd walk a Derby favourite five or six miles across country. He sent for Gladiator himself, did he? Nothing of the kind, my friend. I sent for the horse. Yes, I wrote that note. I forged the signature, But Sir Charles won't believe *that*. I'm much too respectable a person. Besides, the note is in your pocket, and before I've done with you it will be burnt. You'll have the credit of having doctored Gladiator anyway. If you're sensible you'll have something else besides. Here's two hundred pounds," he threw a bag of gold upon the table. "The price of your sweetheart, isn't it? I don't want the girl, believe me. It was only a ruse, the better to bait the trap for you. If you'd been wise you'd have accepted Foster's offer a week back. You can, however, still accept it. Give the horse a dose and I'll hand over the money. You can take him back to the stables and then get clear away. Elsie can join you. If you refuse Gladiator will be doctored just the same, and you will have to face the music. No one will credit your story—Foster and I can both prove an *alibi*. Now then, choose."

For answer Ted flung himself on to Houghton. He was tall and well built, and for a moment Houghton staggered

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under the shock, the next he had tripped his opponent quickly and neatly. Gardiner fell like a log, striking his head against the fender.

Instinctively Elsie rushed towards him. But as she reached the door she paused. For the moment she was powerless to help her lover, but she could at least defend his honour. She must wait and hear their plans, then strive to outwit their designs on Gladiator.

"He's got a nasty blow," said Houghton. "He'll lie senseless for a bit. Stay you here, Foster, and watch him. I'll go to Gladiator."

"No you don't, mister," said Foster angrily. "I'm not going to be left here to take the blame. You knocked him down, and here you've got to stay. I'll dose the nag, and then I'm off."

"Have your way," said Houghton, "but for Heaven's sake look sharp. You've got the stuff?"

Miles nodded, taking a bottle from his pocket.

"Be very quiet, and don't take a light into the stables. Somebody might spot it, the farmer may be home at any minute. Gladiator's by himself, they turned out my nag, so there's no chance of a mistake. Look slippy, Foster."

The ex-jockey nodded, and commenced his preparations, emptying the contents of the bottle into a basin.

Quick as thought Elsie flew down the passage leading from the store room into the garden. Hardly daring to breathe, she made her way round to the stables and softly opened the door. Miles would be about five minutes preparing poor Gladiator's supper, she decided. Five minutes in which to save her sweetheart's honour, and stave off ruin to Sir Charles. No wonder her heart beat quickly and her cheeks grew pale.

The horse whinnied as she entered, the beautiful creature seemed to love her and would follow her like a dog. She led him from the stable into the meadow opening from the yard. Tethering him to a tree, she called and quickly caught Houghton's chestnut. In another minute he had taken Gladiator's place in the empty stable. It was a dark night, and crouching beside the favourite in the paddock, she strained her eyes until she saw Miles Foster leave the house, enter the stable, and close the door.

Then, her pulses beating madly, her heart throbbing, and her brain on fire, she jumped on Gladiator's back. Thank Heaven she had learnt to ride without a saddle, thank Heaven the horse knew and responded to her touch. At any moment Foster might discover the trick she'd played, and, giving chase, capture the horse she'd done so much to save.

"Faster, my beauty, faster," she murmured, and the horse heard and understood, and putting out his matchless speed, swept like the wind across the country.

It was a mad gallop, and when at last they reached "The Firs," and Sir Charles was fetched by the astonished servants, Elsie had only strength to cry:

"I've saved him, I've brought him safe and sound. But they've killed Ted, they——"

She staggered, and the Baronet caught her gently in his arms.

* * * * *

A few days later Elsie found herself a heroine! The story of that dark night's work was spread abroad the countryside. Ted, little the worse for his rough treatment, came in for a share of the applause. Altogether it was a most satisfactory ending to what might have been a black chapter in both their lives.

Gladiator won the Derby, and made Sir Charles' fortune. He proved himself not ungrateful to his trainer, and at the present time Ted is on the road to prosperity.

Foster and Houghton were not again heard of. Houghton, it was alleged, was a member of a gang of sharpers, and had been sent down for the express purpose of corrupting Gladiator's trainer.

In that, however, despite bribes and other mean devices, he had not succeeded, therefore he had determined to deal with Gladiator himself.

Houghton's poor chestnut was found dead in the stables. Gladiator's dose had been too much for him. He, and he alone, had proved the victim of that dark night's work!

John K. Prothero.

THE TOWERS OF NOTRE DAME.

"No, never, never; I shall never marry you now! I hate you!" And pretty Yolande de Mirbelle stamped her tiny foot. Anger shone in her eyes, as blue as the azure sky, and generally so full of laughter and mischief; her rosy lips wont to open in rippling smiles on pearly teeth are to-day hard and set; her brow, wreathed with a crown of golden hair, is puckered with a wrathful frown. She stands before the low couch from which she has risen under the heat of passion, and she hurls words of bitter scorn and hatred at her cousin and *fiancé*, the young Marquis of Kéranville.

Bewildered, the young man stands utterly at a loss to account for this unexpected storm.

Hubert de Kéranville and Yolande de Mirbelle had played together as children; he being several years her senior allowed his wee girl tyrant to order him about, and was ever her ready, willing slave.

One sunny Spring afternoon Hubert and his little fluffy, golden-haired cousin were playing in the apple orchard of the Château de Mirbelle in Normany; Hubert was perched up among the branches of a gnarled old apple tree, showering down the rosy petals on the head of little Yolande underneath. Suddenly she called out to him:

"Hubert, I'm tired of this game; let us play at something else."

"All right!" Hubert rejoined; "but what shall we play at?"

"Well, come down; how can I shout out to you when I want to talk seriously to you? This is to be a very serious game!"

The boy tumbled down on to the grass close beside her.

"Well, now, little one, what is the game?"

"Make love to me!" was the startling rejoinder. Hubert, as a well brought up aristocratic little boy, was rather shocked at this.

"Yolande, you know little girls in France should never think of such things."

"But I am not a little girl; we are playing just now at being grown up. I am a young lady."

"But, Yolande," laughingly protested Hubert,

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"young ladies do not ask young men to make love to them."

"Oh, nonsense, but they do! The other day, just before we came down to Normandy, I was walking with my *bonne* Annette in the Luxembourg gardens, and we met a soldier—oh, such a fine *cuirassier*—and Annette ran up to him, and she must have asked him to kiss her, because he put his arm round her and did so."

"Yolande, little girls should not notice such things."

"Why?"

The boy moralist did not exactly know how to answer the child's puzzling query, so he ignored the question and went on very gravely.

"Annette is a bad, naughty woman. I shall tell mother to advise auntie's having another maid for you."

"No, no! I like Annette, she tells me such funny stories. But now, Hubert, I wanted to tell you, when I am really grown up I am going to be married to you."

Hubert laughed. "All right, but tell me, dearie, why?"

"Oh, well, because I should like to be called Madame la Marquise!"

"Is that all?" And the boy looked rather wistfully at his little cousin.

"Well, no, I like you, Hubert; in fact, I think I like you and Stella about equal."

Stella was Yolande's little white Pomeranian. Somehow, her childish instinct warned her that Hubert felt pained and hurt, so she raised herself on tiptoe, and holding up her little rosebud of a mouth, she said quite earnestly:

"Hubert, dear, you may kiss me! Annette says people who are going to be married always kiss!"

* * * * *

Through an unforeseen chain of circumstances Hubert and Yolande were parted soon after this episode, and did not meet again for ten years. Hubert accompanied his father, the Marquis de Kéranville, to Constantinople, where the latter had been sent as ambassador to represent France at the Ottoman Court. A few years later the Marquis died, and his son entered the military school of St. Cyr, where, after a brilliant career at his different studies, he passed into the army and was ordered to Madagascar. Meanwhile, Yolande had been found too impetuous and self-willed to be brought up at home under the too easy rule of an indulgent mother and yielding governess, and it had been found necessary to put the young lady into the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Versailles, where she duly finished her studies. The kind-hearted sisters knew exactly how to deal with this high-spirited girl, and when she left the convent at eighteen to return to her home she was a highly accomplished, gifted person, thoroughly fitted to take her place in society. As the only daughter of the Countess de Mirbelle, every one knew Yolande would have a pretty large fortune as her dowry, and this, added to the fact of her being very beautiful, made suitors innumerable plead for her hand. Her mother was ever receiving overtures of marriage from dukes, marquises, and counts, but Yolande's invariable answer was: "Mother, darling, I have only just come back to you, and do you want already to turn me out? I do not wish to marry yet awhile." But suddenly Yolande changed her mind on this momentous question, and it came about in this way:

One afternoon Madame de Mirbelle was confined to her room with that favourite French ailment, a headache, and Yolande was alone in the drawing-room bending over her tapestry frame, when the footman threw open the door, and announced:

"Monsieur le Marquis de Kéranville!"

A burning flush suffused the young girl's cheek, and she rose from her seat and advanced with extended hand to meet the bronze-hued Captain of Chasseurs in his becoming pale blue and silver uniform.

"Hubert this is an unexpected pleasure and surprise."

"Can this be my little playmate, my little Yolande?"

"Am I so changed?" she coquettishly answered.

"The chrysalis has become a butterfly with gold and azure wings, the seed has born a flower of regal beauty, the shell has developed a pearl of surpassing value!"

"Fie, fie, for shame, you naughty flatterer!" but Yolande's eyes brightened with delight under her cousin's undisgusied gaze of rapt admiration. "Come," she resumed, "let us talk seriously; when did you return from Madagascar?"

"I arrived this morning in Paris, and you see I have lost no time in coming to pay my respects to my aunt, and pretty cousin."

Yolande pretended not to hear this latter part of the speech.

"My mother is suffering from a bad headache, but later on we shall go to her boudoir; she gave orders not to be disturbed, but a hero back from the wars like you, surely there is no law for such a one!" And half-mockingly the girl signed to him to be seated. "Now tell me all about your campaigns?"

"Tush; nonsense! I am sick of warfare—it is a game I am tired of; let us play at something else. Do you remember that last time we played together in the orchard at Mirbelle how you suggested we should play at *something else?*"

Yolande blushed and showed evidently she had not forgotten that far-away Spring morning amid the falling apple blossoms.

"Yolande," he continued very softly, "do you recollect the game you suggested then? You asked me to make love to you; I want to play that game now!"

The girl toyed nervously with a bunch of violets at her waist, but did not answer.

"And you said you were going to marry me when you were grown up. You are grown up, and, darling, I want to marry you!"

Still she did not raise her eyes, and he continued pleading passionately:

"Yolande dearest, I have never forgotten our boy and girl courtship; by the bivouac fire, through the roar of the battle-field, I kept engraven on my heart the image of my golden-haired little fairy cousin plighting her troth to me amongst the flowering apple blossoms. To-day I come to claim your promise. Dearie, what is your answer?"

The Marquis boldly possessed himself of one of Yolande's hands and, incircling her waist, drew her towards him. "That day you said, 'Hubert, you may kiss me,' will you not say so to me to-day?"

So low that he could barely catch the words she murmured: "Hubert, you may kiss me!"

Fondly he pressed her to his heart while he playfully plied her with questions.

"And is it only because you would like to be called Madame la Marquise that you are going to marry me? And must I share your affection with your pet dog?"

In the midst of these happy remembrances of their childhood, the heavy velvet hangings were drawn aside and Madame de Mirbelle stood on the threshold. She paused aghast, horrified when she beheld her daughter's waist incircled by the arm of an officer of Chasseurs.

"Monsieur! Yolande!" gasped in agonised tones the bewildered Countess. The guilty couple started aside, but they looked not one whit ashamed of themselves as they advanced to meet the irate mother. Yolande's eyes shone with a happy look of intense joy.

"Mother, mother, Hubert has returned——"

"To claim his *fiancée*," broke in the young officer eagerly; "aunt, allow me," and he gallantly saluted his aunt's cheek.

The Countess, on recognising her nephew, was somewhat mollified, but still she remonstrated:

"My dear boy, you are so impulsive, so 'impossible'; surely you know you ought to have come to me to demand your cousin's hand, and not to have presumed to speak to her

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yourself. It is most improper, most injudicious, quite an unprecedented event in our society."

The young people pleaded their intimacy in childhood, the unexpected return of the young officer, and the impetuousness of youth.

A French mother never loses sight of the practical side of things, and Mme. de Mirbelle knew that an alliance with the wealthy Marquis de Kéranville was for her daughter a splendid match; she was, therefore, easily brought to overlook and forgive the unconventional wooing of her future son-in-law.

From that day Hubert and Yolande lived in a sort of ethereal paradise of their own. They were officially engaged, and together day after day they went to balls, dinners, theatres, and picnics. Of course, according to the French strict rules in such cases, Mme. de Mirbelle accompanied them everywhere, but she was a good-natured, kindly soul, and often left the young folks to themselves.

Then there came the fatal day when all the sunshine went out of Yolande's happy daydream. Every morning since she had been engaged the Marquis sent her a dainty basket bedecked with bows of pink and blue ribbon, filled with the sweetest and choicest of white flowers, azaleas and lilies of the valley, white lilac and pale tinted roses.

One morning she wanted to send off some flowers to a sick friend in the country, and she went into one of the big flower shops on the Boulevard. She happened to notice two exquisite baskets of flowers exactly similar as to blossoms and ribbons; her eye caught the two cards attached to the handle of each basket. On one she read "Mdlle. de Mirbelle," on the other, to her amazement, she saw written "Mdlle. de Verny."

"Ah!" said the officious shop girl, "Mademoiselle is looking at those beautiful flowers that M. le Marquis de Kéranville has just ordered. Every day he bids us prepare two of these floral presents exactly similar in every way."

Yolande felt faint and sick, her heart pulsed high in an agonising passion of jealousy. What, those flowers she prized so were but the duplicates of ones sent to another woman! Oh, how false, how treacherous men could be! She hurried home, and rushing to her room bolted herself in, and flung herself on to the couch to give way to passionate weeping.

Hubert was false to her. Oh, she would die of a broken heart! But first she would show him how utterly she despised and loathed him!

Some few hours afterwards, when the young Marquis sauntered into his aunt's drawing-room, he found Yolande white and resolute, with set lips and strained eyes, and he was greeted with the passionate sentence with which this story opens. Again and again she vowed that she would never marry him. The enraged, excited girl flew to his basket of flowers lying on a marble table close at hand, with an eager, passionate gesture she wrenched the flowers out of the stand, threw them on the ground, and stamped on them.

"As I trample on your flowers, Monsieur le Marquis, so do I trample on the love you professed to feel for me."

"Yolande, tell me at least what have I done? Everyone who is accused of a heinous crime is at least told what his offence is, so that he may justify himself."

"Justify yourself, *you*. No, Monsieur, it is impossible. Go. I forbid you ever to enter my presence again." And like a tragedy queen she swept out of the room, leaving him standing speechless in the midst of the room.

Yolande's brain was on fire with the tumult of angry passions that raged unchecked within her bosom. Hastily putting on a hat, veil, and gloves, she peremptorily ordered her old nurse Marion to follow her, as she wanted to go for a walk. Marion adored her young mistress, and never ventured to oppose any of her wildest whims. They left the Hôtel de Mirbelle by the side door, giving into a back street. Scarcely knowing or caring whither she bent her steps, Yolande walked on and on, and poor old Marion could hardly keep up with her quick strides. Suddenly they found themselves on the "Parvis Notre Dame." Yolande glanced up at the grim and stately building; then, like a flash of lightning, the thought coursed through her brain, she wanted air. Well, she would climb to the top of the towers of Notre Dame, and there sit down to collect her thoughts.

"Marion, I am going up there."

"No, surely not; Mademoiselle is joking?"

Marion knew of old no remonstrances ever availed when her young lady's mind was made up.

"And does Mademoiselle want me to drag my weary old limbs up there too?"

"No, no, my good Marion; come, I am not quite so cruel as that. You sit and wait for me in the porter's lodge."

Yolande paid her admittance fee to the towers, and began her ascent up, through the tortuous, winding stairs. She gained the first platform, rather out of breath, gazed awhile on the hideous grinning gargoyles and demons, elfs and spirits carved in stone.

The bell-ringer came forth from his shed, insinuatingly offering his services to show her over the huge brazen bell, which only tolls for births, marriages, or burials of great people. But Yolande turned away; this was not high enough, she was not far enough removed from all humanity, which she just now hated with a deadly hatred, because one mortal had proved false. The stairs leading to the top platform were not lit up, and the night was very black.

Yolande groped her way up; the walls were damp and clammy with moisture, and altogether it was a weird, uncanny feeling. She sat down on one of the recesses just by the edge of the tower, and gazed in awe at the panorama stretched out before her.

Suddenly she started; a black cat with glaring fiery eyeballs and tail erect stood at her elbow, mewing in a most unearthly way. Yolande screamed; to her affrighted, overstrained mind this black cat seemed to be an impersonification of the devil sent there to tempt her to her doom.

The colour left her cheeks, she tried to jump to her feet, but a deadly feeling of sickness pervaded her whole being, her eyes closed, she swayed, and for one awful instant the most appalling of deaths threatened the wretched girl. But in her great extremity, while a hideous end confronted her, two protecting arms were stretched out to support her, and she was saved. Saved and clasped in a loving embrace. Half fainting, paralysed by terror, she lay in Hubert de Kéranville's grasp.

"Yolande, my darling!"

She opened her eyes, then shuddering, turned them away from those of him whom she so lately scorned, and her gaze once more reverted to the black cat, calmly licking his paws.

"Why it is only 'Quasimodo,' the black cat belonging to the bell-ringer. How could you be so childish as to let a pussy cat terrify you so?" the Marquis queried.

"Oh, I was so unhappy, beside myself with grief; but," and she trie to freed herself from his incircling arms, "how is it *you* are here? Let me go," she whispered fiercely.

"I followed you step by step, Yolande; tell me what have I done that in one twenty-four hours you could so change?"

"Go, leave me Monsieur; go to Mademoiselle de Verny!"

"Mademoiselle de Verny! Yolande, can you be jealous of my friend the Baron de Saint-Pierre's *fiancée?* Why, they are to be married to-day week!"

"Then she is as false to him as you are to me. How dare you send her daily the same flowers that you send to me?"

"Is that the key to the mystery which has made us both so unhappy? Oh, Yolande, little one, could you not trust me? Saint-Pierre knew I was engaged, he knows nothing about flowers, or what ladies like, so he had begged of me, when ordering flowers for my *fiancée*, to order some exactly similar ones for him."

"Oh, Hubert, can you ever forgive me?" And Yolande, humble and penitent, sued for forgiveness, which her generous lover was only too ready to grant.

Lily Butler.

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The Patron of an Artist.

A Dainty Little Tale of a Parting and a Reunion.

THEY had met—loved—and parted, promising to write. There was nothing absolutely original in the occurrence; thousands had done identically the same thing before in their time, and, in all probability, thousands will emulate their example years hence. But the promise made on a liner's deck, though sacred at the time, was soon forgotten; and five years elapsed without a line being exchanged between them. And this was the man's fault.

Charlie Montrose had bade Zara Hoste adieu at Vera Cruz, when she was but a girl of sixteen, or rather woman, as girls of that age are ranked out in Mexico; one matures early in Central America.

A year passed, then Art had gradually blotted out the remembrance of her Madonna-like face. True, he had kept five of her letters, unanswered, by the way, which detailed to him her trusting love and her progress in sculpture; but they had lain on the mantelpiece of his study till dust had begrimed them and nearly obliterated the faintly-written words. Then four years lapsed, and Zara was almost forgotten by the man on whom fortune had smiled. Therefore it was somewhat strange that Charlie Montrose dreamt sadly of the past during an interval at a ball given by Lady Belmont at her house in Park Lane.

"Why so glum, Mr. Montrose?" she queried gaily, tapping him playfully on the shoulder with her fan. "You have not done your duty by standing out three dances! I must find you a partner."

"May I have the pleasure, Lady Belmont?"

"With me? Oh, I should be delighted, only, alas! my programme is filled," she replied vivaciously. "But I will introduce you to Miss Vivian. You know the great sculptor?"

"Surely not the Miss Vivian of 'Sleep' renown?"

"The same."

"Pleasure?" She smiled quizzically. "I heard once that you were jealous of her!" He bowed acquiescingly.

"You heard correctly, Lady Belmont; for once report was truthful."

"Impossible!" She gazed wonderingly at the rising artist. "Why, Mr. Montrose, are you jealous of an artist of a rival art?"

He smiled enigmatically. "My dear Lady Belmont, I am jealous because she endows cold marble with life; my figures are coloured by paint, but not by life. My paintings are but the outcome of—shall we say, talent?—while her conceptions are born of genius." He paused, then added brightly: "However, I am wildly anxious to know her, or even to see her, both of which pleasures have hitherto been denied me. Is she old? Learned? Or does she wear glasses?"

Lady Belmont laughed merrily. "Oh, dear, no! She is extremely youthful, being only twenty-two, in fact. Adorably pretty! Witty, and does *not* wear glasses!"

"Then the pleasure is doubled, Lady Belmont," he replied smilingly, as his hostess tripped away to speak to another of her guests. The band struck up the opening bars of a dreamy waltz, and Montrose, noticing that the promised introduction did not come off, retreated into an ante-room, and seating himself on a lounge, gave himself up to the "blues." Through the half-closed portière, he saw the giddy whirl of dancers circling round the room, noticing their smiling faces with a smile that was born of cynicism. He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"How true it is," he murmured reflectively, "that one-half of the world is happy, caring nothing for the miserable other half!"

A light step behind him caused Montrose to turn round. A brunette was coming towards him—a brunette whose beauty, surpassing even his ideals of feminine beauty so often depicted on his canvasses, caused the master-artist to almost wonder as he gazed at the marvellous regularity of her finely-chiselled features. He rose, stretched out his hand mechanically to pull back the heavy portière for her to pass into the ball-room, when she stopped suddenly, and glancing swiftly up at the handsome face of the limner, said impulsively:

"Mr. Montrose, the great artist, I believe?" He glanced straight into the eyes raised shyly to his, then replied:

"That is my name. As a great artist, I believe I am a fraud!" Then added modestly: "I have been lucky, that is all!"

"You are modest," she said gently. "I hope you will excuse my presumption in speaking to you without a formal introduction, but I was very anxious to speak to you. I only saw you once before to-night—at the Academy; you were pointed out to me."

"I am indeed honoured by your remembering my features," he said politely. Then glancing steadily at her face, said thoughtfully, "But surely your face is familiar? It is—ah, yes!" he cried bitterly, "I know whom you resemble. You are much prettier, yet so strangely—strangely like a girl I once knew!" He sighed, as he let the portière fall from grasp.

"Indeed?" The brown eyes opened widely. "I am pleased I resemble that lady—you—you were interested in. It is quite romantic, to be included, if even in so slight a degree, in a great man's life!" Montrose flushed dully.

"I am afraid I was speaking my thoughts," he said awkwardly. "I apologise. I must have bored you!"

"On the contrary," she replied brightly, "I am interested. As I resemble this lady, will you not tell me more about her? Or would it be indiscreet on my part to proffer such a request?"

"I am sorry to refuse!" he replied, glancing at her. "It is very difficult to do so, but no man cares to record a shabby action of his own."

"But, Mr. Montrose," she murmured, "you have always been spoken of in the papers as the soul of honour!"

"So much for the truth of journalism!" he said bitterly.

"But, surely, Mr. Montrose"—her voice trembled a little—"you have never broken your word or——?" He laughed harshly.

"That is identically what I have done!" he said. "I broke a pledge made six years ago, and now dare not redeem it."

"Indeed!" said the brunette, smiling archly. "And why not?"

"Because she would despise me now!" He stopped short, blushing hotly as he realised that he had committed himself. "May I escort you to the ball-room?"

She blissfully ignored his question.

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"So you had asked her to marry you," she said thoughtfully, "and then grew tired of her."

"You appear to be a thought-reader!" exclaimed Montrose almost savagely. "You are, however, correct. I did ask her to marry me, then we drifted apart; four years passed and I did not write, and when I did my letters came back marked 'unknown.' You, however, are wrong when you say I got tired of her. I have loved her all these years, and now, when she has passed beyond my reach—— Bah! why do I speak to you, an utter stranger, in these terms?" he asked, with sudden coldness. "Allow me to conduct you to the ball-room, and pray Heaven I may never see you again; you remind me too vividly of what I have lost!"

He raised the portière.

"No," she replied impressively, seating herself on the lounge. "I will not go in. Sit down here beside me, I want to speak to you!" He turned to face her, cold lines hardening his face.

"Pardon me," he said haughtily, "I am unaccustomed to be ordered—even by a beautiful woman!" She blushed crimson, and he, seeing her embarrassment, hastened to apologise.

"I'm sorry for the way I spoke to you just now," he said awkwardly. "My pride is my fail——"

"Charlie!" There was a pathetic yearning in the way her lips lingered over the name. He started violently, stared hard at his companion, then approaching the lounge, said hoarsely:

"Is it possible? No, you jest! Yet—Zara, can—can it be you? For God's sake tell me if this is truth or am I dreaming?"

"It is true!" she said softly, rising.

"No, you are joking, or I must be dreaming!" He seized her hand and gripped it, then said feverishly: "No, this is real—I am awake!" Then, dropping her hand, said, almost wistfully: "You have come to reproach me; is it not so, Zara? Be merciful!"

"I came over to England to see you, not to reproach you!" she replied gently. "Oh, Charlie, you cannot imagine what agony I underwent during those four years of silence! A year ago I left Vera Cruz in the hope of finding you, and have only just succeeded in seeing you. I suppose you despise me now I have committed that heinous crime of running after a man!"

She asked the question defiantly, a crimson blush suffusing her cheeks.

"Despise you?" he echoed wonderingly, drawing her trembling form to him. "Zara! Zara! it is I who pose you that question!"

"Should I have crossed the Atlantic if I had?" she queried softly. "I thought you had forgotten me, and had I not been assured of your love to-night, I should never have revealed my personality."

"And you?" he asked anxiously. "Do you still care for that artist who asked you to be his six years ago?"

"As fondly as I did then," she replied simply.

"And if he wanted to keep you to that promise?" he asked gently, tilting her face up to his. "Would you repeat the answer of six years ago?"

"How do I know he would not ignore me again?" she asked archly. He sighed, then muttered bitterly:

"True! true! It is only natural you should doubt the sincerity of my love." She melted at the sight of his dejection, then, nestling her cheek against his, replied:

"Can you forgive me for being so horrid, dear? I never meant it, for I still adhere to my promise of six years ago."

She glanced archly up at him as she uttered the words, blushing so prettily the while that Montrose flung discretion to the winds and kissed her passionately, Zara wriggled herself clear of his retentive clasp, exclaiming merrily:

"There, that will do! Enough is as good as a feast; remember this is at a ball, please, and see, you have taken my fringe out of curl! When we are married I shall only allow you to kiss me once a day, but never at a ball!"

"I shall disobey that mandate if you persist in looking so pretty," he said laughingly. "We must go into the ball-room, or our hostess will be wondering what we are doing. Lady Belmont has promised to introduce me to a Miss Vivian, the great sculptor. I feel certain she will be horribly vain and conceited. By the way, talking of sculpture, you used to turn out things in quite a masterly manner once upon a time. Do you still, and have you improved?"

"I think I have, Charlie," she replied demurely. "Why?"

"I must have taught you thoroughly," he said; then added seriously: "My name will help you along tremendously. In fact, I will become your patron!" A faint smile crossed her lips, and her eyes danced with latent merriment.

"Yes," she said softly. "It would."

"Yes, I must have taught you thoroughly," he continued reflectively, raising the portière for her to pass. "And you must stick to figures; you used to chisel them out marvellously."

"Yes, I think I shall keep to figures," she replied, passing him.

"Ah! here you are," cried Lady Belmont, sweeping down on Zara. "I must introduce you to Charlie Montrose, R.A., my dear. He's wildly jealous of you, isn't it lov—— Oh, here you are!" she exclaimed, as Montrose entered the room. "Here is *the* Miss Vivian of 'Sleep' renown—Mr. Montrose—Miss——"

"I knew her years ago," interrupted Montrose starting, and colouring awkwardly. "But I was not, however, aware that she was the great sculptor. Miss—Miss Vivian has done me the honour of consenting to be my wife this evening. I tell you, Lady Belmont, because you have always followed my career with such kindly interest."

"I object to the word 'years,'" Zara said merrily. "It makes me feel an old crony."

"Then your fresh beauty gives the lie to the sensation," Montrose replied gallantly.

"How annoying it is!" exclaimed Lady Belmont smiling.

"Annoying?" echoed Montrose surprised.

"I suppose I must congratulate you both," she said gaily. "And I do, most heartily, but all the same, it is annoying—excessively so."

"But why?" insisted Zara.

"Well, you see," said Lady Belmont merrily, "I was hoping to pit the two wits of my party against one another on the subject of the rival arts, and now I am to be denied the pleasure of hearing the discussion."

"You have been the innocent means of uniting two hearts which had strayed apart, dear Lady Belmont," replied Montrose gaily. "Is not that a sufficient compensation for the loss of the argument?"

Tristan K. Monck.

Mrs. Scribbler (impressively): "Whatever you do, never, never, marry a newspaper man." School chum: "Why?" "I married one, and I know. Every night my husband brings home a big bundle of newspapers from all over the country, and they drive me crazy." "The newspapers?" "Indeed they do. They are just crammed with the most astonishing bargains in shops a hundred miles away."

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A QUESTION OF PROPOSALS.

Telling of a Dilemma and its Solution.

"I HAVE something on my mind which is perplexing, rather than unpleasant, but which preoccupies me a good deal."

"If you were a woman," remarked Mrs. Eden, the charming little widow, "I should say you had just received a proposal, and didn't know how to answer it."

"But being a mere man, I'm in the far more difficult position of having a proposal to make——"

Mrs. Eden looked at him with her small and lustrous head on one side.

"Yet of not being able to make up your mind to whom."

His hostess rose.

"The sun is in your eyes, isn't it? No, don't stir; I never allow anyone to arrange my blinds but myself; other people only disarrange them."

She stood with her back to Holt while she lowered an inch or two the silken and lace flounced blind.

She returned to the sofa.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have a vague desire to propose to woman in general, or to some indefinite yet-to-be-met-with she?"

"I ought to have said, 'to which.' For there are two girls——"

"Ah, two girls," repeated Mrs. Eden.

"Who are both so charming that I can't decide between them, and so I come to you, as usual, to help me out of my difficulty."

"Then I know these highly-fortunate young women, one of whom you intend thus to distinguish?"

"Oh, it's easy to laugh! But you've so often advised me to get married that it's only kind to help me to put your advice into practice. I think you know Margaret Whelan?"

"Intimately. Did I not see her for a whole day in the country last summer? And I approve your taste. She is good to look at."

Holt appeared pleased.

"Yes, is she not handsome? Such a fine figure, and so tall."

"That's her one fault. She's almost too tall. She's taller than you."

"Dear lady. You're quite mistaken. She is three inches at least shorter than I am. She is certainly not more than five feet eight."

"What are inches?" cried his hostess. "A woman is as tall as she looks, and Miss Whelan looks taller than you."

There was silence.

"Then I suppose it's her long frocks," observed Mrs. Eden in a conciliatory voice, but Holt had abandoned the argument.

"Do you like her as well as you admire her?" he wanted to know.

"I adore her. Women never do less than adore each other on so short an acquaintanceship. But I should have got on with her better had I not been so dreadfully afraid of her."

"Why on earth should you be afraid of her?"

"O, she's so clever, so well informed——"

"She is well informed."

"While I, you know, am such a perfect little ignoramus."

"I know nothing of the sort. In your own way you are immensely clever, too."

"But in what a commonplace way! I can keep house, certainly, and out of debt, and I could make my own clothes, and cook my own dinner, if it were necessary; but, then, any woman can sew and cook."

"I wish to heaven any woman could! I wish my landlady could!"

"But I can't read Greek, as Miss Whelan does. She carries a pocket 'Aristophanes' with her up the river, and we could see her now and again enjoying silent laughter as she read. It's uncommonly clever to enjoy Greek jokes, isn't it? But then, of course, you and she could enjoy them together."

"Oh, as to my Greek," said Holt, and with a shake of his head he flung his last memories of it afar. "Margaret, you see, studied at Girton."

"Could I fail to see it? Girton is written all over her in indelible ink. It exudes from her manner, which is an impressive manner, an overwhelming one. A manner which puts me altogether into the shade in spite of the fact that I'm a widow with grey hairs."

"Have you grey hairs?" asked Holt, much interested. "I don't see any."

"There was certainly one there yesterday. Well, at least Miss Whelan need never fear grey hairs; her hair is too pale coloured to show any."

"She has curiously colourless hair, I admit," said Holt. "It would almost justify the use of hair dye. Kitty Redfern's hair is much prettier."

"So the other one is Kitty? Dear little Kitty! I like Kitty. Everyone likes her. It would be impossible not to do so, for she agrees with everyone and is of your own opinion even before you've expressed it. She's so beautifully feminine."

Holt assented. "She's like the finest, the most plastic clay, the whitest unwritten page——"

"On which you write all you wish, but the writing dries off immediately, leaving the surface white as before; while her plasticity is of the kind which takes, but cannot retain an impression. The moment the pressure is removed her mind springs back to its original formlessness."

"It is true that her innocence of any opinions is sometimes perturbing——"

"For while Echo is charming in the fable you hardly want her seated by your fireside."

"And I shouldn't wish my wife to be a mere mass of concessions."

"You are too intelligent. There are many men for whom Kitty Redfern would be ideal; for the man who merely requires a presentable mistress of his house, a healthy mother for his children. But you need something more than this; you need a companion——"

"With whom I can enjoy Greek jokes. Which seems to bring me back to Margaret Whelan, does it not?"

"Oh, but a companion who is also a good comrade. Some one who can appreciate your own little things as well as those of Aristophanes. Now, I should scarcely venture to try any joke on Miss Whelan which was less than a thousand years old. On the whole, I don't consider her any more suitable than Kitty. Less so, in fact. For if one doesn't want too much concession in a woman, neither does one want too forcible opposition. And Miss Whelan can be forcible. I've heard her."

"So have I," murmured Holt, reminiscent.

Mrs. Eden laughed.

"You're exhilarating!" she told him.

"I'm glad I exhilarate you, for I'm much depressed myself," said he. "I seem unable to pull this affair off. You tell me to get married and I try to obey you, yet my suggestions don't

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find any favour in your eyes. Perhaps you will make a suggestion yourself?"

"My suggestion would be such an exceedingly obvious one——"

"Which is actually the reason I can't see it for myself."

"It is merely that you should make an effort to obtain the woman you're in love with."

"But surely I'm more or less in love with Margaret and Kitty, too!"

"Believe me, very much less rather than more."

"Dear lady! By what signs do you judge me?"

"By these signs," Mrs. Eden told him. "When you are really in love with a woman you don't weigh her in the balance with anyone else. She stands above everyone, unique and alone. You don't ask other women their opinion of her; you force your opinion on them. You are in her society as often as you can manage it, and you are filled with solicitude for her welfare when ever she is out of your sight. You joke with her, laugh with her, discuss with her, and disagree with her. You quarrel with her and make it up again. You lay open to her the subject you have nearest your heart, and in any difficulty your first thought is to take her advice."

"But there's no woman in the world towards whom I feel like that but you," said Holt with sincerity. "And—and—but why——! What a fool you must think me!"

He moved close beside Mrs. Eden on the sofa and took her hand between his own!"

"Dear—my dear Mrs. Eden"—he asked her persuasively, "do you think you could ever get to love me the least bit?"

Mrs. Eden turned away to hide her smiles, and having subdued them turned back with a histrionic word of surprise upon her tongue tip, but, looking straight into his eyes, she suddenly threw away play acting and gave him the warm and happy truth.

"You dear and foolish person!" she murmured, "could you not see I have loved you for ever so long?"

But Holt, who hid some wisdom beneath much apparent folly, was wise enough to let this query fall.

G. H. Page.

ACCIDENT TO MISS MADGE MORRIS.

I AM sure all my readers will be sorry to hear that Miss Madge Morris, who has, for so long, been your willing counsellor in any heart-troubles of which you may have confided to her, has met with a nasty accident. Owing to the horse stumbling and falling, she was thrown out of a hansom, and though, by marvellous good fortune, no bones were broken, it will be several days before she is about again. Under the circumstances, therefore, I have thought it best to omit the "In Confidence" page altogether for this week, rather than give it to anyone else. You will be glad to hear that, just as I am going to press, I have received a message from Miss Morris to the effect that she hopes to be sufficiently recovered to continue her services in your little paper next week.

"TOPIC" COMPETITION RESULT.

IN the "Topic" competition, the first prize of a solid silver pencil case goes to Miss M. Hogg, of 15, Mid Street, Fraserbury, Scotland. Her sentence, which has reference to the King's tour, is—"'Tis to this shore the hero hies—this is his rest resort." Consolation prizes go to the following: D. Pope 5, Vernon Place, Birkenhead; L. White, 162, Camberwell New Road, S. E.; P. J. G. Lewis, Jersey Snuff Box, Dover; Mrs. E. Ryan, 21, Abbott's Road, East Ham; H. Barnes, 2, Vauxhall Walk, S. E.; J. G. Bennett, 8, Sydney Street, Grantham; W. Pearman, 115, Brewery Road, Plumstead; D. G. Jelley, 85, Ermine Road, Ladywell; J. A. Downie, 231, Great Junction Street, Leith; and J. G. Inch, 23, Southwold Road, Upper Clapton, N. E.

Your Editor Chats.

A MOST remarkable thing has happened in connection with Cynthia's "Confessions." Two days ago I received the following letter from Miss Cynthia Hamilton:

Empress Club,
Dover Street,
London, W.
Monday, September 1, 1902.

DEAR MR. EDITOR,—I have had quite an adventure, and am naturally rather excited about it. This afternoon, about four o'clock, I was having tea alone in Bond Street, when, on glancing up, I saw Arthur St. J. H—— (whose name you remember I put as Percival Hope in my "Confessions"). He was with two ladies, most elegantly dressed. He seemed much graver and older than when he used to call at poor J.'s house in Pont Street. (J. is the initial of the real Christian name of the adventuress called Frances Norton in Cynthia's articles.—ED.)

After a while he looked my way, and caught my eye. He did not seem to remember me for a second, but when I smiled he nodded gravely, and a few minutes later excused himself from his companions and came over to me.

Of course I was awfully perturbed for a moment. I thought at first that he was going to row me about the "Confessions," but then I thought and hoped that probably he never read your paper. But I went furiously red all the same.

He said in his quiet, even voice: "You are looking very well, but a little sadder than in the old days." He paused, then continued in the same even way: "I see you've taken to writing."

I dropped my eyes and blushed scarlet. He had not only read the "Confessions," but knew who had written them! When I looked up again he was smiling.

"They are clever—very clever, Miss Hamilton! I congratulate you. But you're hard on that chap, Percival Hope!" He smiled. "You make out he didn't care for Cynthia very much. In writing this you are misleading the public, Miss Hamilton. He did." Another pause, during which I felt (although my eyes were on my teacup) that he was looking at me. Then he took a deep breath. "You heard, of course, about Toby?" I said that I had not. "Poor youngster, he's gone to the—the dogs."

Then he roused himself. "Well, good-bye, Miss Hamilton; so glad to have met you again. Mr. Pettigrew and I are over for the Coronation. We leave on Wednesday for Paris for a week. I hope to meet you again when we return. We shall be staying at the Cecil. Good-bye!" and, shaking hands with me, he returned to his friends. Two minutes later he had gone!

I wonder if he will ever come into my life again?

Yours gratefully,

CYNTHIA HAMILTON.

This incident is very gratifying, and shows that the facts stated by Cynthia in her confessions are practically correct. Of all the characters in this life drama, I consider the most interesting (after Mrs. Norton and Cynthia) to be Percival Hope. I feel that this young man, with his serious views of life, has had more experiences than the average young man of his age, and the renewed interest he has aroused by reason of his reappearance has set me thinking. If I can get hold of Hope and induce him to write up some of his experiences in high society—not only in connection with the Frances Norton business, but in other directions, both here and in America—would these experiences be appreciated by the readers? I wonder! Perhaps you will drop me a postcard and say what you think. I shall be guided by the opinions of the majority.

Your Editor.

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☞ On Monday, Sept. 1st last, Cynthia Hamilton met Percival Hope at a tea shop in London. Read Cynthia's letter to your Editor on page 367.

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

THE STORY STARTS HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin, with Fluffy's help, stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, and it was while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, and during that interview Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Frankie left the room; but I stayed, and, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope, overheard Hope (who turned out to be Kinross' cousin) tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. I told Frankie what I had overheard.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with a man from Jamaica who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably.

Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived, He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell in a dead faint. Doctors were called, and pronounced it a paralytic seizure. Toby next called. In three days his uncle's bill must be redeemed. If this was not done he vowed that he would shoot himself.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew. While returning from Pettigrew's hotel late at night she met Kinross, who demanded an explanation.

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FRANKIE MAKES AN AMERICAN COCKTAIL.

My thoughts were quickly turned from Frankie and Lord Kinross. Dollie Grendale clutched me tightly by the arms.

"What am I to do?" she cried, her breath coming and going in short, hard gasps. "I daren't go home. I'm—I'm *afraid*. I can't face Horace. I daren't!"

"You'll have to," I answered firmly. "Come, Dollie, pull yourself together. I don't suppose Frankie said anything to Mr. Grendale about your gambling. She only told you that to frighten you. You'll find she mentioned you'd let slip something about the arbitration, but assured your husband no one should be any the wiser. Cheer up, Dollie, Frankie isn't the sort of woman to make mischief."

I said this more in the hope of restoring Mrs. Grendale's peace of mind than from any great belief in the veracity of the statement.

As it happened, however, I had made a fairly shrewd guess as to the true state of the case. Frankie had driven to the "House," seen Mr. Grendale, and warned him in a friendly and entirely charming manner of the folly of making his wife a political confidante.

My words calmed the poor little woman. She wept copiously, but consented to be helped on with her cloak, and allowed me to send Skinner for a hansom.

"Take my advice, Dollie," I said earnestly, "don't attempt any explanations with your husband. Just kiss him and say you're sorry."

She promised to follow my advice, and, much relieved, I saw her depart.

Frankie was standing at the dining-room door as I passed down the hall. She was flushed, and there was a look of anxiety on her face that startled me. It was very rarely Frankie showed anxiety.

"Come in," she said, "Hartland wants to talk to you." She took my hand and squeezed it. "Don't give me away, Cynthia," she whispered, "for the love of Heaven."

Lord Kinross was standing by the window. Frankie settled herself in a lounge chair and motioned to him to speak.

"If Cynthia is to be scolded," she said, "you must do it—I shan't."

"I think Cynthia deserves to be scolded," said his lordship. He smiled as he spoke, but I didn't like his manner all the same.

"I understand you've found my cousin Percival a little trying lately, Cynthia. I've found him so myself at times." Kinross paused. "He has some letters of yours, I understand, letters which you wish to get back from him? Ask Hope himself to return them."

Kinross looked keenly at me. I felt myself turn crimson. I had written two or three times to Percival thanking him for flowers, etc., short, almost curt notes; nothing in any one of them that the whole world might not see. Why should I desire their return?

"Your cousin tells me you asked her to induce Pettigrew to use his influence with Hope to get these letters. Surely it would have been better to have asked Percival himself—why didn't you? Come, Cynthia, don't be childish, you must have some answer to give me. I owe it to my cousin to ask you for an explanation. Perhaps"—he paused—"have you already asked Percival to send back your letters?"

"No," I gasped. "No."

"Do you think he would refuse?"

I shook my head.

"Why, then, did you beg Frankie to go to-night and urge Pettigrew to get the letters at any cost?"

With a shock I realised what my cousin had done. To save herself from Hartland's anger she had pretended that she went to Pettigrew on my behalf. *Mine!* I flashed a look of indignation and reproach at her.

"Don't tell," she motioned, with her eyes, her hands, "*don't tell!*"

Unable to show anger to her I turned upon his lordship.

"You have no right to question me," I said. "You have no control over me nor my affairs."

"Pardon me, I have this right. I am your cousin's future husband; as such I will not permit her to commit indiscretions even for your sake. It was a glaring indiscretion to call on Pettigrew. I will not have it repeated. You understand?"

My cheeks burnt and my heart grew hot at the contempt in his voice. I threw up my head, and returned his look.

Proudly, defiantly, silently I would screen my cousin; for her sake I would consent to be misjudged, but not even for her could I acknowledge that Lord Kinross had a right to question me.

"As for the letters," he continued, "I will speak myself to Percival upon the matter."

But that I could not endure.

"You will do so in your own name, not in mine," I cried. "I send no message to Percival Hope through you. If you speak to him it will be not at my request, but from your love of interference. I *dare* you to tell Percival I want my letters."

Kinross shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like," he said coldly, "but in no case will I have your cousin dragged into the affair. Frankie"—he turned to her—"I have your word that you will not interfere again in the matter?"

My cousin nodded.

"That's right. We'll say no more about it. And now, my dear," he went to her side and laid his hand upon her shoulder. "There is one thing I want to speak to you about. I must prohibit you betting, Frankie, either on horses or at cards."

"I'm not so terrible a gambler as all that, Hartland."

"In future you are not to gamble at all," he said firmly. "Have you any bills still unpaid?"

"A few."

"Let me have a list in the morning. I will settle them. Also"—he paused—"are you in debt, Frankie? I mean do you owe much money to tradesmen and people like that?"

"Of course I do, till quarter day. I settle my accounts every three months. A tradesman in this locality would take it as an insult if you offered to pay him cash."

"How many unpaid bills are there left from last quarter, Frankie?"

My cousin laughed.

"You're terrible, Hartland. I confess I'm extravagant and get into debt, but who doesn't?"

"What do you owe, Frankie?" He took out his cheque-book and looked at her expectantly.

Frankie flushed.

"I think that's hardly your affair at present," she said slowly.

"Anything that effects you must of necessity be my affair," he answered gravely. "You've confessed you're extravagant, and I know you're short of money. I'm going to pay some into your bank, and I

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CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

want to know how much will put you straight. Don't oppose me, Frankie. I'm not going to scold you, but I won't have it said that the lady I'm engaged to marry can't pay her butcher or the baker."

"Somebody's been talking against me. Who is it, Hartland?"

"Nobody. I shouldn't allow such a thing. Let us return to the bills. How much, Frankie?"

He spoke with more determination than I had ever seen him show. It was evident that if Frankie did not give way to him upon the point, it would make a serious breach between them.

That was the last thing my cousin wished to bring about. With a shrug and a smile she yielded.

"Two thousand will put me straight, Hartland," she said.

He wrote out a cheque for the amount.

"That will pay all your bills?"

"All," she answered with an emphatic nod.

I happened to know such a sum would but settle half my cousin's liabilities, and I wondered that she should have neglected the opportunity of clearing herself of debt. But I never *could* understand Frankie. I could only wonder at her.

"I shall pay another thousand into your account," Lord Kinross continued, "so that you will have some cash to go on with till next quarter day. You receive your dividends from Jamaica then?" He glanced at her keenly.

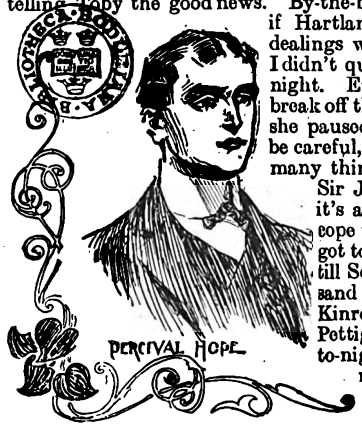
"Yes, dear, every quarter punctually," said Frankie. "And now I think you've lectured me enough. Don't look cross, Hartland, it doesn't suit you. I'll pay my debts and I'll forego gambling, and I'll lead a steady, sober, and righteous life. Will that please you?"

"Entirely. Don't forget. Frankie, you've got to turn over a new leaf." He parted from her affectionately, but bestowed only a cool good-night on me.

"Don't look so tragic, Cynthia," said my cousin, as the door closed behind him. "It isn't as if you really cared for Percival. Even if you do, what I said won't harm you. Kinross isn't likely to mention the letters after the way you snapped him up. It was a terrible predicament for *me*, dearie. I think I got out of it very cleverly."

I made no answer. Remonstrance as to her conduct was useless, but I could not bring myself to offer her congratulations.

"I'm glad you got that Grendale woman off so quietly," Frankie went on. "I managed that affair beautifully! Don't worry, Cynthia; 'poor Horace' will forgive dear Dollie this time. I've seen to that. I must go down to Nathan's in the morning. You shall have the pleasure of telling Toby the good news. By-the-bye, Cynthia, I wonder if Hartland has heard I've had dealings with the money-lenders? I didn't quite like his manner to-night. Even now I believe he'd break off the engagement if——" she paused. "I shall have to be careful," she said, "there are many things he mustn't know. Sir John, Toby, Grendale—it's almost more than I can cope with. Worst of all, I've got to get through from now till September on four thousand pounds — three from Kinross and a thousand from Pettigrew—he paid me six to-night. If I try to raise money Kinross will hear of it. I know what that would mean," she added, catching her breath. She rose from her chair, and paced the room in silence.



"Suppose we shut the house up and go into the country for a bit?" I suggested.

"Impossible. I can't leave town till the end of July, and we're only at the beginning. I've a difficult game to play, Cynthia, and for once the luck's against me."

Frankie's difficulties seemed to increase instead of lessening. Toby, relieved from the nightmare of Nathan's bill, recovered his spirits, and took to haunting the house and my cousin more persistently than ever. At last Kinross remonstrated.

"Ffolliott's here a great deal too much, Frankie," he said. "I don't like it. It's very well to say he's only a boy; other people don't think so. You must give him his marching orders, Frankie, or I shall interfere."

Frankie listened, angry and impatient. Kinross was displaying an unlooked-for strength of character. Of old, he had been easy-going, tolerant, amiable. Now he was as exacting and imperious as Percival himself. I wondered at the time if Mr. Hope had a hand in his lordship's new development. Frankie must, I thought, have felt the contrast between the faith, the utter and complete faith Sir John had always shown her, and the constant, and, at times, ill-concealed suspicions of Lord Kinross. Not that Hartland was wanting in affection; at times he was passionate in his love and admiration. But the old doubt was ever there, clouding his brightest moments. The doubt that cloyed the sweetness of her kisses darkened the radiance of her smile, making her very beauty seem less fair.

For more reasons than one, however, Frankie realised that she must give Toby his *congé*.

She came to the conclusion that Toby would be the better for a sojourn on the Continent, so she determined to get him a post at one of our foreign embassies. To that end she cultivated Horace Grendale with much tact and considerable assiduity.

That astute politician was charmed to accept her friendship. He had reason, so he thought, to feel very kindly towards Mrs. Norton. Owing to her intervention, his wife's volubility had been checked in time. Otherwise the consequences might have been serious. Pettigrew, I may mention, had conducted his Stock Exchange negotiations with skill and secrecy. No one ever discovered from whom he gained his information.

"If you could use your influence for young Ffolliott, Mr. Grendale, I should be awfully grateful." My cousin looked into Horace's eyes with a beautifully pathetic expression. "He's a nice boy, you know, and ought to do well. But," she paused, "he's foolish, and fancies himself in love, and—" she hesitated, "I've felt quite motherly towards him, Mr. Grendale. I assure you it was a terrible upset to me when I found out he'd mistaken my feeling for something different. I'm sure you understand, you're so sympathetic. Thank you," as Horace took her hand, doubtless to show his sympathy. "I knew you'd help me. And you think St. Petersburg? It's the only vacancy? Well, it's a long way, but perhaps that's all the better. When he's there he'll learn wisdom and forget me."

"The first he may do in time. The second"—Horace bowed over her hand—"is impossible."

Toby took his dismissal quietly.

"I fully understand," he said bitterly, "you've no further use for me, and so I have to go. You've heaps of admirers, Frankie, and your lovers are plentiful as blackberries. But there's this difference between me and the rest—they love and they admire you—why? Because they don't know you. But I," he paused, and drawing her to him clasped her in his arms. "I know you through and through. You're bad, bad as can be, and yet I love you, love you with every fibre of my body, and shall do so to my death. You'll send for me yet, Frankie, and when you do you'll find me ready. Kiss me a last kiss, a kiss from the woman who has ruined me." He drew her closer, and, with a cry of pity, she raised her face and clasped him round the neck.

And then he left her.

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Toby Ffolliott had passed out of her life and mine.

Kinross increased his vigilance as time went on. Frankie was held accountable for every hour of the day. If she ventured to go out unchaperoned there were black looks. She must neither drive, nor walk, nor call unattended. Lady Gaveston cordially approved of his lordship's stringency, and I am bound to say aided him to the best of her unamiable ability.

Frankie commenced to show signs of this severe treatment. She looked harassed, little lines crept into view about her mouth, and there were dark rings under her eyes.

"I can't bear it much longer, Cynthia," she said to me one night. "The suspense is killing. At any moment Kinross may hear how terribly I am involved in debt. Every post brings me letters demanding payment, some of the tradespeople have threatened to summon me. If only Kinross would go away for a bit I would raise some money and satisfy the most pressing claims. But he won't stir from me, and while he is in town I can do nothing. If he finds out that I deceived him about my debts he'll throw me over, and yet I can't move hand or foot to get the money to pay them. I sometimes think he has me watched; I can go nowhere without his discovering it."

"When do we leave town, Frankie?"

"We're due at Cowes in three weeks," she answered, "but unless I can manage to stave off my creditors we can't go at all."

The day after this conversation Frankie developed a headache. It came about three in the afternoon, just as we were about to start for Hurlingham, to see a polo match in which Chesterton was to take part. Kinross was much upset by my cousin's sudden indisposition, and talked about giving up the expedition. Frankie would not hear of such a thing, and finally, yielding to persuasions, he consented to go with me and Lady Gaveston, leaving Frankie to lie down in a darkened room.

When I returned that evening I found Frankie much improved in health and spirits.

"I've raised some cash, my dear," she said. "I gave my maid a holiday, and while the household thought me peacefully sleeping I slipped out, the key of my door in my pocket. How did I get the cash? Borrowed it on my jewels. I simply haven't got a trinket left! Hartland's diamonds and Fluffy's pins all had to go. I've not sold them, silly," as I gazed at her, in horrified amazement. "I can get them again when I pay the money. How much? Three thousand; enough to give me breathing time, at any rate."

Frankie's appearance at dinner next evening devoid of any jewellery created something of a sensation. Rich ornaments became her infinitely; hers was a beauty that could stand a costly setting. But she had never looked more lovely than that night, gowned in white and silver, lilies in her hair and at her breast.

Kinross approved her new-found simplicity. He grew quite enthusiastic about "beauty unadorned." But after a time he tired, or grew suspicious of the change.

"Why don't you wear the diamonds I gave you, Frankie?" he questioned; "what has become of that turquoise bracelet I sent you?"

My cousin parried the inquiries with naive quickness, but at last he would no longer be put off. He expressed a hope that she would on no account appear at Lady Daventry's party without the diamonds. It was to be an immensely swagger function, the last event of the season.

My cousin could not get the diamonds under two thousand pounds, the party was in ten days' time, and Kinross was more devoted in his attendance than ever.

Providence, in the person of one of Hartland's aunts, interposed on my cousin's behalf. The aunt in question was taken ill and wired to Kinross to come to her at Como. His lordship reluctantly obeyed.

Frankie, in the height of good spirits at her freedom, wired to Pettigrew to come and take her out to dinner. He turned up about half-past seven, with him a young American named Vernon P. Slade, a professional billiard player.

"It's sweet of you to come," said Frankie. "I propose we go to the Carlton, I want a real good time."

We had an awfully jolly evening. Vernon P. Slade was quite a charming person, and Pettigrew waxed enthusiastic over his marvellous skill with the cue.

"There isn't a player to touch him in England, Mrs. Norton, amateur or professional. There is only one man who can come within a mile of him, and that's your friend Chesterton. I watched him play the other evening at the club."

"Why not get up a match between him and your friend?" she said, laughing. "I won't own England can be beaten, even at billiards, without a trial. I'll back Chesterton to any extent."

"That's real sportsmanlike of you, Mrs. Norton," said Pettigrew approvingly. "If the match comes off I'll lay £3,000 upon Slade."

"I'll put a simliar amount on Chesterton. I don't bet as a rule, you know, Mr. Pettigrew, but in a case like this where one's patriotism is involved, I can't refuse."

"I'll see Chesterton to-morrow to fix it up," said Pettigrew.

Frankie smiled assent, and leaving Pettigrew for me to entertain, turned her fascinations upon Slade.

He was a good-looking fellow, there was character in his square jaw and steady eye. With all the quickness and avidity of the Yankee, his manner was quiet, his expression imperturbable. He did not fall a very easy victim to my cousin, but parried her soft speeches with wonderful self-possession. But I was not surprised—it was no more than I had expected, when in the course of a week he surrendered at discretion, and became a constant visitor to Pont Street.

The match between Slade and Chesterton was arranged to take place the evening before Lady Daventry's party. Frankie had written and told Kinross that for this once she felt compelled to disobey him, and had backed his friend for all she was worth. Hartland condoned the offence, and hoped to be back in time to see Chesterton carry all before him. In any case, he would return for Lady Daventry's affair.

The day before the match I discovered Slade and my cousin in a close and confidential attitude—she had clasped her hands round his arm and was gazing at him intently.

"It isn't much for you to do," she said; "one defeat won't spoil your reputation. Consider the match is purely a friendly affair."

"I've played a straight game all my life, Mrs. Norton," he said quietly, "and I always shall. If, as you say, you have backed Chesterton so heavily, that you will be unable to meet your losses, why don't you hedge? You can put an equal amount on me, you know, and that will make you safe either way."

"I can't—Lord Kinross would never forgive me. Besides, there's no one to take the offer. It's a purely friendly match, as I told you before."

Slade paused. "I'm terribly sorry for you," he said at last. "I'm not a rich man, Mrs. Norton, but if a few hundreds would help you?"

"Not a bit of use," she interrupted hastily.

"Well, then, I can do nothing. It's quite possible," and he smiled, "that I may be in bad form, or Chesterton may put up

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a better game than I anticipate. For your sake, I will hope for the worst."

He smiled again and pressed her hand. But for all his soft words he was adamant. Frankie could not move him.

At length the evening of the match arrived. It was to be held at Chesterton's house in Manchester Square, where there was a splendid billiard room. Frankie was resplendent in a wonderful gown of wine-coloured silk, veiled with rich lace, and held her head high despite her fears.

"I shan't be able to get my diamonds back in time to wear at Lady Daventry's if Slade wins," she remarked. "Kinross will surely discover what I have done with them. And then"—she shrugged her shoulders. "At all events," she added, "I mean to have a merry night even if it's my last."

The billiard room was very large and lofty and flooded with electric light. The green tables, the polished ivory balls, exercised a fascination over me, and when the game commenced I was fully as excited as the rest.

Three games under American rules were to be played of 200 up. Chesterton scored first with a break of 20. Slade followed with a break of 36. The Englishman, who was in fine form, rapidly ran up to 150. Slade failed to catch him up, and Chesterton, as Pettigrew said, romped in an easy winner of the first round.

The second game Slade made a brilliant start; he took and kept the lead, beating Chesterton by 50.

The third game was the most exciting. Each had scored a victory. This was a final test.

Chesterton played cautiously, his score crept slowly but surely to 80, 90, 100. The balls rolled monotonously, again and yet again, till his score nearly touched 150. It would take some skill on Slade's part to beat his record.

The American, with a tense look on his face, made a succession of brilliant strokes. He soon passed the first hundred and reached the second. He had eighty-five to make to win.

"He moistened his lips with his tongue and glanced towards the side-board where there was an array of decanters.

"Let me mix you something, Mr. Slade," said Frankie. "I'm a very good hand at American drinks. What do you say to a cocktail?"

"Thanks, very much, I should like it immensely!" he replied.

Frankie set about compounding the mixture. She took rather a long time over the business. The flavouring wouldn't come right, she said.

"It tastes first-class," said Slade. He drank it, and returned to the table.

For a while his play was brilliant as before, gradually, however, his wrist seemed to lose its power, he all but missed a stroke, and looked very white and fagged.

"You might open the window, the room is awfully hot!"

He looked so bad that Chesterton suggested he might like a rest, but he would not hear of it.

"I'm all right," he said irritably; "there's nothing the matter with me."

He took up the cue and struck wildly, sending the balls in all directions but the right. The game was over, Chesterton had won.

"Never saw such a smash-up in my life!" said Pettigrew. "What's come to you, Slade?"

"I'm beaten, that's all," said the American, too much of a sportsman to acknowledge that he was feeling awfully bad.

"You're ill, old chap!" Chesterton took his arm and led him from the room. Frankie and I were left with Pettigrew.

"Can't understand it a bit," said Hiram. "Never witnessed such a collapse in my life. It's just as if he was dying or faint or something!

"I shouldn't wonder if your cocktail made him queer, Mrs. Norton," he said joking. "English women don't know how to mix a drink."

Laughing, he took up Slade's glass—there was still a little of the mixture left—and examined the contents.

He tasted, and seemed to like the taste but little. His face grew very grave.

"It's very queer," he said, shaking his head, "very queer. Why," he dropped the glass and faced round quickly, "I believe it's drugged, and you"—he walked to Frankie and seized her wrist—"yes, you have drugged it!"

(What happens to Frankie will be told next Tuesday. This series began in No. 702 of Short Stories. Back numbers may be ordered through any newsagent.)

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

Beginning with a Tragedy and Ending with a Honeymoon.

"By just half a minute, sir," said the porter.

For the moment the man did not answer.

It was evident that he was more than vexed, that he was irritated and angry at his failure to catch the train.

He was a fairly well set-up man, of an age that it was hard to determine. Wrapped in a long, roomy, travelling cloak, the collar turned up above his ears, and wearing a big, black, soft felt hat, his face was all but indistinguishable.

He was too upright, too alert for an old man, but the deep, firm tones of his voice, as he at length addressed the sympathetic official, indicated someone with more than the usual share of decision of character, good or bad.

"The train just gone," he said, "is the very last which could possibly put me on board the *Campania* for New York, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir! The next will be just too late, by three hours."

"Um! Well, it can't be helped; get me a cab!"

His bidding was done, the two great cabin trunks being re-hoisted on to the roof of the "growler."

"Where to, sir?" asked the porter, tip-expectant.

"Ah! That's just it!" re-echoed the man.

"Beg pardon, sir! Where you came from, perhaps, sir!"

The man's face became absolutely livid; while he himself seemed suddenly to be transformed into hard, dumb stone.

Then the fit changed, and his face became scarlet with passion, his eyes almost bolting out of his head; he clenched and unclenched his hands as he flung words at the unfortunate porter, like as they had been deadly missiles.

"There! Tell me, you rascal! Why I should go there!"

"I can't tell you!" returned the nettled railway official; "and as to being a rascal, keep your bad language for somebody else as like's it better nor I do."

"Why, you impudent, loafing scoundrel! I'll complain to your masters and have your coat from off your back!"

The porter, as if determined to keep his temper, and so be on the prudently right side, made no reply, but having done his duty with regard to the luggage, walked away to another and newly-arrived cab. The man was about to enter his own vehicle when his Jehu roughly asked for directions.

The fare looked at the driver, who repeated his inquiry with an impatient insistence, which served, however, to irritate the other still more.

"Where to?" he snarled viciously. "Drive towards

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Paddington. Go along the New Road and—and Talbot Street, and I'll tell you when to stop."

"Talbot Street!" exclaimed cabby, half turning round. "Why that's where——"

"Never mind!" sharply interrupted the man, "do as you're told, and keep your remarks to yourself!"

Outside the station boys were shouting out the contents of the noon editions of the halfpenny evening papers.

"Terrible murder! Man stabbed to death in an hotel in the West End! Murder!"

The man in the four-wheeler leant out of the cab window and beckoned to a boy.

"*Evening Express* there!"

"Here y'are, sir! Terrible murder, sir!"

"Give me the paper, you noisy young blackguard! There's the money!" throwing a penny into the road.

"Who're you callin' a blaggard? You're a nice old cup o' tea, *you* are!"

The boy's abuse followed the cab, but the man, though he must have heard it till it died away in the distance, took no notice, but sat well back in the shadow, his eyes fixed on the paragraph which described the tragedy at Blacklock's Private Hotel, Talbot Street, Edgware Road.

* * * * * * *

Two women, by their striking likeness to one another, obviously sisters, sat at the open window of a second floor front room of number twenty-three, Talbot Street, Edgware Road.

But in spite of the likeness between the two there was as noticeable a dissimilarity.

One, evidently the elder, expressed in the lines of her face, in the sad look in her eyes, and in her careworn appearance generally, the strain of responsibility and thought for others.

The younger girl was, or seemed to be, altogether different.

A complete contrast in appearance to her sister, she was tall and fair beyond the ordinary, and in every way of a more intellectual, if restless, type of character.

"Gracie," the latter was saying, "I cannot rest. I think I shall go out."

"Go out, Rita! You know this is your rest day! Don't, please don't!"

"Nonsense, dear. I will just stroll and meet Leo; he always walks home on Saturday afternoons, and I shall be sure to catch him the left side of Oxford Street near the Circus."

"Well, I think Leo Bryant ought not to encourage you, Rita, in playing these mad pranks," said Grace Ellington. "You never seem to be for five minutes together in your home. He imagines that just because he, as a man and a journalist, is under the necessity of being abroad at all hours, and can do it with impunity, you, a mere girl, can do the same, and with like results."

"And Leo is right, you dear old fidget! Any way, I'm going, and we shall be back in a couple of hours, in time for an early cup of tea."

As Rita Ellington quietly closed the street door behind her, and halted a moment on the bottom step to button her glove, a four-wheel cab, with two heavy trunks on the top, passed slowly up the street.

As it passed where she stood, the white, black-bearded face of a man appeared at the window nearest her.

It was only for an instant that she saw it, but long enough to be able to recognise it.

For she remembered that only the night before, while as on this afternoon sitting at the open window of their front room, she had seen about half-past twelve, at the centre, second-floor window of the hotel opposite, the same white, black-bearded face pressed for a second against the window pane.

At the time it had startled her by reason of its expression of weird terror and horror-stricken apprehension.

Mixed, too, with this coward look was a cruel, vindictive glint in the eyes, which she could plainly see in the light of the moon that beamed down from overhead, sheer between the two sides of the street upon the centre of the roadway.

Now up the street came the raucous voices of the newsboys, crying out—"Terrible murder in the West-end! Murder of a gentleman in a Private Hotel in Talbot Street, Edgware Road! Paper!"

They had kept the affair very quiet over the way; for although a certain amount of unusual bustle and running to and fro had been noticeable, not a whisper of the fact had leaked out, until it was made public through the evening early editions.

Rita Ellington had that rare gift among women of being able to come to logical conclusions on most matters, and this gift it was that caused her to take these two separate views of a man's face, and to make of them two well-forged, unbreakable links which should connect themselves with the murdered man still lying in the centre, second-floor room of Blackstock's Private Hotel.

And the man in the cab went on his way, little heeding that a woman's wit was awake to follow in his footsteps; that a woman's hand was set to the task, from which she would not, because she could not shrink.

* * * * * * *

Rita Ellington never did anything like the majority of other girls, and when, therefore, walking on and on, she failed to meet her lover, she did not hesitate to make the whole journey to Fleet Street right to the door of the office of the *Daily Phonograph*, the journal upon the staff of which Leo Bryant was a special news reporter.

"No, Miss!" said the commissionaire, in reply to her inquiry. "Mr. Bryant isn't here; he went away in a cab more than two hours ago."

"You don't know if he is likely to be back here, do you?"

"Can't say Miss! But as he's gone on that West End murder case, near Edgware Road, it's sure to be very late when he does come."

"I might have guessed that he would have been detailed," said Grace, half to herself and half to the doorkeeper. "Well, please tell Mr. Bryant, if he should come, that I called—Miss Ellington—and—and that's all. Good afternoon!"

She stood a moment in the doorway, undecided as to whether she should walk home or take a cab. The latter was somewhat in the nature of an unwonted luxury, and she was on the point of bracing herself to face the inevitable, when a hansom dashed up, a young fellow, tall, stiffly-built, and breathless almost with energy, descending quickly from it, and well-nigh knocking Rita down in the semi-darkness of his impetuosity.

"Rita! What's brought you right up here?"

"Nothing of any importance, Leo, except that—that something I cannot quite explain, is worrying me a bit."

"Well. I shall not be ten minutes, go into the room there on the right of the passage and I will come to you, and we'll go home together."

Leo Bryant was a first-floor lodger in twenty-three Talbot Street, the house where the Ellington girls lived.

In less than ten minutes he came and bore her off into the crowded street, and, as they decided to walk, they soon found themselves in Holborn, with their faces set westward.

"Do you know the job I'm on, dear?" he asked her abruptly.

"That alleged murder case at Blackstock's in our street, isn't it?"

"Yes, but how did you find out?"

"The old doorkeeper at your office told me."

"Ah, of course. Well, Rita, it is one of the most extraordinary cases I have ever had to tackle, and my experience, for a youngster, hasn't been so limited. It completely fogs me."

"Do they suspect anybody?"

"Well, there's the rub! There is absolutely no one upon whom they can lay a finger as having been likely, from motive

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or interest, to kill this man. Except, perhaps, a man who left the hotel this morning, and there is really nothing definite to connect him with the crime."

"Leo, you love me very much? At least you say you do, so I suppose I must believe it."

"My darling, you know that I love you better even than life itself."

"Then, if love be life, we—you and I, Leo—shall live for ever, because my faith is that love can never die."

"Dear heart!" said Leo tenderly, and inclining his head towards her, so that her hair touched his cheek. (They were passing through quiet Staple Inn, so the caress was possible). "What ails you to-day? And what earthly connection can there be between this wretched murder case and you and me?"

"More, perhaps, than we should care to acknowledge, dear," she answered him.

That her strange manner should startle him was not wonderful, seeing that Grace had told him more than once of her sister's almost unnatural proneness of late to do and say things peculiar and out of the common.

"What makes you think so, dearie?" he asked, without putting too much earnestness into the query. He knew that if he was to be successful in guiding her mind back into a calmer and quieter channel, it must be by refusing to take her too seriously.

"Only something I saw last night, and something else that I saw a couple of hours ago. But, Leo, if I told you what I think these two things really mean, you would simply laugh at me, and so—well, I won't tell you."

"That is unkind, dear!"

"No, Leo, there may be nothing in it after all, and should that be so, I should regret having said anything to you about it."

"You will at least tell me why you put that question to me just now as to my love for you?"

"Oh, I don't know, dear; I fancy it was because in case anything should happen to me—to us—it is pleasant to know that love, at least, is deathless."

"Happen to you! What can happen?"

"Who knows? But there, dear, we won't discuss the subject further. I am not quite myself to-day, and maybe it is all fancy on my part and foolish moonshine."

"Very well, my darling, if it pleases you to say nothing—say nothing. We will hail the first hansom, and get home in double-quick time."

At the corner of Tottenham Court Road they found a hansom, and in a quarter of an hour were landed at Talbot Street.

"Remember!" said Leo to her as they parted in the hall, "you are not to worry your poor little head with any theories, good, bad, or indifferent on the subject of this hotel affair!"

Before having his tea Bryant crossed the street, and exchanged a few words with the policeman on special duty outside the hotel opposite.

He knew that the body of the murdered man, upon whom nothing had been found by which he could be identified, had been within the past two hours removed by the police to the nearest mortuary, yet on the chance that anything fresh in the shape of explanatory evidence might have transpired and which he could add as late "copy" to his already delivered-in account, he thought it advisable to "tap" the constable ahead of the other newspaper scribes.

The officer knew the *Daily Phonograph's* special reporter and responded readily to his inquiries.

"No, sir, there's nothing new, and I don't fancy as there will be."

"Well, if anything turns up, you know where I live; just run across and knock me up, wil you?"

"Right you are, sir! Thank you, sir!"

This was for the customary tip, which in these cases is always a source of strength to the pressman angling for news.

Seeing that there was nothing more to be gleaned, Leo Bryant went in, had his tea, and a pipe, and sat by the open window in company with his thoughts.

* * * * *

It was just after filling his second pipe that young Bryant imagined he heard the street door shut to, but, quick as he was, he failed to see more than the back of a woman walking rapidly up the street towards the main road.

For an instant he thought it looked like Rita. To make sure, he ran upstairs and knocked at the Ellington's sitting-room door.

Grace opened it.

"Has Rita gone out?" Leo asked.

"Gone out! No! She went to bed directly after her tea."

"Then it couldn't have been her," he said, half-musingly. "Would you mind, Grace, making sure that she is in? I'm a bit anxious about her. That's all!"

Grace Ellington came quickly back again, her face white with apprehension.

"You are right, Leo. She *is* out. Oh, where can she be? What can she be doing?"

"Stay you there, Grace! I'll go and look for her."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before, seizing a cap, he was down the stairs and out into the street.

"Did you see which way that lady turned who left twenty-three just now?" he asked his friend the policeman.

"The young lady as you came in with awhile ago, sir? Oh, yes, when she got to the top of the street she turned to the right, Kilburn way!"

"Thanks! Good night!" and Leo Bryant sprinted for all he was worth in the same direction.

To keep his eyes on both sides of the road, in his search for Rita, was no easy matter, the thoroughfare being even more than usually crowded.

As he neared Maida Vale, however, it got quieter, but not a trace of Rita could he see.

Kilburn reached and without any result, he felt both alarmed and at a total loss what to do.

Then it suddenly occurred to him to hark back, as it was improbable that Rita should have made so long, and apparently so purposeless a journey.

On his return to Talbot Street he was met with the news of the arrest of the alleged murderer of the man at Blackstock's.

"It's only a case of suspicion," said the policeman to Leo, "but pretty thick suspicion at that. If it don't hang him, may I never get my stripes!"

It appeared that the police, who naturally suspected the prisoner, but lost track of him after his missing of the boat train, came up with their quarry just as he was boarding the Havre steamer. He made no resistance, and at the moment no statement.

Leo Bryant's first duty being to his paper, he collected all the information relative to the case, posted off with it to Fleet Street, and did not inquire about Rita till his return.

The story he had to hear was most extraordinary.

In the first place he learnt that Rita had returned within an hour after his departure in quest of her, refusing to go to bed until she had seen him and spoken with him.

Late though it now was, he found both sisters up, and evidently waiting for him. In his position as Rita's promised husband,

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no one of the three saw anything out of the way in his sitting and talking with the girls at this hour.

"Leo, I have seen my father to-night!" were Rita's first words.

He thought almost that she was ill, for he knew, as a matter of fact, that Mr. Ellington had not been heard of for ten years or more, he having some time before his wife's death sailed for parts unknown.

"Your father, dear! Why——!"

"Yes, I know, but I have not seen him alive, Leo—but dead,—in the mortuary at Church Street."

"Good Heavens—have you been there to-night? And your father?"

"He is the man murdered at Blackstock's last night. I cannot exactly say what it was that impelled me to go and see—see—him, except, perhaps, that I have lately been thinking much of poor old thoughtless dad."

"Do you know that they have caught the man who is said to have killed him?"

"The man I saw at the window—the man I saw in the cab! There is nothing extraordinary in it. A child could have pieced so easy a criminal puzzle together."

* * * * *

In his subsequent confession the prisoner, Sylvanus Hemp, told a remarkable tale.

He and the dead man had, it seemed, been partners on a "claim" in the Nevada silver fields.

The other, Robert Ellington, but known as Robert Pateman, discovered a rich "pocket," for a time keeping the discovery to himself.

Accidentally finding this out, Hemp planned to murder and rob Pateman, but the latter, secretly concealing his property, managed to elude his scheming partner and to make off coastwards.

Reaching New York—Hemp well on his track—he sailed for London, putting up on his arrival at Blackstock's.

There the two accidentally met and patched up a sort of peace. Hemp waited a favourable opportunity to effect his purpose, namely, the getting at the proceeds of his partner's "find" at any risk.

It came, he surprising Pateman when half asleep, and demanding a share of the money. On the other's refusal to disgorge a single coin, Hemp stabbed him with his own knife, which lay at hand upon a small table by the bed.

Hemp then left the house after paying his bill, deposited his luggage at a railway cloakroom, and kept quiet till it was time to catch the night mail for Liverpool.

He also in the interim bought a passage to New York at a London agency of the Cunard company.

That was all there was to be said about it, and he was now prepared to pay the penalty of unsuccessful crime.

This he did in due course.

* * * * *

A month or two after the events above related, a couple, evidently newly-married, took their seats in a second-class compartment of the limited mail at Euston.

The girl was tall and fair, and her companion had the look of one who might be relied upon in the tightest of emergencies.

"You're sure you are comfortable, dear?" said Leo Bryant.

"Comfortable, Leo! I'm simply happy, and that's better, for it includes the other."

"So it does, Rita, and all you have to do now is to forget everything that is connected with the old days, and let Gracie see that we are the happiest couple in the world."

"Dear old Gracie! She will be thinking of us all the time we are honeymooning in the Isle of Man."

"Well, I'll tell you what I did, dear. I told her on the quiet that we should expect her down in a week from to-day. Does that please you?"

"Leo!—it is just what I could have planned, but as your dea it is better than best."

As the train steamed out of the station he asked her:

"And you feel safe, darling?"

"Perfectly safe," she answered him, "now and for always."

Ralph Enderby.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 16. — The year promises much annoyance and anxiety to those whose birthdays fall to-day. Losses in business and through false friends. Sickness in home circle.

Girls will need great care in their love affairs, and should act with extra caution and prudence.

The day is evil for marriage and pleasure parties; not good to engage maid servants.

A child born to-day will be careless, fond of pleasure, but of good understanding, and will get on in life by its wit.

September 17.—Those celebrating birthdays to-day will have a changeable and uncertain year. Unfavourable for those in employ; better for aged people, landlords, farmers, and builders.

Girls born in the early morning must beware of deceit from opposite sex.

The day is not good to ask favours, to speculate, or travel. Beware of accident near nine a.m. and five p.m.

A child born here will be fond of change, extravagant, and should keep in the employ of others.

September 18.—The year will be rather favourable for health, business, and finances. Some trouble in domestic circle.

Girls will meet with disappointment in love affairs and have some strange adventures if born near six p.m.

The day is good for commencing new undertakings, buying and selling, consulting lawyers, doctors, and military men.

A child born here will be fortunate with business; have an active mind and keen wit.

September 19.—An unfortunate birthday; the year will be full of change. Health will need care, and the temper should be kept well in hand.

Love affairs will bring worry and anxiety; not a good time to marry.

The day is evil for social affairs, letter writing, and dealing with aged people. Guard against chill and cold.

A child born to-day will be cunning and crafty, lack self-confidence, and will not make much headway in life.

September 20.—The influences for the year are not good; losses and worry in business. Do not lend to friends; avoid speculation.

Girls will find love affairs of a quiet order.

The day is not good to buy or speculate; good to study metaphysical subjects, visit palmists, and spiritualists.

A child born to-day will be improvident; the mind will be original and fond of mysticism.

September 21.—Rather favourable for business; beware of accident and law. The year will be fair for health and domestic affairs.

Girls will find love affairs very interesting, and, if engaged, may marry this year.

A child born here will be cheerful, quick, and rather fortunate in life. Should insure against accident.

September 22.—A favourable year for those in business; if in employ promotion is promised. The health will need some care.

Love affairs are rather promising to girls; those born near one p.m. will become engaged, or marry.

The day is good for asking favours, seeking employment, dealing with bankers and shipping agents.

Asturel.

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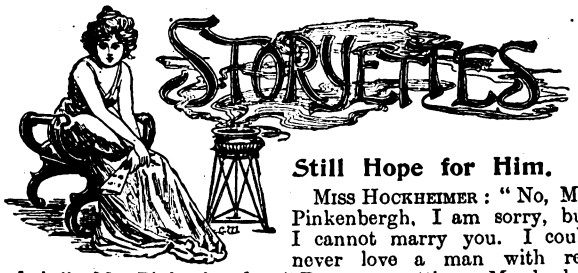

Still Hope for Him.

MISS HOCKHEIMER: "No, Mr. Pinkenbergh, I am sorry, but I cannot marry you. I could never love a man with red hair." Mr. Pinkenbergh: "Dot vas notting. My barber tells me dot at the rate my hair is falling oudt I vill be completely bald in one year."

More Bacteria.

MOTHER: "What's that smacking noise in the parlour?" Studious boy (who goes to school): "It's Ada and her young man exchanging microbes."

Very Probably.

MRS. SMITH: "I declare this leg of mutton has shrunk away almost to nothing." Willie Smith: "Perhaps, mamma, it came off the same sheep as my flannel did."

Nature Sure to Compensate.

ETHEL (looking at the statue of the Venus of Milo): "It seems to me, Maud, that the women in ancient times had larger waists than they have now!" Maud: "Well, perhaps the men had longer arms."

The Youthful Cynic.

LITTLE DICK: "You can say what you please about boys, but men is polite, anyhow. Men always gives up their seats to ladies." Little Dot: "That's cause sittin' down makes their trousers bag at the knees."

He Remained.

SHE (sadly): "Well, if we must part, let us part friends. Good-bye, and may all that's good go with you." He (decidedly): "If all that's good went with me you would not remain here." Then she smiled and laid her head on his shoulder, and he remained.

Not a Laughing Matter.

LITTLE JOHNNY: "That young man who comes to see you must be pretty poor company. He hasn't any sense of humour." Sister: "Why do you think so?" Little Johnny: "I told him all about the funny way you rush about and bang doors when you get in a temper, and he didn't laugh a bit."

Looking for Trouble.

LADY (to husband): "My dear, did you remember to order a ton of coal to-day?" Husband: "Yes." Lady: "And my shoes?" Husband: "Yes, and" (peering out of the window) "there is a truck backing up to the door now, but its too dark to see whether it has the coal or the shoes."

Not Very Substantial.

MR. NEWEDD: "How is that, my love? Nothing in the house to eat? I gave you money this morning." Mrs. Newedd: "Yes, I know; but I ran against the most exquisitely charming dinner gong—awfully fashionable, you know—and I couldn't resist the temptation to buy it." "But what shall we do for dinner?" "We can listen to the gong."

Just the Difference.

DAUGHTER (delightedly): "And did you really consent?" Father: "Consent? My stars! I had to. The man demanded your hand like a highwayman holding up a coach. Consent? My good gracious! I believe, from the way he looked and acted, he would have knocked me down if I hadn't." Daughter: "Oh, it can't be. You must have been dreaming. Why, when he proposed to me he trembled so that he could hardly speak, and he looked so weak and nervous I had to hurry up and say 'Yes' to keep him from fainting."

Saved and Lost.

"I HEAR Smith has got married to a Naples lady." "Yes; he went south to save his lungs and lost his heart."

The Cook's Question.

"I WONDER if his heart is fired—he calls here every night. I wonder—are his calls inspired by love or appetite?"

A Tedious Business.

JUDGE (to prisoner): "We are now going to read to you a list of your former convictions." Prisoner: "In that case perhaps your lordship will allow me to sit down."

The Initial Proceeding.

MR. BASHFUL: "If you were going to invite a young lady to go to the theatre, how would you begin?" Mr. Swiftly "By pawning my watch to pay for the tickets."

An Urgent Call.

SHE: "One of the legs of our sofa is broken. Will you come at once and mend it?" Carpenter: "I am very busy just now, miss. Won't to-morrow do?" "Oh, dear no. It must be ready by 7.30 this evening."

The Meanest Man.

PENDENNIS: "Who is the meanest man you know?" Warrington: "Old Closefist. Whenever there is a crowd at the railway booking-office he always gets on the outside, so as to be the last to part with his money."

Mr. Softly Left Hurriedly.

BOBBY: "My sister will be down in a few minutes, Mr. Softly; she's upstairs rehearsing." Mr. Softly: "W—what is s—she rehearsing, Bobby?" Bobby: "I don't know exactly; but she's standing in front of the mirror and blushing and saying, 'Oh, Mr. Softly—er—this is so sudden!'"

Agricultural.

THE meek young agriculturist had been talking with great frankness to the handsome young woman, but she didn't quite believe him. "Oh," she exclaimed, "you are chaffing me!" "My dear young lady," he responded, "you were never more mistaken. With wheat at its present price, it would be an insult to offer you chaff."

Amateur Golf.

FIRST YOUNG LADY (learning golf): "Dear me! What shall I do now? This ball is in a hole." Second Young Lady (looking over a book of instructions): "Let—me—see. I presume you will have to take a stick of the right shape to get it out." First Young Lady: "Oh, yes, of course, see if you can find one shaped like a dust-pan and brush."

His Mother Could.

A CONJURER was recently performing the old trick of producing eggs from a pocket-handkerchief, when he remarked to a little boy in fun: "I say, my boy, your mother can't get eggs without hens, can she?" "Of course she can," replied the boy. "Why, how is that?" asked the conjurer. "She keeps ducks!" replied the boy, amid roars of laughter.

Breaking it Gently.

"REALLY, Mr. Stalate," she protested, "you have given me four hours of your time this evening." "Why—er—upon my word! So I have. The hours pass like minutes when I am with you." "You were telling me that since your promotion your time is valuable." "Yes." "Well, papa doesn't allow me to accept expensive presents from young men."

Unpremeditated.

MAIDEN AUNT: "I hope you did not make any chance acquaintances in the train, Maud?" Miss Maud Brisk: "I am sorry to say, auntie, that I sat for a little time in the lap of an Episcopal bishop, and watched a stockbroker stand on his head in the lunch basket of a total stranger." Aunt: "Horrors, child, what can you mean?" Maud: "It was not premeditated, I assure you, Auntie; but when our train collided with another, we were so upset by the shock that we were hardly responsible for what we did."

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In Search of an Heiress.

A Charming Little Story of a British Consul's Luck.

THE Hon. Philip Howard, bachelor, British Consul at Gon, never knew exactly how he succeeded in securing his appointment, but he did know that in applying for it, he had vaguely imagined that he was to have nothing to do except to draw his meagre salary and amuse himself. But, after six months at his post, he had made three important discoveries. Firstly, that there was a great deal of serious work to do; secondly, that he, being ignorant of the language, was absolutely incompetent to do it; and thirdly, that he was hopelessly in love with Mlle. Marcelle du Pont, the young lady whom he had engaged to teach him French. Marcelle du Pont was a sweet, gentle girl of twenty, with a fair face and a voice that breathed music. After the third lesson she saw the love-light in Philip's eyes.

"Mademoiselle," Philip said abruptly, "what is French for heart?"

"*Cœur, monsieur,*" she replied.

"*Bien,*" rejoined Philip; and how would you say 'with my whole heart?'"

"*De tout mon cœur, monsieur,*" Marcelle answered demurely.

"And how would you say 'I love you?'"

"*Je vous aime, monsieur.*"

"Good," cried Philip; then looking her squarely in the face, he said, "*Mademoiselle, je vous aime de tout mon cœur.*"

"Monsieur's accent is very bad," observed Marcelle naively.

But that was five months ago. Last night under the silent stars she had said to him, "*Oui, Philip, je t'adore,*" as only a French woman honestly in love could say it. Thus it was that Hon. Philip Howard, British Consul at Gon, on a salary of £300 a year, found himself engaged to be married to the prettiest and one of the poorest girls in French Switzerland, for Marcelle du Pont, although she gave music lessons, did not even own a piano. And, what was worse, Government changes were likely to take place in a few months, and Philip's tenure of office was already a dissolving view.

"It would be just like them to kick me out on my wedding-day," he groaned; "why haven't we got some money?" And Philip, with a heavy heart, turned to his London mail which had just arrived. Among other letters he found the following:

"London, Oct. 3, 189—. To the British Consul, Gon.

"DEAR SIR,—The late William Markham, a merchant of this city, received some fifteen years ago from one of your predecessors a communication in regard to the case of a child, Eva Cottram, whom it appears was deserted by her mother at Nice in 1878, and who was subsequently taken to Gon by the nurse to whom her mother had intrusted her. The grandfather of this girl has just died and left her the bulk of his estate amounting to about £50,000. If you can find any trace of her at Gon, or elsewhere, we would be greatly obliged if you would communicate at once with the undersigned.

"Yours very truly, BLAND AND JONES, Solicitors."

"Why didn't I find Eva Cottram, the heiress, and fall in love with her instead of Marcelle du Pont, French teacher of music and languages?" grumbled Philip. Then he went to his bookcase and took down the great record-book bearing on the outside page this descriptive title:

"Record of Births—Deaths—Marriages and Other Happenings of Personal Interest in the Consular District of Gon. From 1876 to 189—."

As he was looking through the index, the door of the consulate opened and Mlle. du Pont entered.

"It is time for your lesson, Monsieur," she said, with a certain gentle reserve which she always maintained with Philip when acting in her capacity as his French teacher, even in spite of their engagement.

"You must let the lesson go to-day and help me with something else," said Philip. "Read this," and he handed her the letter he had just received, which Marcelle read with undisguised interest.

"It is an opportunity to make some money if you find her, is it not, Philip?" she cried enthusiastically. "Certainly she would be generous if you should put such a great fortune into her hands."

"I hope so," said Philip. "I think I might legally ask at least three per cent.; that would be £1,500."

"We need fear nothing with £1,500 in the bank."

"No," said Philip, "but we haven't discovered the girl's whereabouts yet, and I doubt if we ever shall."

Meanwhile he had turned to page 106 of the big record book. Here he found the following entry:

"COTTRAM—June 13, 1878: Eva Cottram, two years of age, born at Lucerne of English parents as attested by her birth certificate, was this day brought to this Consulate by one Marie Barbier, of No. 3 Rue des Grottes, Gon, who states that she was formerly employed as '*gouvernante*' at the Hotel des Anges, Nice; that on the 2nd day of March, 1878, there came to the hotel, Robert Cottram and Emily Cottram, his wife, and that they had with them their infant child, Eva; that they engaged her, the said Marie Barbier, as governess, and that she immediately entered into their service; that on the 6th day of April, Mr. and Mrs. Cottram left the hotel, saying they were going to Monte Carlo, that instead, they went to Paris; and from there wrote to her sending five hundred francs and begging her to keep their child until they came for it. They gave no explanation of their strange conduct, and in May, 1878, Marie Barbier saw an account of a railway wreck at Dijon, in France, and learnt that among the killed were Mr. and Mrs. Cottram. It is presumed that they were on their way back to Nice to get their child.

"(Signed) "BENJAMIN HEMMICK, Consul."

A second entry was as follows:

"August 3, 1878.—Since making the above entry, I have communicated with William Markham, in London, father of Mrs. Robert Cottram, telling him of the presence of his grandchild here and asking him what disposition he desired should be made of the little one. He answered me curtly, stating that his daughter had eloped with a blackguard, and that he would assume no responsibility for the fruit of such a marriage. Mademoiselle Marie Barbier agrees to keep the child upon condition that she may adopt it as her own, to which I have consented, and she now has it in her possession. She is an honourable and industrious woman with some savings of her own and a respectable home at No. 3 Rue des Grottes.

"(Signed) BENJAMIN HEMMICK. Consul."

"It is a very sad story," said Philip softly, as he finished reading the record aloud to Marcelle. "I hope I shall be able to find the poor girl; you must help me, Marcelle; we must look at once for Marie Barbier, the governess."

"I happen to know Mlle. Marie Barbier very well," said Marcelle quietly.

"What!" cried Philip. "Do you mean it?"

"Undoubtedly, monsieur," said Marcelle, "but she is no longer Marie Barbier; her name now is Marie Barbier du Pont. I have just left her, and she, too, had received a letter from London. She asked me to bring a paper and show you. Have the kindness to examine it, if you please."

"What is this?" cried Philip excitedly, as he hastily scanned the document which Marcelle had handed him.

"It is a birth certificate, Monsieur le Consul," answered Marcelle, "my own birth certificate. I am the adopted daughter of Marie Barbier du Pont," and as Philip read from the paper the name "Eva Cottram," she buried her head upon his shoulder and burst into tears. **B. A. Ridgley.**

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NEW SERIAL STARTS IN THREE WEEKS' TIME.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By Henry Farmer.

Tom Jackson Supplies a Link to the Chain.

"AND that, gentlemen," said Crump, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "represents my plan of campaign. I should be very grateful to either of you for any suggestions or improvements."

His two visitors shook their heads.

"Let it stand at that, Mr. Crump," said one of them, in a low voice.

After knocking, Mrs. Cobb entered with letters.

"The last post's just come in, Mr. Penworthy!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Cobb. We shall be going out after our suppers; but I have my key."

He sorted through his correspondence and selected a letter, addressed in pencil, and bearing the London post-mark. Its appearance suggested that it had been written under difficulties.

"From Grogan," said the little man, after Mrs. Cobb's departure. "Just listen to this, gentlemen: 'F. left his rooms this morning for Chancery Lane, and called in at Holbeck Chambers. Mr. Lewis Masters, Turf Accountant and Commission Agent not at home, but expected back to-morrow afternoon or evening. F. then proceeded to the Central Bank, and drew out about a hundred and fifty pounds in notes and gold. He is back at his rooms now. Am pencilling this not a stone's throw away.—G.'"

"It looks to me," commented Crump, as he tore up the letter, "very much as if there had been a split, and that Mr. Faversham meditates a trip abroad. This Mr. Lewis Masters, can either of you tell me anything about him?"

"H'm," said one of his visitors, "he does a big betting business. He calls himself Masters; but that's not his real name, and he's not an Englishman. He's a Dutchman, and his real name's Meister. He's got a partner who has offices at Flushing. A lot of English money goes over there."

"Exactly," said Crump thoughtfully. "Has Mr. Masters a clean sheet, do you know?"

"Yes, and no! He's never been convicted; but some little time ago he was brought up for paying a betting debt with bank-notes that had been stolen. However, he swore black and blue that they had come to him in the ordinary way of business, and there was no proof against him."

Crump's eyes seemed to light up suddenly. He opened his lips; then closed them with a snap. He had all but given utterance to a conclusion.

"Could you tell me," he said, after a pause, "what kind of a man this Masters is? I mean his character?"

"Well, I saw something of him when I was doing racecourse work. He's one of your blustering, bullying sort; but an arrant cur at heart."

"Thank you. That is a piece of information that may come in useful, if at some future time I should have dealings with him!"

"Mr. Crump," said the other detective eagerly, "might I ask what's passing through your mind?"

The little man hesitated.

"Wilcox," he said eventually, "if it should ultimately turn out that Mr. Lewis Masters was the medium through whom the diamonds and bank-notes, stolen from Mr. Mansfield's safe, were disposed, I should not be overwhelmed with surprise. But I will not commit myself further than this!"

There was a knock on the door, and Tom Jackson entered.

"Come in, Tom. Shut the door behind you. Let me introduce you. These two gentlemen, Inspectors Winton and Wilcox, have heard all about you and Fred."

Tom Jackson went stiff and saluted. They were great names, these! The inspectors nodded.

"Mr. Crump," said Winton, "has spoken very highly of you, Jackson."

The young constable flushed a little.

"Only carried out his orders, sir!"

"Anything to report, Tom?"

"I've just seen Railton. He's been questioning me about you, Mr. Crump!"

"Oh, indeed!" said the little man, a shadowy look of annoyance flitting across his face.

"Said he'd heard that Fred and I were chummy with you, and wanted to know what sort you were?"

"And you said?"

Tom flushed again.

"Well, you see, having an idea that he was a bit suspicious, I—I said, well, I said——"

Crump was chuckling now.

"Out with it, Tom!"

"Well, I said that you were a good-hearted, but rather a stupid old buffer!"

Crump threw himself back in his chair, and laughed himself red in the face.

"Good, Tom," he chuckled, "good! Stupid old buffer—good, very good indeed!"

Poor Tom looked very uncomfortable indeed.

"Then," he went on, "he wanted to know if you have ever been connected with the police force in any way!"

"And you said, Tom?"

"Nothing for a bit. I just laughed. That seemed to reassure him. Then I said that you'd no more been a policeman, than he, Railton, had been a cracksman. Then he laughed. And then, well, I spun a bit of a yarn about you having spent most of your life in the country, flower and fruit growing. And somehow, when I parted with him, he seemed happier in his mind."

Crump and the inspectors sighed in unison, sighs of relief.

"Anything else, Tom?"

"Nothing to do with The Firs; but you've heard me talk of old Rumbey that sometimes goes on the drink for a fortnight at a time, and prefers sleeping in ditches and hedges and the hollows of trees to a decent bed? He was so bad this evening that I had to take him to the station. It was a bit difficult to catch what he was saying, but it seems that he was sleeping in the wood that night poor Vance was drowned, and he kept on mumbling——"

Crump's eyes were glowing like stars.

"What?" he said sharply.

"Mind you, he's very much the worse for liquor; but he kept on mumbling something to the effect that he was in the wood on the night that Vance was drowned, and that if he had cared to come forward at the inquest, he could have told

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coroner and jury something that would have opened their eyes for them, and given them something to think about; but when I asked what it might be, he turned nasty and showed fight. He's a queer sort, old Rumbey: He's thought by many not to be right in his head, and when he's in liquor, he carries on like a madman. They say that, many years ago, he was crossed in love, and that was what made him take to drink, and living like some wild man of the woods. They call him 'Old Hedgehog' in the village."

"And," questioned Crump, "he made no more definite statement than what you have just told us?"

"No."

"He will be brought up before the magistrates to-morrow?"

"Yes. It will be a matter of fourteen days."

Crump glanced at the inspectors.

"We shall know where to look for him then, and, perhaps, when he is sober, we shall be able to extract something more definite from him. I am much obliged to you, Tom, for this piece of information. It may prove that you have supplied me with a very much wanted missing link; though I mustn't allow myself to be too sanguine. Drunken men are prone to make irresponsible statements; yet it is remarkable how Rumbey's statement, vague as it is, corroborates certain discoveries and suspicions of mine."

He glanced again at the inspectors, who nodded significantly.

"But I think the time has come to enlighten you, Tom."

As yet Jackson knew nothing of Crump's suspicions on the subject of how Vance had met her death, nor of his investigations and discoveries; but before he left the cottage, he had been enlightened.

"A promising young fellow," said Crump, after his departure, "he and that rascally young nephew of mine are great favourites with me." He glanced at his watch. And now gentlemen, I think we have time to smoke one more pipe in comfort before sallying forth. The fact that Mr. Seaton Revelle is supposedly indisposed with influenza inclines me to think that we may not pass a fruitless night. But perhaps you would prefer cigars. Personally, I'm going to indulge in a strong cup of tea; but there is whisky on the premises for those who prefer it."

The inspectors voted for tea also. Mrs. Cobb had retired to bed, before Crump, having turned out the light, quietly led the way out of the cottage. The three men made their way towards The Firs together, only separating, according to a pre-arranged plan, when the building loomed out indistinctly through the dark, to take up their respective stations.

"I sincerely trust," were Crump's last words before parting with his colleagues, "that our efforts to-night will be attended with success!"

SEATON REVELLE GETS UP AT MIDNIGHT.

THROUGHOUT the day Revelle had kept to his bed. The local doctor, who had been summoned, was rather puzzled as to the exact nature of his complaint, owing to the fact that his pulse was normal, and there was no feverishness; but his complainings of aching limbs and a violent headache, and "influenza" being a safe card for a doctor to play when in doubt, he had played it, as Revelle fully intended him to do. After the doctor's departure, Revelle had cracked a bottle of champagne, and smoked a couple of the cigars that were so highly approved of by Railton. This helped to while away the monotony of his self-imposed imprisonment.

He felt in need of a stimulant. He was conscious of a sense of failure; he was uneasy in his mind about Benny Beard. The languid air of unconcern that he had worn in the presence of his one-time partner had been a finely-assumed mask. Men's consciences, he repeatedly told himself, were uncertain, treacherous things sometimes. He regretted now that he had not come to a more definite understanding with Benny before his departure. And it was Esther that had awakened Benny's conscience. He felt the irony of it all, and inwardly writhed. It added to his bitterness. She had fooled him, he told himself, now she had caused a breach, possibly a dangerous breach, between him and his former partner and tool.

"When I've pulled off to-night's little business," he muttered half-aloud, "and if all goes well—pah! It's sure to go off all right; I've never yet made a mistake—I'll give Benny a look up, and have another little chat with him. He's not anything like such an arrant cur as Railton; but he isn't extraordinarily courageous. I'll rub it into him pretty severely. No. I don't think he would have the pluck to round on me, unless——"

He ground his teeth. But that was not likely to happen. He would not be likely to come in contact with Esther again. She was the danger. Those dark eyes of hers, with their wistful, unforgetting look might have a weakening, demoralising effect on Benny.

"He was always talking about them," he muttered irritably; "there's a wretched strain of maudlin sentimentalism in the fellow, and—that's the danger; but they're not likely to meet."

He rang the bell, and ordered Railton to bring him another bottle of champagne.

"You'll pardon me, sir, won't you? But is it advisable?" said the smooth-faced valet, a world of apology in his voice; "you have such a strenuous task before you to-night. Might I suggest, sir—I trust you will forgive the impertinence—that you refrain from further stimulant now; but, just before setting out, take one glass of champagne, with a dash of cognac in it."

Revelle laughed good-humouredly.

"You're a splendid servant, Railton. Your solicitude is almost paternal. You're quite right, though. And, Railton, when everything is settled up, you will find that I haven't forgotten you."

"Thank you, sir!"

"No," said Railton, on his return to the servants' quarters, "the master is anything but well. I hope the doctor's medicine will arrive soon."

The other servants retired to bed shortly after ten o'clock that night; Railton, having stated his intention of sitting up for some time at least, returned to his master's bedroom.

"Railton," said his master drowsily, "I'm going to put in a couple of hours' sleep; come and wake me at a quarter-past twelve."

"Very good, sir!"

Revelle was sleeping very peacefully when at the appointed time Railton crept silently into the room.

"Quarter-past twelve, sir!"

Then, having carefully drawn to the curtains so as to prevent even a stray beam of light stealing out, he turned up the gas. A very perfect servant he was!

"I had quite a shock to-day, sir," he whispered, as he took a dark suit from a chest of drawers, "but I am thankful to say that my apprehensions were groundless."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yes, sir, I was talking to Banks, the gardener at the Woodlands, when I caught sight of a figure that recalled most unpleasant reminiscences; but I ascertained that it was Penworthy, the landscape gardener, who is responsible for the alterations to Mr. Mansfield's garden, but, at the time, sir, he reminded me most uncomfortably of Crump, formerly chief inspector of Scotland Yard. You know this Penworthy, sir?"

Revelle gave vent to a low laugh.

"Of course, yes! A most homely, harmless little fellow."

He laughed again.

"So he reminded you of your old acquaintance, Crump, did he? That must have been painful, Railton!"

"Most painful, sir!" answered the man with a little shiver, "And I did not feel quite happy in my mind till I met my young, unsophisticated constable-friend Jackson, who is acquainted with Penworthy, and who removed the last doubt from my mind."

While speaking he had been assisting his master to dress. Revelle was wearing black clothes. A black silk scarf took

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OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

Our Powerful Serial.

the place of a collar. Railton helped him into an Inverness coat.

"The keys, Railton!"

The valet slipped a hand into his pocket, and drew out a small wash-leather bundle. Taking it from him, Revelle unrolled it, and examined a number of newly-made keys. Railton had obtained wax impressions of the principal locks at The Towers. These had been forwarded by post to a certain locksmith acquaintance of his.

"They are excellent!" muttered Revelle approvingly.

From his waistcoat pocket Railton drew out another, and very small key.

"The key of the safe, sir! It is not, as you are aware, a combination lock."

Revelle retired into his dressing-room. On his return, he carried a small hand-bag.

"And now, Railton, I think that's everything."

"Yes, sir. You know, sir, that you have my very best wishes for your complete success."

The two figures that, a few moments later, passed down the stairs, might have been ghosts, they moved so silently. Reaching a small, side gate that led out into the garden, Railton unlocked it, and slipped back the bolts. Revelle, his coat-collar upturned, his soft felt hat drawn down over his eyes, passed out. Railton locked the door behind him.

Revelle, as he walked away rapidly and silently, was conscious of a thrill of exhilaration. He was confident of success; perhaps he would have felt less confident had he seen the shadow that had risen up from out the shrubs behind him, and was creeping along in his wake, every whit as silently as himself—the man whom, but a brief while ago, he had described as a most homely, harmless, little fellow. A few yards along the main road; then he climbed a stile, and struck across fields. After nearly an hour's sharp walking, Normanhurst Towers loomed out, grim and indistinct, through the darkness. The ghostly silence that prevailed was only broken by a distant clock striking the half-hour.

Thanks to Railton's plans and his own personal knowledge, Revelle was completely informed concerning the interior of the house. He made his way round to a side-door. A moment's pause to listen, then, having taken from his bag a small lantern, he lighted it with a silent match. One of the well-greased keys turned the lock. But the door was bolted on the inside.

Revelle smiled softly to himself. He had come prepared for this contingency. He carried in his bag a little invention of Benny's, unpatented, in the shape of a long, thin piece of steel, with a hinge in the centre and a prong at the end.

Thrusting it under the door, he pressed a spring attached to the instrument, and the prong, rising up, caught the knob of the bolt within. By pushing the instrument along, he was enabled to draw back the bolt. The door was now unlocked and unbolted; but there was still a heavy chain to be dealt with. Silently opening the door a couple of inches, he thrust in the steel instrument, and switched the chain off its hook. Once within, he closed to the door, and made his way into the great, oak-panelled hall. He was absolutely calm and self-possessed.

Up the broad, oak staircase, he stole silently as a shadow. Reaching the landing above, he paused for a moment to listen. No sound broke the stillness. Half-way down a long corridor, he paused again outside a door, drew out a key, unlocked it. The silence with which the man worked was truly marvellous. The room entered was a dressing-room, a door leading from it into the bedroom beyond. In one corner stood a small, but massive safe. From the next room came the sound of breathing. The safe contained the Normanhurst jewels. Revelle, holding the lantern in a grip firm and steady as a rock, fitted the key that Railton had obtained for him into the lock. The next moment, the door swung back on its well-oiled hinges. No sound escaped his lips as his eyes fell on the glittering gems that lined the shelves—tiaras, pendants, bracelets, and necklaces, thousands of pounds' worth of heirlooms. A few seconds later, his bag was full.

Everything had been carefully thought out. Before leaving the room, Revelle locked the safe. Outside, he relocked the door. Once outside the Towers, he behaved with the same deliberation. Having relocked the side door, he put back the bolt by means of the steel instrument. Except for the hanging chain, which it was impossible to replace, and which might have been left unfastened through the carelessness of a servant, he had left behind him no trace to show that the house had been broken into. It was quite possible, he told himself, that the robbery might remain undiscovered for two or three days. It was characteristic of the man's coolness that, before extinguishing the lantern, he first lighted a cigarette by it. The bag he carried contained enough to keep him going like a gentleman for a matter of four or five years. The morrow's evening would see the jewels handed over to Masters, who would leave the same night for Holland. The cheques that he would be presently paying into his bank, would arouse no suspicion, coming from a well-known commission agent. He himself was known to be a racing man. Only two shadows marred the rosy sky of the future—Esther and Benny! He was not given to throw up the sponge; but he despaired now of winning Esther. He could not altogether shake off the haunting thought that Benny might be meditating treachery.

But he was, even now, reckoning without his host in the shape of a little man who was not more than ten yards away from him.

It was close upon four o'clock when Railton, standing behind the side-door at The Firs, heard a faint, scratching sound outside. Noiselessly opening the door, he admitted his master.

"All well, sir?" questioned the valet.

"Quite," came back the low answer, "perfect! Not a hitch from beginning to end."

"Will you allow me, sir, to offer you my heartiest congratulations!"

"Thank you, Railton. 'Pon my word, I do really feel rather pleased with myself to-night!"

Shortly after the two men had passed upstairs, a shadow stole out from the grounds of The Firs; then a second; then a third.

"An eventful night," whispered a voice, "and—I must give the devil his due—a most skilful and masterly performance. I think, gentlemen, it is quite safe for us to return to Woodbine Cottage for two or three hours. Given a little more rope, and I think that Mr. Seaton Revelle will most effectually hang himself. No train stops at Warham before eight o'clock."

"Well, how are we this morning?" said the doctor, as he was ushered by Railton into Revelle's bed-room.

"Miles better, doctor. That medicine of yours has worked wonders. I slept like a top, and woke up with all my aches and pains gone. I'm very grateful to you. I've an appointment in town this evening, and I should have been awfully disappointed if I couldn't have kept it."

"This place," said the doctor presently, "is getting very popular with artists. I passed a fellow outside here as I came along and he was making a very presentable sketch of The Firs."

"Ah, yes. It's a favourite subject. No end of fellows paint it. Then, doctor, there's no objection to me going up to town?"

"No; if you feel up to it, certainly not!"

When the doctor left The Firs, the artist was still hard at work upon his sketch. It was one of Crump's visitors.

"Railton," said Revelle, "nothing has been missed at The Towers yet?"

"Evidently not, sir; or we should have heard something to that effect from the doctor."

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"When the loss is discovered, it will cause a considerable amount of sensation."

"Yes, sir; and will be most interesting to see what theories will be advanced by the police."

Railton paused for a moment.

"Pardon me, sir, but might I ask if you parted on friendly terms with Mr. Faversham? I was considerably startled when you informed me that he had withdrawn from this venture."

Revelle glanced rather sharply at his servant. Was he anxious, too?

"Of course, sir, I never saw very much of Mr. Faversham; but I do not think that he was very favourably disposed towards me; perhaps, in consequence of that, I am somewhat prejudiced against him; but I presume he is absolutely to be relied upon?"

"I think so, Railton," he replied slowly. "In any case, I shall be seeing him some time this evening, and shall be having a talk with him."

"I am glad to hear that, sir! And at what time do you think you will be leaving for London?"

"I don't know—some time this evening."

"There's a very good train at six thirty-five, sir."

"That will do. I want you to take a telegram for me."

The telegram was addressed to Masters, Chancery Lane, and made an appointment for that evening. Railton, on his way to the post office, passed the artist, and glanced over his shoulder at his sketch. It really was remarkably good. At Scotland Yard it was firmly believed that, though up to the present he had been unsuccessful in his efforts, Inspector Winton would achieve the distinction of having a picture hung in the Royal Academy.

Reaching the village post-office, Railton copied the message on to a telegraph form. The pencil he wrote with was hard, and sharply pointed. He was still writing, when a man entered and bought some stamps. When Railton moved away from the box-like place reserved for the writing of telegrams, the man stepped up to it, bent down, and seemed to be writing a message.

"Mr. Crump's conclusions," said Inspector Wilcox, when, a few moments after Railton, he left the post office, "look like being confirmed in a remarkable manner."

In his pocket he carried a telegraph form. It bore a legible impression of the message dispatched by Railton. When he reached Woodbine Cottage, Crump was reading for a second time a letter from Esther that had arrived by the first post. She was, she wrote, over so much better. So much so that she was travelling up to London with her father, who was obliged to come to town on business. He had tried to dissuade her; but she had insisted. Of course, Mr. Crump would understand why they were not coming to The Woodlands. They were going to take rooms at the Hotel Royal. Would it be possible for him to come and see them there? She longed to see him. There was much else besides.

"It is a brave letter," said the little man to himself, "they will reach London some time to-day. No, I'm afraid to-day will be impossible for me! Ah, Wilcox!"

"Mr. Revelle," said the inspector, producing a telegraph form, "leaves this evening for London by the six thirty-five train, and has made an appointment to meet Lewis Masters at eight thirty. Mr. Crump, it looks as if your conclusions are going to work out like a mathematical equation."

Crump took the telegraph form, and glanced at it. He realised.

"Wilcox," he said, his eyes twinkling approbation, "you've done a very smart piece of work this morning!"

"Winton is still sketching near The Firs!"

"Good! We, too, Wilcox, will be travelling up by the six thirty-five train. I hope you don't disapprove of my policy, Wilcox; but not only do I want to bag the lot of them, including Mr. Masters; but I want conclusive proof of Scarsdale's innocence. And it is this man Masters from whom I expect to obtain it!"

(The result of Mr. Crump's journey to London will be told next week.)

Strange Ways of Sleeping.

The Chinese and Japanese sleep on a hard wooden pillow. The Laplander sleeps in a bag of reindeer skin. Russians in winter sleep on stone slabs resting on stoves. Most people sleep soundly for several hours at a stretch. Where this sleep cannot be obtained, depend upon it the digestive organs and liver are wrong, and that a course of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans should be taken without delay.

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If She Had Been Faithful.

Telling of a Sacrifice for Love and its Reward.

Two of the prison warders meeting in the corridor stopped for a moment.

"Doesn't one of your men finish this week?"

"Yes, this is his cell," said the other warder, tapping the wall. "He's due out to-morrow morning, but you'd think he was in for life to judge by his face. I fancy he's fretting about something. Look here—quietly."

They advanced to the movable panel and slid it silently back. The prisoner sat upon the edge of his bed, gazing towards a narrow, barred window, through which a sunbeam slanted across the floor. His face was pale and listless, his head drooped in a sort of hopeless patience.

But all the time his brain was working, and fretting in a very maelstrom of despair. The knowledge that he was to be released the following morning gave him neither pain nor pleasure. They might open the doors and send him into the world again, but they could not rescue him from his own thoughts. Nobody could do that now.

If only she had remained faithful—he had taken her brother's guilt—he had wrecked his own honour in the eyes of the world, and for what—his thoughts plodded wearily back to their starting point. If she had remained faithful he could have borne it all, he thought wistfully.

But neither letter nor message had come from her—she was like the rest—she had deserted him.

The church bells ringing for evensong, crashed brutally into his reflections and drove home the hopeless lesson he had been learning so long—a year—two years—he scarcely knew how long he had been in prison. His despair found utterance at last. He stretched his arms passionately towards the window and burst into a wild fit of weeping that shook him from head to foot.

"It's for a lass, I reckon," whispered one of the warders gently. "Come away, Jack, tisn't fair to watch him, and we can't help."

* * * * * *

The next morning opened out clear and bright, with just sufficient breeze to keep the air cool. A little rain which had fallen during the early morning, had cleaned the streets, and the warm sunshine soon dried them.

When Will Seddon came out he felt dazzled for a moment. The keen light beat full upon him, as though it would expose his haggard face and general look of neglect and loneliness. A man approached as though he wished to speak, but the other shrank back and hurried towards a side street. The very idea of companionship was inexpressibly distasteful to him. The world had cast him away, had deserted him.

A passing cab driver pulled up his horse suddenly in obedience to a signal from the fare. The animal fell back upon its haunches, striking fire from the stones.

As for Seddon, he raised his arms weakly to defend himself, and then, finding he was still unhurt, went uncomplainingly forward.

But at the same moment a girl of about twenty-three or four years of age, opened the door of the cab, and jumped lightly to the ground. In a moment she had reached him.

He turned round and gazed at her with a look in which amazement, hope, fear, and doubt were all blended. The phrase that had haunted him for two years rose slowly in his mind.

"Oh, if only you had remained faithful," he muttered, with a sob, "I could have borne it all."

"But, Will, I have been faithful, and I never doubted your innocence, although I only knew a few days ago who was the guilty one. I had brain fever during your trial. When I wrote to you afterwards my mother intercepted the letters, and destroyed them."

"*She* intercepted them?"

"She thought you were guilty."

"When I taxed your brother with his guilt, he said the knowledge would break his mother's heart, and then, for her sake and yours, I took his place," he said simply.

"He went to Australia after the trial. Nothing seemed to prosper with him, and he sank lower and lower, and died there in poverty and loneliness a few months ago. He wrote to mother and confessed everything."

"And is your mother——"

"She is at home waiting for us." She led him gently towards the cab. "She has nearly cried herself to death about you, so you'll be kind to her for my sake."

"I can feel kindly towards anybody now," he said wistfully.

They took their places in the cab. Her head sank upon his shoulder, and then to his own great astonishment he found himself whispering words which he thought he had forgotten for ever. The shadows rolled swiftly from his mind, and sorrow and despair fled before the new born happiness. To have complete faith in just one person, this is half the battle of life.

Wal Frank.

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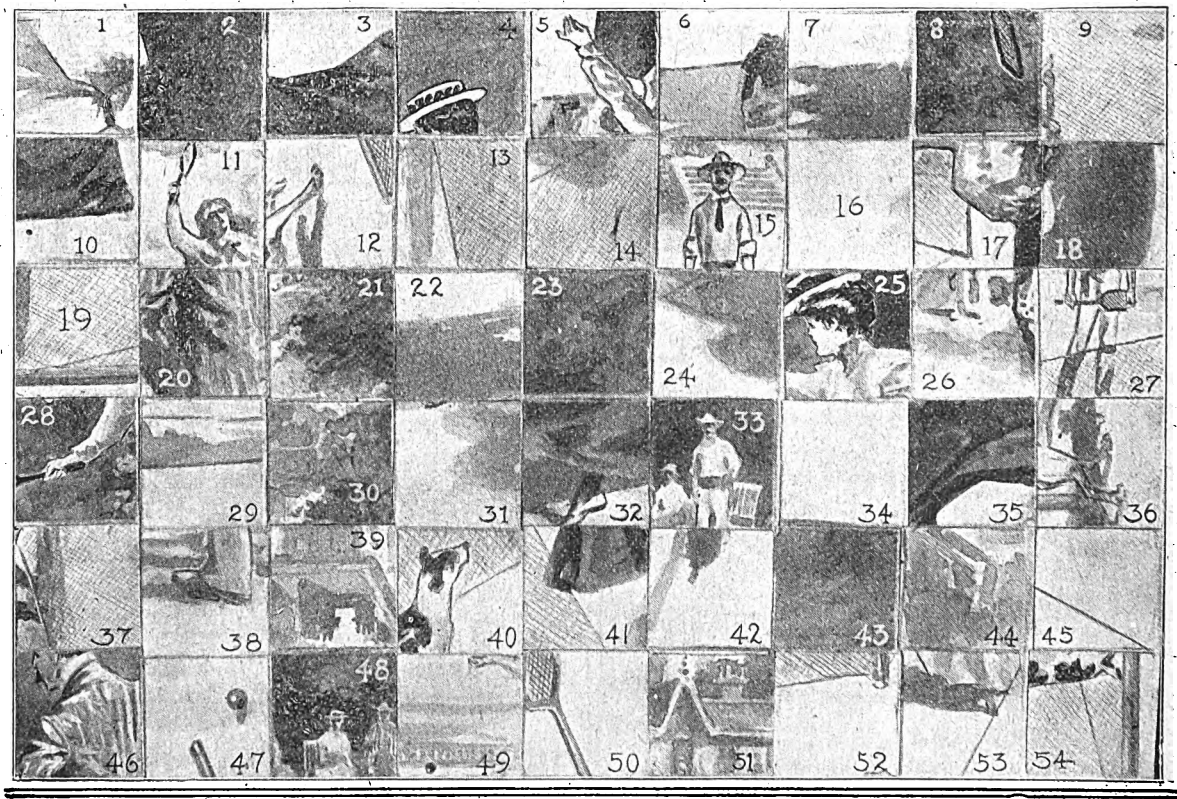

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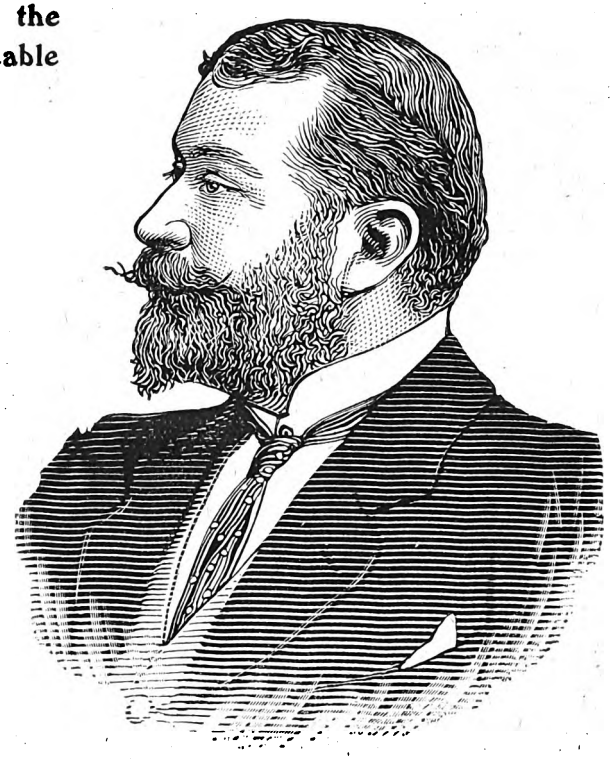

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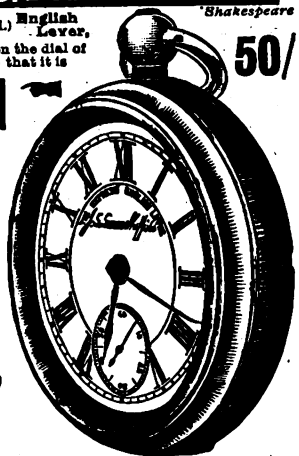

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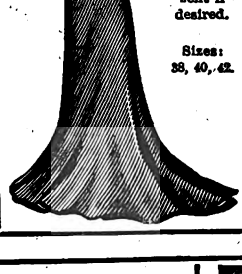

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SHORT STORIES

No. 717. ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending September 27th, 1902.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

A Powerful Story Telling of a Deserted Bride.

It had snowed for two days incessantly.

Grayson's eyes rested upon the scene thoughtfully. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets. Occasionally he shivered with the cold that crept in between the cracks of the ill-fitting window. The sensation of hunger gnawed at his stomach. The man had eaten nothing since the day before. Finally he laughed.

"I'm beaten, that's about the truth of it. I'm hungry and cold. I haven't a penny. I've pawned everything I possess, yet I am fortified against the world with a profession—a profession—Heavens! I'd sell all I know of it for one good, filling dinner."

It had been a hopeless, merciless struggle from the beginning, yet in those first months of misfortune Grayson had remained unbroken in courage. Even when his father had gone Grayson had risen stoically above his grief. Once, years before, Grayson had watched his father drag himself by the strength of stupendous will above a heart-breaking despair. It appeared unfair then that a beloved wife and mother had been taken away. She had been so dear to them both; so necessary to the very existence they led. Yet probably because of this one fact, from the moment of her death, father and son had become inseparable.

But now it was the ending of everything—all at a stroke. There was no longer any future, any hope, any fight, any chance at all. He was homeless, friendless, penniless and hungry—fearfully hungry.

About nine o'clock the man fumbled his way to the table in the centre of the room and lighted a gas jet overhead. Then he went to his cupboard, getting out the roll and the tea, handling both cautiously. He poured some water into a tin mug, put in the tea leaves, and stood on a chair to steep the mixture over the flickering light.

While the man was drinking his hot tea without sugar or milk, soaking the crusts of the one hard roll every now and then to make it more palatable, a rap sounded on his door.

"Come in," he cried, rising and looking expectantly at the door.

It was his landlady—shambling, ungainly, but very sympathetic.

"Doctor, it's a call for you, but I wouldn't advise you to take it."

Grayson listened with eager intentness. "A call, Mrs. McIntyre?"

"Yes, sir, but I wouldn't take it."

A sudden wave of relief smote the man. "That would not be professional; but why wouldn't you take it?" He could afford to be curious.

"Because it's from over there"—the woman jerked her thumb.

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For a moment, in spite of himself, a queer chill ran up Grayson's spine, settling itself somewhere in the base of his brain. She referred to the house of preposterous mystery.

"Over there?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes, sir; they're in a hurry, too."

"Say that I will come—at once."

Crossing the street was a struggle—literally a hand-to-hand battle with the storm. Once at the door of the house the man paused, exhausted and panting. He was weak from want of food and numbed from an all-day's chill. After a moment he straightened up and rang the bell.

The wire grated harshly. Somewhere in the distance, like a phantom sound, he heard the vibration of striking metal. When the door was opened Grayson faced a tall, lean, hard-mouthed woman. She barred the way.

"I am the doctor from across the street," he volunteered.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Someone came for me. I understand my services are needed here."

Grayson's elation was falling.

"Well, you can go back. We don't——"

Before the woman finished a scream rang through the house—a scream that rose above the cry of the wind and came to them a fearful, paralysing sound. In the stillness that followed, Grayson's jaded senses became alert. There was no longer any hesitation.

"I am needed here. Stand out of my way." He put his one empty hand on the woman's shoulder, making her stagger under the grip. Immediately he slipped into the hall, letting the door fly to with a jar that shook the house. Before the last echo died away a young girl came running towards him. She was pallid and trembling violently.

"Oh, thank Heaven, you are here," she cried, her words coming with dreadful rapidity. "I sent for you because something is the matter. I don't know what. I've only been here a few days, and she is always strange, but not like this. It is terrible to watch. She must have help. Please, please hurry!"

Meanwhile the woman, expressing no emotion of any sort, moved away. "You'll find out by to-morrow that it's all nonsense," she announced as she disappeared.

Silently the girl and he walked the length of the long hall.

"She's in here," she whispered, stopping before a door.

In spite of all he could do, Grayson was uneasy. Following the girl and moving noiselessly, he entered the room. For a moment the dimness prevented him from distinguishing objects clearly. But bit by bit it all lay before him. The richness of the furnishings and the decay everywhere so evident; the room was abominably dirty, heavy with grime and filth; the air reeked with the smells of age. Blackbeetles

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crawled lazily in and out of the crevices in the woodwork. Once a large rat scurried across the floor. At sight of it the man dodged back in horror. Over between two windows stood an immense desk made of black wood and inlaid with silver wire. Plunged on her knees before it, Grayson's eyes made out the figure of a woman, her body rocking to and fro with a persistent regularity.

Presently the distant figure arose and the man's eyes widened in astonishment. He saw that she was as white as the dead, with eyes that burnt deep in their sockets and a face from which all expression had fled. She was arrayed in wedding garments—garments as grisly as finery taken from the tomb.

Pushed back from the face, but falling over her head and to the bottom of the bridal dress yellow with years, hung the limp veil, ragged and frayed. Covering the emaciated hands were long gloves, rotted and torn. Her feet were hidden in tiny slippers, broken through where the satin had long since refused to hold together.

"Go to her," whispered the girl.

The man obeyed, wondering what he ought to do or say, willing to have given at that minute, years of professional life for a knowledge broad enough to encompass a case like this. He told himself that, perhaps, if the woman would come to him voluntarily, the skill of questioning her without arousing antagonism might arrive instinctively.

But the opportunity for those questions never came. Suddenly the woman raised her head. She met Grayson's eyes full upon her. For a moment she gazed spell-bound, then straight as a child who in trouble goes to the one it loves for help and comfort, this woman went to Grayson. There was no doubt, no uncertainty, hardly any surprise. It was as if she had looked for him daily all her life.

But the transition in her face was stupendous. All in a moment the lines of hardness and the scars of suffering were obliterated by a radiance of divine happiness. Silently, swiftly, but very surely, this woman came with a bound out from a dementia of hideous sorrow.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she gasped. "Charles, I was right. You meant it as a test to my love. It was not desertion. No, no, never that. I did not know what would become of me. Yet I never really doubted. Oh, it was not desertion! I loved you too much to believe such a thing. But sometimes I was afraid. It has been so long, so many, many years." She threw herself into the man's arms, caressing him, fondling his hands, talking all the while with pathetic rapidity. But while the doctor was all at sea, something told him that this was not the chatter of insanity.

Presently she held a letter out to him; a scrap of paper that had not left her hands. "When this came to me on our wedding day I was here, dressed like this—waiting for you. First I was frightened. I screamed. I remember that. Afterwards I seemed to wake from my fright. I knew it was not desertion. I tried to be brave and not to mind. I never once blamed you, for you could not know how you were to make me suffer. But my father would not understand. He was so angry I believed he would hunt you out and kill you. I forgot my own grief in talking—explaining to him. Finally I saw the tears in his eyes and I knew he was understanding at last.

"I have been faithful to the day. Every anniversary I have come to this room in my bridal clothes and waited from dawn till dark. I knew you would come if I waited long enough. Some of those days were hard, but I always trusted." She pointed to the letter again. "I always read this, too, on the anniversary, and though I never meant to, the scream would come just as it did on that day long ago."

The woman's body was shaking with excitement and the girl had crept up to her side, tears of pity brimming in her eyes. But Grayson was speechless. During that torrent of words some sixth sense was suddenly born in him—a sense warning him of what he might expect.

"Auntie," whispered the girl, touching the woman gently.

At once the bride turned. "Elizabeth, my dear, this is my *fiancé*. We were to have been married twenty-five years ago to-day. But he has only just come for me. This is Charles Grayson, Elizabeth." There was great pride in the quavering voice.

But at the mention of his name the man reeled, his senses stunned. What did it mean? Who was this woman? Who was that other, the man of his name, who had wronged her so cruelly?

The girl watched him curiously.

"It was an unkind letter, wasn't it, dear?"—she held up the paper. "I have just been reading it again."

The man clenched his fists. "Let me see it—again," he gasped.

She gave it to him, at the same time drawing herself from his arms. Grayson opened the paper, sick with dread. It began abruptly: "I am doing a dastardly thing, yet I should be more of a coward if I stayed. Do not judge me more harshly than you can help. I am to be married to-day to the woman whom for years I have loved. Loved madly, loved with all my soul. She is penniless—so am I—yet I have more courage in facing life with her whom I adore than in coming to you who would make my life easy with luxury. Am I not right in going before I commit a greater crime against you than I have already done

"CHARLES."

"Father! Father!" moaned the man. "How could you?" A spasm of pain ran through him. For a brief second his anger rose hot against his father. But the woman claimed him again instantly.

"Don't grieve," she began, her voice weak and trembling. The radiance, too, was leaving her face. "The sorrow is past."

"Yes," he groaned, "but does that make up for the suffering that has been?"

"You are so little changed," she said, finally, "and I am so different. But you will care for me just the same, dear, won't you? Just the same?"

He might have answered in a dozen different ways. What he said was, "My whole life shall be devoted to you, from now until—death."

"This is the wedding gift I spoke of. It is all my property willed unconditionally to you for life; afterwards it goes to your heirs. I hid it long ago to show my faith."

The last word faltered, for a great faintness was creeping over the woman. She could no longer stand unsupported by Grayson's arms. The twenty-five years of waiting had done their work.

From now on, she was a little light-headed, talking continually. Bit by bit the extent of the mental anguish she had endured came out. She never chided, never once complained; but the man was not deceived. All she asked now was his care and love and presence, and Grayson gave what he could—expiating his father's wrong.

He sat through the night holding the poor, thin hands in his, making his father's peace.

Towards morning everything became suddenly silent. The woman roused herself from a half stupor, murmuring, "I am very cold. Hold me closer, Charles." She had lost all idea of time, imagining herself a girl once more. After a little she spoke again:

"You are here, dearest? Really here, near me?"

For answer the man picked the fragile body up in his strong arms, holding her tight against his breast. With a contented sigh her eyes closed. Elizabeth, sitting apart, dozed from sheer weariness of watching. About three o'clock Grayson spoke across the room:

"She is unconscious. I do not believe your aunt will live long."

A little later she opened her eyes. They were bright with the clearness of renewed youth. She looked up into the man's face.

"My beloved——"

Grayson bent. He leant down and kissed her full on the lips. A thrill swept through her. A second later she sighed for the last time on earth, but the smile of divine happiness did not fade from her face.

G. P. Daniels.

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Won by a Tune.

"GOOD-BYE, dearest!"

"Good-bye!"

For the twentieth time Mark Jermyn uttered the words of farewell, and for the twentieth time the girl responded, but, realising that the parting was not an ordinary one, they were loth to part even then. Years hence they might meet again; perhaps never!

"And dearest, you'll remember, if the recollection of me ever stands in your light, you're to forget I existed. Promise me that!"

The girl looked into the earnest face bending over her, into the depths of the grave, brown eyes.

"I cannot," she said softly. "Moreover, is it necessary? Is it what you would do were you in my place?"

Her logic was unanswerable, and he sighed.

"If you were the only child of somebody next door to a millionaire," she went on, "and your father forbade you to marry anyone who was not wealthy whilst you really loved one poor as a church mouse, would you give up without a struggle? Of course you wouldn't, Mark! You'd wait, and wait, and hope!"

"But waiting doesn't always bring wealth," broke in Jermyn, "especially in the musical profession. Why did my father ever destine me for his own career?" he added bitterly.

"Because it's what you're most fitted for," Elsie Renton replied. "Mark, dear, you're going to be a great man."

He waived away her words with a smile and another kiss.

"You flatter me, sweetheart" he said, "although it's true my father was far from being a mediocrity. He changed his name on marriage, and died when I was only five years old. But his existence really ended, so far as the world was concerned, when he forsook his old name, for he never composed a single thing after."

"How strange!" remarked the girl, wonderingly. "And what a terrible example to you, dearest."

He laughed.

"You may think so. Of course, I was too young to know much then, and never heard how it all happened, for my mother soon followed my father."

"And his name before, was——?"

"Wegar—Mark Wegar—one of the foremost composers of his time!"

* * * * *

A couple of years later, Mark Jermyn was in London. It seemed much longer since he had parted from Elsie Renton in Paris, where they had been fellow students at the Conservatoire; she for the sake of finishing a musical education, he because he had his future living to consider.

In Paris, the girl had been free from the hidebound conventionalities of home and her doting parents would doubtless have been horrified had they known she had dared to regard someone with affection. The two had parted; he, to work for a name, and she to enter Society.

And now he was in London, his fame having preceded him, and Mark Jermyn, the celebrated pianist was announced to make his *début* before the most critical audience in the world. Success had not spoilt him, and he remained the same modest man that had held Elsie's hand in his two years since; deeply, madly, in love with her still. Several times she had written to him, and with her last letter in his pocket as a talisman, he faced the eager crowd that evening.

The performance was a success, Mark Jermyn's reputation was more than upheld, and he quickly became the lion of the hour. Invitations from the highest in the land literally showered upon him, so numerous, that they would have taken years to respond to all, one of the earliest coming from the Renton's offering a princely fee for a short recital at a forthcoming "At Home" To this, Jermyn stiffly replied that he only accepted social engagements. An answer soon came altering the tone of the invitation, and a day or two later, he found himself about to meet his loved one once more.

The place was already thronged with guests when he arrived, but Elsie was the first to greet him, and as he took her hand he would have knelt down there and then and kissed it, had not decorum forbade. She welcomed him gaily, and he felt all at once the happiest of mortals, for a single look served to tell him he held her heart still.

"I'm hostess for the moment," she observed. "Let me take you to mother."

He followed her, and a little later was being introduced to Mrs. Renton.

"Mr. Jermyn, mother!"

The stately lady addressed, looked up, and as she saw his handsome, clear-cut features, started.

"Mr. Jermyn?—ah, yes, of course! Your appearance seems familiar. But then, aren't your photographs all over London?" she asked.

Mark bowed, but guessed by her tone that she had never seen his portrait.

Soon he became swallowed up in a crowd of people anxious to be introduced, but he detested the necessity of being polite; five minutes alone with Elsie was all that he craved for.

The millionaire's daughter, however, was now busily engaged in chatting with a cavalier who gazed upon her with unmistakable admiration, and the scene caused a pang in Mark's heart. Had he, after all, any semblance of a chance?

He sauntered aimlessly about, conversing first with one and another, till at length he found himself addressing the host himself. And Jermyn was agreeably surprised; Elsie's father was not nearly so formidable as he had pictured him to be; on the contrary, his attitude towards the young lion of the season was courtesy and geniality itself.

"Ah! my daughter tells me she met you in Paris," he remarked. "One of the first to discover your genius, I believe? Elsie's a dear girl, my dear sir!"

"She is," assented Mark, earnestly.

"Always a dutiful girl, and a prize worth the winning," continued Mr. Renton, briskly. "It's a pity we're to lose her so soon—but there! the men, the men! I was young myself once."

"You mean someone will fall in love with her?" queried Jermyn, anxiously.

"Has fallen in love. Scores of them. By the way, there she is with Lord Mapleson."

Mark Jermyn turned, and followed the other's glance to where Elsie stood talking with the man he had noticed a few moments before.

"Are they——?"

"Engaged, my dear sir, engaged. And to be married shortly. My wife's a wonderful woman, she's arranged it all!"

Mark's first impulse was to flee, but he resolved to learn the truth from Elsie's lips first. At last he caught her glance, following her into a small ante-room leading from one of the

principal apartments. When the door closed, he took her hand, and looked into her eyes.

"Elsie," he asked. "Is it true?"

She averted her gaze.

"Is what true?" she murmured.

"That you're engaged to Lord Mapleson?"

Her eyes filled with tears and she turned towards him passionately.

"No!" she said vehemently. "He's asked me frequently, but I've always refused. But mamma insists, and the rumour we're engaged is about already. Oh, Mark! Mark!"—with an outstretching of her arms that was irresistible; "what's to be done?"

He took her into his arms.

"You love me, what is to prevent our happiness?"

"Mother—she insists. Father, I know, would rather I married a man of my choice."

"And I insist on your marrying me!" he cried earnestly. "That is, if you're willing to become the wife of a nonentity?"

She looked up quickly.

"Who is the nonentity?" she asked. "You, the clever artiste or"—with a gesture of disdain—"Lord Mapleson?"

"Then, darling," he cried, "if your mother will not consent, it must be a runaway match. You're sure you don't mind intrusting your happiness to me?"

"No, indeed. Mark, no! I love you, oh! heaps more than I did two years ago, and that's something, isn't it?"

He admitted that it was, and kissed her, when someone calling Elsie, she had to leave. Mark strolled back to the drawing-room with a lighter heart. Someone was asking Mr. Renton whether Jermyn was to play; the host shrugged his shoulders, but the musician at once interrupted with the remark he should only be too delighted.

A move was made to the piano, whilst all voices were hushed as it became known that the great Jermyn was at the instrument. He ran through several of his better known things in succession, playing as he had never played before, his audience, spellbound and enraptured. The applause at his conclusion, unlike most drawing-room applause, was for once sincere.

Mr. Renton was profuse in his thanks, and then his less genial wife inquired as a special favour, whether he would give them a novelty.

"A novelty?" repeated Mark, anxious to please his prospective parent. "Ah, yes! I had almost forgotten. To-day's the twenty-second, isn't it? There is one thing I only play once a year, and always on the twenty-second of this month."

His hearers looked puzzled, but his fingers had already wandered over the keyboard and at first seemed to evolve nothing but chaos. But suddenly came forth the notes of a sweet love song, delicious, haunting and uncanny almost. And as the melody flowed on, full of pathos and quaint touches, like the outpourings of a lovesick heart, tears came unwillingly to the eyes of the fashionable listeners. Mark himself, seemed lost to his surroundings, for was not the piece his father's last composition, one that had been too sacred to give to the world?

The last notes of the song were gradually dying away, when all at once there was a tense scream from a distant corner of the room.

All turned and saw that Mrs. Renton had fainted!

A few days later, Mark Jermyn called to inquire after Mrs. Renton, whom it was understood was seriously ill. The young fellow was at once shown into Mr. Renton's study, where the millionaire greeted him cordially.

"My dear Mr. Jermyn," he said "you're the very man I wish to see! You remember the effect your wonderful playing produced on my wife the other evening?"

"Unfortunately," responded the famous musician. "Believe me, I'm exceedingly sorry."

"It's not your fault, my boy," he answered kindly. "The event has brought something to light which I hope may mean your happiness. I have learnt that my daughter loves you."

"Yes," responded Mark, quietly. "And I love her too."

"Just so, just so! What I was going to say was this; my wife, it appears, was once engaged to your father."

Mark Jermyn looked up in astonishment.

"Yes," continued Mr. Renton, "and, from what I can gather—of course, this is in confidence between you and me—she broke Mark Wegar's heart. My wife jilted him for myself, and it seems, that out of pity, he afterwards married his cousin whom he discovered had been in love with him for years. The air you played the other evening was one of Wegar's compositions, was it not?"

"Yes," replied Mark. "My father left me the MSS. with the injunction it was only to be played on the twenty-second of November every year—the anniversary of what, I could never make out."

"Ah! my wife recognised the theme; it was the old love song he used to play to her and of which she had been so fond. The date you mention was the one on which she broke off the engagement. Old memories came back to her, and—and—"

"Say no more, sir, it's a painful subject."

"To be sure, to be sure! My wife wishes me to tell you that although she broke your father's heart she has no wish to break either yours or her daughter's. We are both willing you should marry Elsie."

Someone opened the door just then, and Elsie Renton, seeing Mark, threw herself into his arms.

T. Bonsall.

Only Practising.

OLD LADY (on her way to church): "Don't you know, little boy, that it is very wicked to play cricket on Sunday?" Little Boy: "We ain't playing; we're only pracisin' for to-morrow's game."

How He was Stung.

"HENRY, you look worried; what's the trouble?" "I was stung to the quick by an adder this afternoon." "Heavens! How did it happen?" "Why, I went to the bank this afternoon, and the manager told me my account was overdrawn."

OCTOBER 7TH **OCTOBER 7TH**

IS THE DATE OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF

"A Foe in the Family."

"SHORT STORIES'" SPLENDID NEW SERIAL.

OCTOBER 7TH. **OCTOBER 7TH.**

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A Fatal Wooing.

The Tragic Story of a Woman's Love.

LADY SELBY'S picnic had been a great and glorious success. Everything had gone off well, from the champagne and lobster salads to the various little flirtations for which the kind-hearted hostess loved to make herself responsible. It is no easy task to entertain a large party of fashionable young men and women all day long, but Lady Selby's energy was inexhaustible. Her sole object was to make everybody happy, and, with one exception, she had succeeded even beyond her own expectations.

Her old friend, Major Bohmann, had been moping about in a state of abject misery ever since he had arrived. Lady Selby, being a woman with unlimited experience in such little difficulties, soon saw what the matter was, but for the life of her she could not remedy it. She did her utmost to throw Mrs. Corbolis in the Major's way, but that lady was far too much taken up with a young friend she had chosen out for herself to pay any attention to her hostess' gentle hints. And so the day had passed away.

It was evening now, and Lady Selby was rushing about here and there, and, with the help of three or four energetic young men, trying to whip in the various couples who had strolled away far into the forest glades, where the sinking sun was throwing long, wavering shadows on the green sward, and the cool, mossy banks tempted them to unburden the secrets of their hearts to one another.

At last they were all collected on the river banks, and there was more than one couple who thought the delightful wanderings through those woodland paths had come to an end all too soon.

Most of the party were going home by water. In the cool of that midsummer evening the gently rippling waves which lapped so musically against the boats, fastened by their painters to the overhanging willow trees, certainly looked more inviting than the dusty roads.

But someone must give up their place to drive home with Major Bohmann in the dog-cart. He looked imploringly at a little woman in black, who was just gathering up her skirts in the daintiest fashion to jump on board the tiny sailing yacht, her fingers lightly resting on the hand of a young man who stood in the bows with a happy smile upon his well-bronzed face.

All the afternoon the Major had been trying to get a word with her, ably seconded by his thoughtful hostess, but she had persistently and purposely evaded him. Something in his glance must at last have touched her, for, kissing her hand to the others, who had already taken their seats, she turned round, and in another moment was clambering up beside him.

The young man in the boat, whom the others familiarly called Jack, and whose name was Vaughan, threw himself down on his cushion with an angry, disappointed scowl, which deepened as his companions frivolously discussed the chances the widow had of "catching the Major again," and told one another stories about the previous adventures of the little lady, who seemed to fall in love with every other man she came across, and yet never by any chance to get further than the preliminary flirtation stage.

The Major had been her most intimate friend ever since her schoolroom days, and it was well known he had stood by and seen another claim her hand, which at that time he would have given his soul to possess. When she began to recover from her terrible grief, first at her husband's disappearance, and then at his reported death, the Major had come forward in his simple, honest, straightforward way, and once more renewed his attentions to her.

Led on by false hopes, he had proposed one day at the very house at which they were now staying, only to be laughingly refused. From that time forward the Major had been a confirmed woman-hater.

To his intimate friends he would confess that he would never trust a woman again, and to see two people flirting, as society people will flirt to amuse themselves, and to pass away the long days in a country house, would drive the honest Major almost frantic. His own bitter experience was still deeply impressed, or rather engraved, on his mind, for nothing could ever obliterate it.

It is just possible that if young Vaughan could have overheard the conversation between the two people in the dog-cart he would not have felt so miserably unhappy, but perhaps it was well that he did not.

For the first half mile neither of them spoke a word. The Major was looking straight away over his horse's ears; Mrs. Corbolis was snatching carelessly at the bunches of half-ripe nuts as the cart brushed by them in the narrow lane. The Major's eyebrows were working nervously up and down.

The truth was, he was very angry, and was trying to compose himself, which is no easy task for a middle-aged gentleman who has been inexpressibly worried and bored for ten whole hours at a stretch.

"Mrs. Corbolis," he said at last, speaking with a careless affectation, which he was very far from feeling, "I have been waiting for a quiet moment to speak to you all the day, and you have purposely avoided me. Not once, but time after time. How have I managed to offend you?"

"Perhaps I had someone I liked better to amuse me," said Mrs. Corbolis, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on a little foot encased in patent leather, which peeped out from beneath her black serge skirt.

"So it seems," said the Major drily.

Just the faintest tinge of pink coloured the widow's cheeks.

"And even so, what is that to you?"

The Major uttered an impatient exclamation.

"After all these years, Maria, I really think this affectation is rather out of place. I have been your friend," he went on bitterly, "for nearly forty years, and it is somewhat ridiculous to treat me as you are doing now."

"When I got up here to drive with you, I did so because I

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thought that you had something special you wanted to say. If I had known you were only going to speak nonsense, I should not have come."

Mrs. Corbolis spoke very slowly, and her tone was icy cold and forbidding in the extreme.

"And I *have* something special to say."

"Then, Major Bohmann, I think, under the circumstances, I should say it, and leave off flogging that poor horse like that. It's quite unnecessary. Besides, it's cruel."

There was nothing which annoyed the Major more than the treatment he was receiving, and the little widow was perfectly alive to the fact. The truth was, she was frightened by his serious manner, and hoped to exasperate him so that he would not take advantage of their *tête-à-tête*.

"I want," the Major began after a long silence, during which he had been trying to keep his temper, "I want to speak to you about my young friend Jack Vaughan."

Once more the colour rose to his companion's cheeks, but the Major did not notice it.

"Well?"

"I think, Maria," the Major went on with sudden vehemence, his irritability getting the better of his prudence, "that it is a disgrace, a shame—a wicked, cruel shame—to lead him on in the way you do. Do you think he is a cold, heartless being like yourself? If so, you are mistaken. You will break the boy's heart, as you have succeeded in breaking mine, and as you have already succeeded in breaking the hearts of a hundred other men besides.

A FOE IN THE FAMILY,

"Short Stories" new serial, commences in two weeks time.

"You forget, or else you purposely refuse to remember, the sacred nature of the fire you wantonly kindle; you forget that often and often it can never be quenched again. He is innocent of the ways of the world. He thinks you really love him. And when he finds, as others have found before him, that you are only playing with his affections, using them to while away your spare time, it will ruin his whole life.

"I love the boy far too well to see his future happiness blighted for your temporary amusement. If you must flirt, flirt with men of the world who are as heartless and frivolous as yourself, or at least can read your character, and do not tamper with——"

"Major Bohmann, how dare you insult me like this? I shall flirt with whom I like!"

Mrs. Corbolis had risen from her seat, and the Major, half frightened at his own vehemence, would not have been at all surprised if she had struck him, but she sank back again, her lips as white as death.

"Then, my dear lady," said the Major with forced calmness, "I shall take the precaution to warn my young friend what a hollow, heartless woman you are, before you have time to do any more mischief. I have watched you encouraging him.

"Yes, I have seen it all," and the Major's eyes gleamed angrily. "You, a widow of forty-three—yes, I do not mind saying it—the prettiest, the most charming, apparently the most unaffected woman I know, but still on the wrong side of forty, actually flirting all you know with a boy, who until to-day was not even twenty-one.

"A boy straight from the wilds of Australia, inexperienced, and knowing nothing of the rotten state of society, or the heartless women who adorn it, and who has already learnt to love you, to look up to you, to trust you mutely, believing every word you choose to whisper in his ear, totally unable to resist your cunning wiles, the wiles which you have twined around more men beforetime than you could remember if you would."

At that moment the house was reached. What Mrs. Corbolis would have said will never be known, but probably she would have said nothing. The Major, who believed he had only been doing his duty, although he had not done it in the quiet gentlemanly way he had been rehearsing to himself, offered Mrs. Corbolis his arm with a polite little bow, as they mounted the steps together, but she brushed past him and entered the house.

She crossed the passage, and flew straight up the broad, oaken staircase, and did not stop until she was safely in her own little room. Then she locked and double-locked the door, threw herself upon her bed in a paroxysm of grief, and raged and wept as if her heart would break. Poor little woman, she had found it hard to keep back that flood of tears so long!

She was angry, frightened, and tired; terribly tired. Angry with the Major for daring to speak to her as he had done, and angry with herself for having given him in years gone by ample excuse for the words he had uttered, and frightened more than she herself knew lest he should carry out his threat and turn the boy's heart against her, the only creature she had loved since her husband had deserted her more than twenty years before, deserted her on the birth of her first-born son, and carried the little baby away with him almost before she had pressed it to her lips.

The terrible quarrel which had brought this about does not concern us here, but it left poor Mrs. Corbolis deprived of husband and child at one cruel blow, with all her faith in man shattered. It made her look upon all men with suspicion, and treat them as she thought they would treat her. It made her cold and heartless and unfeeling.

Then she had met Jack Vaughan at Sir Robert Selby's house, and she had loved him. From the first moment that their eyes had met they had been drawn together by a strange fascination. The difference in their age was no barrier between the two. She loved the boy as she never thought she could love again, and her one fear had been that he could never return it.

When she at first listened to Major Bohmann's angry words they filled her with delight, and now—now—he would be warned that she did not care for him; would be told to keep away; would be taught to look upon her as a cold and heartless wretch, who used him merely as a thing to toy away her idle hours. The thought was almost distraction.

The Major was perfectly right when he had said that Jack did love the little widow. He did not know what it was which drew him towards her as irresistibly as a moth is drawn to a candle-flame, but he felt his whole life was wrapped up in hers. He felt as if he had met her in some previous existence, so well could he foresee what made her happy and also what displeased her.

Their tastes were exactly similar. What she liked he liked, what she hated he hated; it seemed as if Nature, in spite of the score of years between their ages, had ordained them for one another's company. When he had seen her go off with Major Bohmann that afternoon his heart had been filled with a sudden dread, and he made up his mind he would confess his love to her that night and have the warrant of his future sealed and signed.

Meanwhile, Major Bohmann did not feel at all comfortable. Somehow or other what he had meant to deliver as kind words of semi-paternal advice had been thrown like a shower of poisoned darts. The widow's manner had aggravated him, and ruffled his hasty temper.

He did not for one moment regret the course he had taken, but he wished he had ridden over it more lightly. He had been rude, unwarrantably rude, and even though he had been doing his duty, he was rightly indignant with himself for using the words he had used.

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He threw down his gloves on the hall table, and, changing his felt hat for a light shooting cap, he strolled down towards the river, trying to drown the unpleasant reminiscences of the past half-hour in the smoke of a very strong cigar. Tobacco was, as a rule, an unfailing tranquiliser with the Major, but to-night, somehow, it seemed to have lost its charm. At the landing-place he found the rest of the party had already arrived, and were unpacking their boats of the empty bottles and disgorged hampers.

He singled out Jack, who was standing disconsolately by himself, and looking as black as thunder. Linking his arm in the lad's, they strolled off towards the house.

Although the Major had never set eyes on the boy until a few weeks before, he had taken a violent fancy for him. There was something about his plain, straightforward, unaffected manner that went to the heart of the old soldier. The two strolled through the fields together, and a fine pair they made —the one smallish and decidedly stout, the other tall and slight, but both with backs as straight as an Indian's arrow.

The Major meant to give his friend a timely hint about Mrs. Corbolis, but, somehow or other, when it came to the point, his courage failed him. How was he to tell this boy that the woman he trusted in was false—that she whom he loved with his whole heart was merely trifling with him? He smoked one cigar through and lit another, but still the right words did not find their way to his lips. How he thanked the constellations in after years for this timely hesitation! As it was, Jack was the first to break the silence.

"Major Bohmann," he said, "when my father died ten years ago in the Australian bush he gave me a letter, in which he told me I should find written my real name and the true history of my family. This he made me solemnly swear I would never open, until I came of age. And yet another oath he made me take. It was that if my mother should still be alive at that time—my mother, whom he never forgave for some great injury even on his death-bed—I should never make myself known to her.

"To-day, Major, is my birthday. I may open that letter I have guarded all these years, and now when the time has come I am afraid. I have felt so long that I must not break that seal, that now I dare not do it."

The Major pressed the lad's arm kindly. "Tell me," he said, "of what you are afraid."

"I cannot," answered Jack. "All I know is that I have a presentiment that evil will follow, and that the contents of this letter will bring me no happiness. Why should I want to know the past? What should I gain by knowing a woman as my mother who may never give me a mother's love? Think how terrible it would be if I ever were to meet her. To know that she was my mother, and yet never to say so, never to tell her of our relationship. Oh, it would be terrible!"

They had reached a stile which led into the park. Jack Vaughan clambered on it, and sat there dolefully, while the Major, very uneasy at the turn affairs had taken, and very much dreading a scene, said what he could to laugh the matter over. He stood there with his elbows resting on the stile, and keeping his eyes fixed on the herd of dappled deer which was browsing on the lower branches of the trees.

It was a pretty scene. The old park, with its long vistas of trees leading up to the old house in the distance, with its many waterfalls running between endless beds of flowers and its sloping banks of well-kept lawn. But neither of the men was admiring the beauties of nature just then. Presently the younger drew from his pocket an envelope, which, perhaps, once had been white, but now was almost black with the wear of many years.

"It's rather dirty," he said, with a little laugh, as he weighed it in his hands as he had done a thousand times before. "It has never been out of my pocket since my father—since it was given to me. I shall be quite sorry to lose its company. Will you open it?" he went on suddenly, swinging round and facing his companion. "Will you open it and tell me what I dare not read myself?"

The Major winced inwardly. He barred this sort of thing altogether. However, he took from his pocket a neat little ivory knife, and slid it along the top with a great deal of unnecessary precision. He opened the mysterious package and drew out a letter, and within its folds a photograph. "Here," he said, "'pon my word, you'd better read it. It might be private."

"No, you read it, please!" said young Vaughan eagerly.

The Major undid the letter. As he did so the photograph fell to the ground. He stooped to pick it up, and then started back with a little cry.

From his waistcoat pocket came a little bit of tissue paper with which he brightened up his glasses. Then he put them on and looked again.

"Well," he said slowly, "of all the curious coincidences—of all the—well, look at it yourself. Take it, man—take it. Do you know that face?"

Jack took the photograph eagerly.

"What, do you know her?" he asked.

Then he looked at the photograph. Not a word did he say. He turned a deadly white, and his face fell on his hands with a little sob.

The picture was one they both knew well. It was the picture of one they both had uppermost in their hearts just then. Presently he raised his head and looked into the Major's grey, compassionate eyes, which were bent upon him.

"It's awful!" he said, and then covered his face again.

"Then Mrs. Corbolis is your—your mother." The Major got the words out very slowly, as if half fearing that he had lost his senses.

It was all clear now. It was clear why Jack had so loved the widow. His strange infatuation was no longer a mystery to the Major. He saw it all.

How long the two men stopped there they neither of them knew. It was dark when Jack slid off the stile and said, "Come along."

"What are you going to do?" asked the Major, as they neared the house.

"I shall go away to-night," said Jack, looking up with tears in his eyes. "I cannot see her again. It would kill me!"

For the time the Major did not speak. He felt it was his duty to advise the young man as to the course he should take, but for the life of him he could not think what had best be done.

Such a problem had never been faced by man before.

"I don't think I should do anything rash like that," he said at last. "Why not go on as you are now? You love her with all your heart and soul, and so you ought to love your mother. Your love need not alter because its nature must. If you may never tell of your relationship, upon my word, I don't see that it matters much. I don't really. It would break your heart to go away now," the Major was just going to add, "although I don't say that it would break hers," but he stopped himself in time. It was useless to say anything of the matter which had been uppermost in his mind all day after the extraordinary turn affairs had taken.

At this moment they reached the house. Everyone had gone to bed. They let themselves in quietly through the conservatory, and in the hall they said good-night.

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"I think you are right," Jack said, as the Major pressed his hand and handed him the letter which could tell him nothing more he wanted to know now. "I will stop near her and love her still!"

Poor fellow, it was hardly surprising that he did not get any sleep that night. Surely no man ever before had fallen in love with his own mother, only to find out the relationship on the very night he had determined to offer her his hand in marriage, and then be bound by a promise he dare not violate not to tell her what they really were to one another.

* * * * *

Nearly three years had passed since that memorable day on which Mrs. Selby had given her picnic, and those three years had brought little change to the principal actors in this romantic drama.

It was one morning in May that Jack found a letter on his breakfast table at his London rooms inviting him to go down and spend a week or two with Major Bohmann at his house in Bournemouth. He was delighted at the prospect of seeing his old friend again, the one human soul who shared his secret and felt for him in his trouble.

Only one thing worried him. Since he had found her he had never let a day pass without calling on his mother. He had purposely taken rooms near the house in Kensington where she and her younger sister lived. He had devoted his time to making the widow's life a happy one. Every evening he would call in and see her, would sit and read to her, and confide in her his troubles and his griefs, all except the great one she could never share.

And he did not like to leave her even for a little time. He wondered what she would say when she heard he was going. Their strange, lop-sided affection had ripened exceedingly of late. Ripened, though, as it were on different stalks. How dangerous this affection was neither of them guessed. But, oh! the pity of it, that he had not followed his own impulse and gone away from her for ever that night when he talked with the Major in the park!

He went to his mother's house with the letter in his hands and a little bunch of rosebuds, which he never failed to take. He told her he was going away for a short time, and she looked at him sadly out of those great eyes of hers. But she made no protest. How could she? What could she have said to bind him to her side? It was a sad parting, but at last it was over. They were very dear to one another.

It was down at the seaside that Jack fell in love with a certain blue-eyed, golden-haired girl whom the Major had introduced to him. Those days spent down there were a new experience to him. All the pretty girls he had met at Lady Selby's had been as nothing beside the widow he loved so sweetly, but now he could love her and another too.

That last evening when he strolled along the cliffs with Margaret Fanshaw on his arm, with the indescribable, invigorating odour of the sea filling his lungs, was like the essence of a new life. As he stood and watched the great waves dashing against the rocks below, and dreamt of future happiness, he was more full of bliss than ever before in his life.

For had he not told her of his love and pleaded for hers in return, and had not the girl laid her hand in his in mute answer to his appeal? Oh, that fatal love! How shall I tell the end?

Jack Vaughan came back to London a changed man; a new-born spirit had taken hold of him.

And even while he had grieved at parting with his new love he had not forgotten his old. He longed to be back at his mother's side. He went straight there from the station and told her of his visit. He told her all he had done, all he had seen, everything up to a certain point, and then he could go no further. And that point was where Margaret Fanshaw appeared upon the scene.

He could not pluck up courage to tell her that she had a rival in his affections. He knew he ought to; but he went on as he had gone on before and he loved her too well to make her sad with the news of his betrothal; at least, he could not do it yet. Some day he knew it must all come out, and what would happen then he dared not think.

It was at Nice the next winter that the climax came. Lady Selby, Major Bohmann, his niece Margaret Fanshaw, and Jack Vaughan, all were there.

Jack had been out riding with the Major. They came back to the hotel, and on the steps stood Mrs. Corbolis. Why she had come out so suddenly, so unexpectedly, she told no one. One quick, searching glance at the lad's face and the secret was out. When his yes met hers he could have killed himself for not having told her of his love before. It was too late now. The opportunity had gone.

What would she think of him? He dared not even wonder. He was as one in a dream. How he went through dinner that night he never knew. Only one thing was clear in his mind—Margaret had promised to marry him next week, and his mother would be there to see the ceremony. He had hoped to get it all over before he told her. But now——

That night he invited Mrs. Corbolis to go out with him in the garden.

For half an hour they sat there silently on the terrace overlooking the sparkling waters of the Mediterranean.

"Why," she said at last, speaking, oh, so coldly and collectively, "why did you not tell me of your love before? How dared you treat me as you have done—to sit at my feet and whisper words of love into my ears, when all the time you were loving another—I who have waited these long years until you should care to make a home for me?

"Oh! it is cruel. It is more than I can bear. You, the one fellow-creature I believed in, the one fellow-creature I could trust, you have treated me worse than any other man has treated me before. Yes, worse than the cruel deserter who robbed me of the child I have never known. Oh! it will break my heart, it will break——"

"Mother!" The word was on his lips, but he could not utter it. He tried three times, but each time the enemy of his oath haunted him, and the word died on his lips. That one word alone would explain his conduct, could heal the terrible wound he knew he was inflicting, and that he dared not mention. His head sank to his knees for a moment, and then he dropped senseless at the widow's feet.

Poor creature, great as was his grief, hers was even greater. After those years of love it was more than she could bear to find, as it seemed to her, that the one soul who had really cared for her was only trifling all the time.

The poor woman could not have had a more cruel punishment for her frivolity in those years before she came across her son.

She roused herself at last. She called Jack by his name, but no answer came. She cast one long look at him, a look in which all her love had been transformed into a hate such as the face of woman seldom bears, and then she went.

* * * * * * *

Next morning she had disappeared. No one knew where. All she had left was a little parcel for Jack Vaughan. With it was a letter.

He tore it open. It read: "I am going for ever now, and I forgive you. This bottle of wine is old Madeira, my favourite, as you know. From this drink my health on you wedding day, drink it with your bride, and as you do so, have a kind thought for one poor sinner who died with your name on her lips."

* * * * * * *

Two years afterwards the marriage took place between Jack and Margaret Fanshaw. The former had aged greatly since his mother's death. His grief had been beyond description, for was he not her murderer? When the wedding breakfast was finished, he opened, with tears in his eyes, the bottle which she had left him.

He poured out two glasses, one for his bride and the other for himself. He had told her his strange story now that Mrs. Corbolis was dead. It was a moment full of sad memories, and he cared not if people saw the tears trickle down his cheeks.

There was a great lump in his throat as he raised the glass and said the simple word "Mother."

That wine had been drugged with the most deadly poison the hate of woman could devise.

C. K. Robson.

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The Palmist's Prophecy.

Its Utterances—Its Motives—Its Fulfilment.

CHAPTER I.

The Line of Life.

"And you say that this will certainly take place in three months from now?"

"Sir Howard Wynne will die, as I have said, at noon, on the seventeenth day of July next."

"And this, although his health is not now, apparently, threatened in any way?"

"Yes, in spite of his present good health."

"When was he here?"

"Why do you ask? *You* know, no one better."

"I?"

"Yes, you! He was not out of your sight from the time he drove from Brook Street, at eleven o'clock this morning, till he left here at a few minutes to twelve."

Madame Cecille, palmist, thought-reader, and "Society" second-sight juggler, looked keenly into the small, closely-set eyes of her visitor.

Accustomed as she was to the arriving at the inner thoughts and intents of men, by, and through a cunningly clever interpretation of individual facial expression, she was fain to confess that the features of Martin Trevenna, bronzed by the heat and glare of ten years of Indian suns, offered but little ground for coming to a right conclusion with regard to their owner's reliability or otherwise of disposition.

An ex-officer of a native regiment, he seemed to have imbibed by virtue of professional contact with his men, some of the more undesirable phases of the native character. Dissimulation, an unreasonable, because unnecessary reserve, together with a strange inability to discriminate between right and wrong (his own actions considered) made it difficult for even a clever character like our palmist to get at the heart and soul of the man, and to read his life-book.

It was at his suggestion that his cousin, Howard Wynne, had visited the Sloane Street Sybil, a suggestion having for its object his relative's moral bewilderment and intimidation.

Howard Wynne was not only the possessor of the family title and estates, he was also, as Martin Trevenna well knew, first in the affections of Mollie Doyle, the girl who, of all the world, had it in her power to hold him, Martin Trevenna, in the hollow of her hand, and to bind him as a slave to the chariot wheels of her sovereign will and pleasure.

Wynne was, by the accident of just half-an-hour only, the younger man, and indisposed by sheer laziness of nature to kick against any semi-assumption of superiority on the part of the other, as toward himself. So it was, therefore, that the somewhat weak-minded, but altogether single-hearted young baronet fell, all unsuspiciously, into as cleverly a devised trap as could well have been set.

The owner of Llanwrist Castle, County Carmarthen, Howard Wynne had, for the first sixteen years of his life, been brought up in close companionship with his cousin, Martin Trevenna.

The latter's mother, a Wynne, had married, in absolute opposition to the wishes of her family, a Cornish mine captain, one Martin Trevenna; a man rugged-natured, and blunt of speech and manner, but as professionally expert and enthusiastic, and as honest of soul, as any in all the "West Countree."

Killed, five years before, by the falling-in of the great Tremallick Mine, that stretched for nearly a mile under the sea, his son and namesake was indebted to Howard Wynne's father for a home, education, and an entrance into life as a subaltern in the native Indian army. Young Martin had, in fact, been born at Llanwrist, during one of his mother's rare visits to her old home.

He had from boyhood been envious of his cousin's position and prospects, and when a year prior to this present relation, he heard at Simla of his uncle's death, and of Howard Wynne's succession, he then and there devised a plan and course of action, the one end and aim of which was the ultimate securing for himself of his cousin's heritage.

Losing no time, and having a few thousands in reserve (thanks to his uncle's testamentary bounty), he forthwith sent in his resignation, took passage for England, and, at the time of his interview with Madame Cecille, was the undoubted master spirit in his daily and hourly intercourse with Sir Howard.

His acquaintance with the palmist was by no means recent, he having met her a year or so previously at the court of a native prince, who, attracted by her dealings in the occult, had invited her to take up her temporary residence in his capital.

Casting about, therefore, for an unscrupulous ally in his scheme for his cousin's undoing, he remembered the pretty French adventuress, and while not committing himself to the extent of dangerous personal compromise, he contrived to so far gain her adherence as that she should sow the seed of vague alarm in the mind of the young baronet—for a consideration.

"Remember!" she said, on his leaving the Sloane Street flat. "I am not responsible—I know nothing!"

It was a curious coincidence that, while standing at the kerb-side awaiting a hansom, the very woman with thoughts of whom his soul, or what passed for it, was at that moment full, should signal him from a passing brougham.

"Martin!" she cried as the carriage drew up, and she extended her hand to him. "I thought you were in Cornwall! Howard said something about your intention to see if something could not be done with the re-opening of that dreadful mine."

"Yes, it is quite true, Mollie, I *am* going to see about it, but not till next week. I leave for Tremallick on Sunday night. But when did you come to town?"

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"Yesterday. I saw Howard half-an-hour ago in the Park, and I am glad I have met you, for I want you to tell me what is the matter with him."

"The matter with him? Nothing that I am aware of. But why do you ask? What have you noticed wrong about him?"

"He would hardly speak," said the young girl, with an anxious look into Martin Trevenna's expressionless eyes, "and I am sure he is either ill, or worrying about something, for he was white and set, and—and—surely, Martin, he has no secret from you, who are so constantly with him—who are like his brother!"

"I can assure you, Mollie, that I am as ignorant of that which you imagine ails him, as you are yourself. More, when I last saw him this morning at breakfast, he seemed to me to be unusually jolly, and full of almost boyish good-humour."

Molle Doyle, unsophisticated, innocent as are the majority of country-bred girls, could not be expected to successfully measure swords with so accomplished a master of fence as the ex-lieutenant of Native Light Infantry. Yet she was not convinced at his off-hand disclaimer, though quite believing in him as a good friend to his cousin.

You cannot deceive the average woman, even if you do not actually declare your love for her. She knows of its existence by subtle intuition, and discourages or encourages you according to circumstances, and as she herself feels towards you.

Lady Mollie Doyle loved Howard Wynne, not because he had asked her for her heart, but because she couldn't help it. On the other hand, she knew of Martin Trevenna's overmastering passion, though as yet expressed by dumb signs of admiration only, but having but one heart for disposal, and as that heart could never in any case have gone a-wandering in Martin's direction, the knowledge she had gained only served to intensify all the womanly courtesy and tenderness of her nature as towards the man who had dared to stake his happiness upon her smile.

"Well, Martin," she said at parting, and regarding him steadfastly. "I shall never rest until I have found out what is the matter with Howard. You may not, as you say, know the cause, but something tells me that the truth lies with you, and with you alone, and that it is to you, and to none other, that I must look for the real explanation of the mystery."

CHAPTER II.

A Missing Letter and a Secret.

"Has Sir Howard returned yet from London, Edwards?"

"No, my lady!" replied the Llanwrist station-master, "but I did hear that he might be expected by the late express that always stops here for him."

"Which it certainly will not do to-night, Edwards!" said a man's quiet voice.

"Howard!" exclaimed Lady Mollie, turning sharply round and facing a tall, kindly-eyed young fellow in grey-tweed shooting suit and gaiters. "I am so glad you have come, for I want to see you awfully."

"Do you?" he said, looking wistfully down at her. "You must lose no time, then, dear, for I leave again for Milford Haven in less than four hours from now."

They had by this reached Mollie's dainty little pony-carriage in the station-yard.

"Milford Haven, Howard? Are you going across to Kingstown?"

"No, dear, I am to meet Martin at Milford, where my yacht is, and we are to make for Portreath, on the North Cornish coast. But if you will drive me to the Castle I will give you details on the journey."

"Well?" she asked as soon as they were on the open road. "What takes you to Cornwall, Howard?—and with Martin! I can't exactly explain, perhaps, what I mean, but I don't want you to go."

"Not go, Mollie, why?"

"That is what I cannot tell you, because I don't know; but for all that, dear, I shall be very—very unhappy if you do go this trip with Martin."

"Haven't you any reason for feeling like this?"

"Only a dream, Howard! A silly dream, very likely, you will say, and yet you know that I am not superstitious—not even a little bit."

"Well, I won't ask you for the details of your vision, Mollie, if that is all the reason you can give me for your not wishing me to go to Cornwall. But supposing that I have a strong, a very strong reason for going—how then? Although, curiously enough, there is a decidedly superstitious flavour about my reason too."

"Tell me," was all she said.

"Nearly three months ago I went—for the want, I suppose, of something better to do—to that palmist woman in Sloane Street, London—Madame Cecille."

"Whatever for, Howard?"

"I am sure I couldn't tell you. But, never mind that, I did go; and I'm ashamed to say that I haven't had an easy five minutes since."

"Why?"

"Well, you will hardly believe it, perhaps, but she prophesied, after pretending to read my hand (for it's all humbug and pretence, you know) that I should assuredly die at or about noon on the seventeenth of this month—two days hence."

"The wicked woman!"

"Say rather, dear, foolish me for listening and paying serious attention to such arrant rubbish."

"Of course you deserve a scolding, but you haven't shown me yet the connection between the prophecy and this yachting cruise."

"That is where my shame comes in. I am going just because I am afraid to face possibilities among those who know me."

"And Martin?"

"Oh! Martin is doing his best to help me to throw off this wretched something, which, after all, may and no doubt will prove to be nothing."

"Then why go?"

"Don't seek to dissuade me, dear. It is all very childish, I know; but I promise you, that next week, when I return to Llanwrist, you shall punish me in your own way. Will that content you?"

"I suppose it must. But here we are at the lodge. I shall not see you again before you leave. Good-bye, Howard!"

He bent over and kissed her.

"Good-bye, dear!"

Another minute, and the little carriage had disappeared round the bend of the road.

* * * * * *

Mollie was penitently reading a brief note from Howard Wynne, just delivered at Eloyne Court by the butler from Llanwrist.

There was not much in it, only a few words of regret that he was resistlessly impelled to go his own way in this matter, with an earnest expression of belief that in some, as yet unaccountable way, good would come out of evil.

The letter arrived immediatelyly after breakfast, and she had scarcely read it for the third time, when a mounted messenger from the housekeeper at the Castle, begged for her presence there without delay.

Not staying to even tell anybody of her intended absence, she ordered her ponies, and within the half hour was sitting in the housekeeper's room at Llanwrist.

"It is old Nurse Wyatt, Lady Mollie," said the stately domestic head of Howard Wynne's establishment.

"Sir Howard's old nurse, do you mean, Mrs. Evans?"

"Yes, my lady! And she wants to see you as soon as you can go to her."

"Wants to see me? Why, I don't know her!"

"Well, my lady, she sent word, an hour or more ago, that being as she was suddenly struck for death, she had something of the greatest importance to tell Sir Howard if he would go to her at once."

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"But Sir Howard is not here!"

"No, my lady, and so I told the boy that brought the message. Back he comes, however, almost directly, with the old woman's request that you would go. I didn't know what else to do, and though I thought it a liberty of her to ask it, sent on to you."

"You did quite right, Mrs. Evans. See that my ponies are put up for an hour, please, and I will walk across the park to the north lodge."

* * * * *

In the little room under the eaves old Rhoda Wyatt lay a-dying, while, sitting by the bedside, Lady Mollie heard from the dry, trembling lips, the most astounding story to which, during her short life, she had ever been fated to listen.

In effect it was this:

On the night of young Martin Trevenna's birth, twenty-nine years before, at Llanwrist Castle, she, Rhoda Wyatt, was in charge of the nursing arrangements connected alike with the advent of the Wynne heir, and with the coming of the little, poor relation.

Mrs. Trevenna, as Miss Wynne, had known the nurse from her own childhood almost, and when she saw that her new-born looked weakly, and needed better nurture than she, as a mere mine-captain's wife, could hope to give it, she tempted Rhoda to exchange the children, in order that she might secure for her own the advantages of a son of the house.

Rhoda Wyatt's task was made easier, in that the same night the suggestion was made, Lady Wynne died, so that no mother's unerring instinct was there to proclaim the substituted babe as an impostor.

"Remember," she said; "I am not responsible—I know nothing."

Satisfied now that her son would, as the reputed heir, have his chances for life increased a hundredfold, and trusting to the chapter of accidents that in some mysterious fashion the wrong would, in the future, right itself, so that no one should suffer by her practically criminal action, Mrs. Trevenna wrote and gave into Rhoda Wyatt's keeping a short, signed statement of that which she had done, which, in the event of her own death, she enjoined upon the nurse to communicate to her own boy without delay.

Mrs. Trevenna died just before young Howard's twenty-first birthday, by which time Rhoda Wyatt had lost the letter. Fearing to make so momentous a statement on her own bare word, and fearing also the consequences of her own share in the matter, she decided to hold her tongue, and let things remain as they were.

It was only now, when death stared her in the face, that she felt she must unburden her mind, and disclose the secret, which, if her story was believed, would change the whole course of two men's lives.

Howard Wynne (so-called) not being at hand to receive the confession, who so fit as the girl of his choice to take it, and to pass it on to one or both of the victims of Mrs. Trevenna's indefensible duplicity and wrong-doing.

It would be difficult to describe Lady Mollie's feelings upon the conclusion of the old woman's narrative. Sorrow for her lover's blighted hopes and prospects, for his sure disappointment, his almost certain social ignominy and shame, filled her heart to breaking-point. But in the presence of the mighty leveller, she could utter no reproach, no condemnation; and so she watched life's light flicker out, closing gently the eyes of her whose tardy revelation consigned the man she loved to a future for which alike by nature and by up-bringing, he was ill-fitted and ill-prepared.

CHAPTER III.

The Old Mine Workings Under the Sea.

During the run across the Bristol Channel, from Milford Haven to Portreath, Martin Trevenna played the game in such fashion, that his cousin, had he been even in the least suspicious, would have been disarmed and at ease.

It was late on the night of the sixteenth of July that the *Ariel* arrived off Portreath; so late indeed, that after consultation with his skipper, the baronet decided to stand "off and on" outside till the morning.

For some reason this did not appear to fall in with Trevenna's plans, for pleading an appointment with the resident representative of the Tremallick mine, he availed himself of an opportunity for going ashore offered him by the master of an in-bound fishing-smack.

Thoughwondering a little at the other's somewhat feverish haste to land, Howard, it being none of his business, made no remark beyond promising to meet his cousin at nine the next morning at the house of Micah Trevithick, the captain of the mine.

Though as a property of but small value nowadays, the Tremallick, in the opinion of many, only needed money to be spent upon it, to come out a paying concern.

Martin Trevenna's father had possessed a small share in the proprietary, and this having, after his death, devolved upon his son, who, owing to various causes, was now the sole remaining proprietor, Martin had for some time past been seeking capital in order to carry out his ideas of resuscitation.

This being so, his present visit to the mine, with his cousin for companion, was no surprise to anybody, and it was only in the light of after events, that his real motive was disclosed.

As has been said, the mine was situated close to the sea, running under it in fact, at right angles to the coast line almost, for a distance of nearly a mile.

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When Martin's father met his doom, it was in a desperate endeavour to penetrate the extreme limit of the subterranean workings—the mass of earth, rock, and ore forming the crown of the gallery, which then fell in, walling in the unfortunate man, as in a huge tank, under the ocean bed, which must have immediately filled with sea-water, and at once drowned the explorer.

The present captain's residence was a small hut (it was nothing better) at the shaft mouth. Here Martin Trevenna sought him just before midnight.

The grizzled old Cornishman's reception of his employer was not particularly cordial, or even commonly respectful.

"Look here, Mr. Trevenna, I've done your bidding, but to my mind it seems all wrong and dangerous, the knocking away of those props mid-way in the under-sea working. Mark my words, sir, the crown of the gallery won't stand many hours, and when it does cave in the whole mine will be flooded to sea level, and Tremallick will never give another ounce of copper so long as the world lasts!"

"Pooh, nonsense, man! So long as there is no movement or hammering down there, the place is safe enough. Besides the iron supports to replace the old wood props are on their way from Cardiff, and then you'll have no reason for croaking."

"All right, sir, the responsibility's yours, not mine; only don't ask *me* to go down again, for I won't! I'll live the rest of my life out natural, if I can."

"Oh, I shall not ask you to risk your skin, but to show you that I have the courage of my opinions, I mean to descend now, and have a look round before taking my cousin, Sir Howard Wynne, down in the afternoon."

"Very well, sir, I won't seek to persuade you to 'keep on the grass.' You know your own business best, I suppose."

"Now you're sensible, Trevithick. Get me a hat and candle, and a suit of overalls, and get yourself ready to go to St. Ives when I come up again. I have a letter and message to send there."

"Right, sir. I'll be ready."

The old man came to the door of the hut and watched Martin Trevenna, the lighted candle flickering in the front band of his old grey slouch hat, disappear from view over the shaft mouth, down the first of a series of ladders placed perpendicularly against the sides of the opening.

* * * * *

It was not Trevenna's first descent by many down the old mine shaft, and he faced the down journey of over five hundred feet without a tremor.

In places the rungs of the ladders were slippery, and in some instances perilously loose and insecure, but with care and prudent deliberation he managed to reach the bottom in safety.

By this time the candle was more than half burnt out, but as he had a supply in his pocket that did not trouble him much.

The limited light almost necessitated the blind man's resource, a feeling with the hands for the gallery opening under the sea.

At last he found it.

Above him, fully a hundred and twenty feet over his head, rumbled, with a sound like to distant thunder, the watery uneasiness of the mighty Atlantic.

Evidently a storm was in progress (it had threatened a gale before he left the *Ariel*) for to his imagination it seemed that mountain dashed against mountain, as if all the artillery of the world was roaring and booming up beyond the bed of ocean.

Still he crept on, intent upon one thing, the satisfying himself that his instructions had been carried out by old Trevithick.

Stumbling over a baulk of timber he recognised that he had reached his journey's end.

Only one prop remained, hardly sufficient, as the old captain had said, to keep danger off for more than a few hours at most.

"It will last till I get him down here, and then, for the upper air!—and love!—and—What's that?"

He stood a minute and listened intently. Again through the booming of the surge above sounded distinctly a sharp, quick, crack. He listened again, his heart stopping its beating almost, so deep was the mysterious suspense.

Then a louder, longer report, resembling a volley of musketry.

"My God! It can't be!" he half whispered to himself in terror.

Throwing all schemes and plans to the winds he turned swiftly to make for the gallery opening again, and for the bottom of the shaft. But the horror of his situation must have bewildered him, for instead of a free passage, he collided blindly with the gallery wall, his candle going out in the frenzied struggle to pull himself together.

Then out of the black, solid darkness rang a cry, which, if it could have been heard in the upper world, would have frozen the blood in the veins of the very vilest of humankind, so full of agonised and death-dreading despair was it.

Simultaneously with it the whole crown of the gallery at that point seemed suddenly to collapse, and with the triumphant roar, as of the final consummation of all things, the sea swept the tunnel from end to end, and—all was chaos.

* * * * *

It was ten o'clock when Howard Wynne knocked at old Trevithick's door; but to no purpose, for it remained fast shut.

"Twelve," sounded from Portreath Church-tower before the young man saw Trevithick returning along the road from the town.

Mutual explanations resulted in an adjournment to the shaft mouth.

Hastily throwing himself face downwards upon the ground, the old "captain" leant over and listened, making a motion with one hand to his companion for silence.

Even Howard Wynne could detect a faint swishing sound of water in motion.

When in a moment or two Trevithick rose to his feet, it was with a blanched face and trembling limbs.

"Sir," he said, with an awe-stricken catch in his voice, "the end of Tremallick has come, and Mr. Trevenna, God rest his soul!—has seen it!"

"You mean——!"

"That the sea has broken in, as I told him it would, and the son has gone to find his father."

* * * * *

The collapse of the Tremallick mine is talked of to this day on the north coast of Cornwall, but the contemplated crime of Martin Trevenna is hidden in his grave. If old Trevithick suspected anything he died a year or two after the catastrophe without word or sign.

* * * * *

Upon the *Ariel's* return to Milford Haven, the first to come on board were Lord Eloyne and his daughter, Lady Mollie Doyle.

That which they had to tell Howard Wynne, that he had no right to the name, but that as his dead cousin's next-of-kin, he was now the true and lawful owner of the Wynne title and estates, had, after his joy in the sure and certain possession of Mollie's love, one dominant meaning, namely, that palmists may sometimes arrive at, and prophecy the truth, seeing that on the day and hour indicated by Madame Cecille, Martin Trevenna, otherwise Martin Wynne, tenth baronet, duly met his death.

Ralph Enderby.

Poor Poet!

POET: "How beautiful, how enchanting is the moonlight! There is nothing in nature so poetical. How often have I sung the praises of fair Luna in my poems." She: "Perhaps that's what makes her look so pale."

And Again he Failed.

"WILL you be mine?" he faltered. She looked upon him with disdain. "I thought you knew better!" His head sank upon his breast. "I do," he answered, in a hollow voice, "but they have all refused me, one by one."

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THE GREAT CUT-PICTURE COMPETITION.

PICTURE No. 2.

Twenty-five Awards of Valuable Gramophones.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find fifty-four pictorial squares, which when placed together in their proper position will form a complete picture.

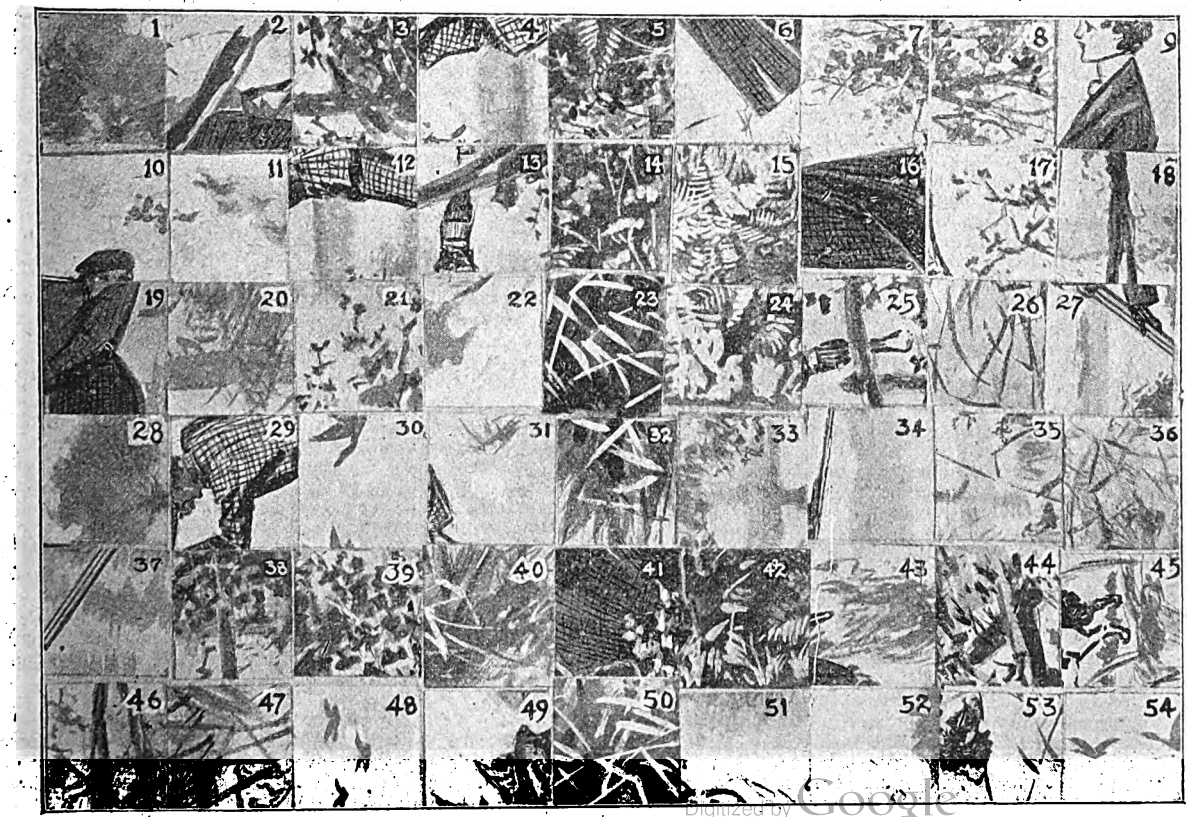
Each square is numbered; that, however, has nothing to do with their correct position, of course. What we want you to do is to cut the jumble below into the fifty-four squares and carefully paste the squares in their correct order on to a sheet of paper.

When you have pasted up the complete picture keep it carefully together with the picture which appeared last week until you get next week's *Short Stories* containing the final picture. *Do not on any account send it in to us before you are told to do so.*

The twenty-five prize-winners will each be presented with a Handsome Gramophone.

These machines are beautifully made, fit to grace any drawing-room, and an everlasting source of amusement. With these Gramophones will be given two records.

The Gramophone is one of the most delightful companions for the long winter evenings. None of your friends can talk like a talking machine can, and give you the same amount of fun as it produces. It is the very essence of good and genial companionship, which never tires you. What it says, or what it sings, is always interesting. Once you have heard it you want always to hear it, and it is ever-ready and willing to oblige.



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Penfold's Hidden Lover.

YOUNG PENFOLD was leaving those comfortable rooms of his in South Street. He had not been very careful with his money of late, and what with one thing and another, there had been little irregularities in regard to the payment of his weekly rent which had led good Mrs. Davies, his landlady, to suggest to him that he should find other quarters.

The luggage the cabman lifted on to the top of his vehicle was not on a very elaborate scale. There was a tin trunk, a couple of worn portmanteaux, and two or three boxes shaped with an unquestionable regard to hats. As he stepped into the cab he gave a final glance at the house where he had spent that last twelvemonth.

They had been a giddy twelve, those months. Could he count the number of supper parties Mrs. Davies had been ruefully summoned to cater for? Could he remember all the gay, boyish faces that had from time to time made merry there with him over countless bottles of wine? No, but still it had been a giddy time.

Now he was to bid farewell—not merely to the house, but to the chapter in his life to which it formed the background. That giddy life was, for the nonce, over. There was now nothing before him but work—hard, very hard work—for the little legacy his dead mother had bequeathed him a year ago was now all gone. He had nothing but his brains. They were good brains he fondly believed.

He had also, what was perhaps as much to the shallow world, a good face, at least, so Annie Garth thought as, from behind a curtain in his late bedroom, she took a last peep at it, as its possessor drove away in the cab. Annie was the housemaid at South Street, who had ministered to Leslie Penfold's needs during that twelvemonth. He had never said an abrupt word to her. If dinner had been late, and had kept him feverishly waiting, he had never been nasty about it. He had always accepted her lame excuses with a forced smile. If he had ever given an order, it had been as a kindly request, prefixed always by a "Would you, please." He had often smiled at her, too, and made a jolly remark, and he had, thought Annie, such a beautiful smile.

And now he was going—perhaps she would never see him again. Perhaps that flitting glance he gave towards the window would be the last that would ever meet hers. The dear boy she had looked after, to whose little wants she had ministered with feelings of delight—unconscious to him—was vanishing. And Annie knew only too well—servants diagnose these things on a system entirely their own—that Penfold was not facing a world of roses as he sped away in that cab. The address he had given for the forwarding of his letters was not a good address. It was far from as "classy" as South Street, and Annie knew, too, that he was not free from financial trouble, and was woman of the world enough to doubt if the boy would meet with much better a fate than most of the gentlemen she had known who "lived by their brains."

These thoughts it was, that accounted for the fact that when good Mrs. Davies entered the bedroom of her departed lodger, she found her faithful domestic sitting by the window in a flood of tears—a headache, she explained—and tears that, even when they did cease, only made way for sobs. Annie Garth had a heart, and, impossible though it seemed, that heart was a present accompanying Leslie Penfold and his belongings on that uninteresting journey to new and smaller lodgings in Bloomsbury.

This was all in the Spring, when people don't very much think about destiny and such things, and Leslie was not particularly downcast or dispirited when he entered those new lodgings. After all, he told himself, he had brains.

But there was to be an Autumn, and Autumn did not find him even in those lesser lodgings in respectable Bloomsbury. We must turn many times to the left and right, cross many mean, tram-lined thoroughfares, and evil-smelling streets, to trace our youth where Autumn found him.

It was not in respectable Bloomsbury, but Clerkenwell; not on the first floor, but the fifth, and in the back, too, that a young fellow sat with his head between his hands that following November. There was not here any neatly-laid meal on a clean tablecloth, awaiting him as he had entered that evening. And he was not wearing that fashionably-cut suit, and one of those spotless collars and neat ties that had in the old days shown his good looks to such advantage. The clothes he wore were threadbare, and his collar had known three days of active service, and a past which left its traces on its frayed edge.

He had not shaved very recently, and his light brown hair hung very shaggily on his head. His eyes were red, too, and underlined by black marks, the revelation of late hours and, perhaps, hard drinking. This was after six months of attempted employment of those brains, the goodness of which he had so confidently trusted the previous Spring.

On the table in front of him lay an outward and visible revelation of those brains in the shape of a manuscript, lying half outside an envelope, and inclosing a little single sheet of printed paper—that callous usher of evil, the editorial rejection form. Penfold had known many of these, and most of them had merely caused him a passing spasm of disappointment. He had never known despair, for, despite his worn appearance, he still hoped and trusted in those brains of his. But this last returned manuscript fell less lightly on him. He had not eaten much that day, and it was a matter of speculation where he should eat the following day. Under previous circumstances that would have troubled him little.

But to-night they were not. He felt, for the first time almost in his life, that insidious fever of depression which is the invariable forerunner of despair. In a moment it had overwhelmed him. A dark flash came to his eye, and he clenched his fists, and walked absently round the room. He opened the window hurriedly, and glanced down at the crowded street a hundred feet below. He wondered if there were palings at the bottom, and, remembering there were, closed the window. He glanced round the room as though seeking for something, but apparently did not see it. Then, as in a moment of resolve, he seized that faded, soft felt hat, and thrust it on his head, and with that same, wild look, and those clenched fists, he descended the narrow, creaking stairway, and emerged into the street.

He did not notice the figure of a woman standing close by, a woman dressed in neat black. And, as he walked hurriedly down the street, and turned several corners, emerging into Holborn, he did not know that a few yards behind him walked that same, solitary figure. Pausing here and there, as if in thought, he continued his course southward, reaching Fleet Street. It was empty and deserted. Those myriads of newspaper offices, now denuded of their occupants, seemed to mock at him as he passed. They seemed to be shouting welcome to all but himself. Such feelings of despair as had marked his departure from his lodgings increased as he

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walked down this thoroughfare, which was adding another to the list of the victims of its contemptuous rejection.

He wandered into the Temple Courts, silent and gloomy, and finally emerged on to the Embankment. He heard behind him a soft, pattering footstep, but had not looked round. If he had done so, he would have seen a little woman in black. And as he stood on the Embankment gazing into the black river, he little knew he was observed from behind the fence of the Temple Gardens. He stood looking into the water, his hand lightly gripping the stone. The grip was strengthening, he was beginning to raise himself up by his muscles to a seat on the Embankment wall. He was sitting on that wall, and was about to——

"Stop, for God's sake!"

He swung round from his dangerous position on the wall.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

He seemed to recognise the face; he could not remember where he had seen it. He had always had a bad memory, especially for girl's faces.

"Annie," she answered, "Annie Garth. Don't you remember me, Mr. Penfold, the housemaid at South Street? Don't jump over, Mr. Penfold, don't, for — for my sake."

"For your sake, Annie? What can I be to you?"

"You are all the world to me, Mr. Penfold. I have never dared to think of addressing you, but I have seen you often—every week—since you left South Street. I could not bear the idea of losing sight of you, and—but it's very silly."

He had hopped off the parapet to the ground, more with the motion of an athlete in form than a thwarted suicide.

"You, Annie? You love me? Good Heavens, then, there is someone in the world."

He grasped her hands in his.

"Tell me, Annie, how you came to trace me to this dreadful place."

"It is Thursday, sir, and my evening out. Where should I ever be on this night but somewhere where I might see you? As I always do on Thursday, I was waiting outside your lodgings for you to come out, and, as I have always done, I followed you as far as I could keep you in sight."

"But how came you to know where I was? I had drifted there, you know."

"I had found out. The servants had told me your address, and I had spent each Thursday evening outside, waiting for a glimpse of you."

She burst into tears.

"You are the only one in the world to me. You did not know it, but every word you spoke to me when I waited on you went through me. Oh, how mad I am! But at last something seems to have brought us together—the shadow of death. Had it not been the shadow, it would have been death itself, for if you had gone over there," she pointed to the river, "I should have followed you."

He kissed her.

"You have saved me from folly, Annie. You have showed me that my miserable being is something to somebody. Come on, let us forget about the hideous world."

And, her arm in his, he took her with a rapid stride back through the courts, into the Strand, and half an hour after, Fritz, the waiter of a little Italian restaurant, was getting two suppers for a "broken down gent" and a "skivvy," who, chatting as merrily as a pair of young lovers, sat gazing into each other's eyes.

The next day brought the usual-looking dispatch to Penfold. But inside it was not that callous rejection form, but a neat, red cheque for £5. His luck had turned. From that day his old life came back to him. He wrote and wrote, and buoyed up by success, his work grew better and better until it now confronts one's eyes almost everywhere the periodical reader looks. And in a little room in a cosy flat near Holborn sits a little woman, who incessantly types away as he dictates to her. Penfold's wife, Annie, makes an excellent amanuensis.

Vivian Carter.

Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 23.—Those whose birthday occurs to-day will have a good year for health, and with care business will progress favourably.

Young girls will have anxiety over their love affairs; letters cause trouble.

The day is good for buying and selling; evil for marriage and pleasure-seeking.

A child born to-day will be very changeable, untidy, and much given to pleasure and the opposite sex.

September 24.—An unfavourable birthday, except to clerks, teachers, and travellers. Avoid speculation and keep business well in hand.

Girls born between four and five p.m. will need to be careful in their love affairs; much deceit and anxiety.

A good day to write letters; evil to ask favours, buy, or change residence.

A child born this day will be clever and ingenious, but improvident, and subject to accidents.

September 25.—A quiet, but rather fortunate year for business, health, and domestic affairs.

Love affairs are very interesting, and girls born near two and five p.m. become engaged or marry.

A good day for visiting, pleasure seeking, marriage, dealing with jewellers, doctors, or military men.

A child born here will be quick, good-tempered, and make many friends. Will be fortunate in business.

September 26.—An unfortunate year is shown; sickness in family; annoyance over business and many minor drawbacks. See to health.

Girls meet with disappointment in love affairs.

The day is evil for signing papers, dealing with elderly people, or buying property, or land.

A child born to-day will be timid, overcautious, and reserved. Should keep in the employ of others.

S ptember 27.—Beware of law, accident and losses during the next year. Insure against fire and mishap.

Young girls will need extra caution and prudence in love affairs.

An evil day to speculate, to make new friends, or engage servants. Beware of mishap from two to seven p.m.

A chi d born here will be unfortunate in life, headstrong, and improvident. If a girl, unlucky in marriage.

September 28.—An active and fortunate year for business. A lot of travel and movement. Many pleasant events occur.

Young girls have a favourable time for their love affairs; if born near four or seven p.m. they will receive offers of marriage.

A child born this day will be fond of travel, and never settle long in one place. Will be clever and of a cheerful disposition.

September 29.—A quiet year is promised, things go much as usual. Rather more favourable for those in employ.

Young girls receive attentions from married men and need care where they place confidence.

The day is good to ask favours, engage servants, and deal with shipping agents, and superiors.

A child born to-day will be rather fortunate. Fond of the mystical and of the sea. Will lack self-confidence.

Asture!.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

NEW READERS START HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We moved into a house in Pont Street, and it was here that Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, and during that interview Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Frankie left the room; but I stayed, and, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope, overheard Hope (who turned out to be Kinross' cousin) tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis-Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably.

Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived, He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell in a dead faint. Doctors were called, and pronounced it a paralytic seizure. Toby next called. In three days his uncle's bill must be redeemed. If this was not done he vowed that he would shoot himself.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. Pettigrew was present, and, seeing what was done, accused her when they were alone.

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FRANKIE REDEEMS HER DIAMONDS.

FOR a minute they faced each other, the man keen and determined, the woman flushed indeed and trembling, but resolute to fight to the last.

"Prove it," she said, "prove it."

"The proof's here in the drink," Pettigrew took up the glass again, "nothing else is wanted."

"Tell that to Lord Kinross, or any other of my friends, and see if they'll accept it as a proof. Something more will be required to convince anyone that a woman in my position drugged a fellow guest, here, in Lord Chesterton's house. We're not in the wilds of Texas, Mr. Pettigrew; we're living under civilised conditions. Such melodramatic happenings don't take place here."

Pettigrew smiled grimly.

"You play the game, Mrs. Norton," he said, "but I'm too old a hand to be bluffed. I'm not likely to mistake the taste of opium for anything else."

"That doesn't say I put it there?"

"I think I can settle that question. I happen to know you want £3,000—want it desperately, want it to-night. I can pretty well fix up the reason why you want it, and I know how you hoped to get it. You stood to win £3,000 from me if Slade lost the match."

"What then?" she asked, defiant still, though her eyes glanced restlessly, fearfully, towards the door, and her face grew white. "What then?"

"You determined at all risks that Slade should lose the match—and the risk you chose was this," and he held up the glass. "Do you want further proof? Do you think I shall have much difficulty in convincing Kinross or any other of your friends that you drugged Slade?"

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I shall make the affair public. To commence with, I'll inform Chesterton, Slade too, if he hasn't left the house."

"No!" she cried vehemently. "No!"

"Can you give me any reason why I should not?"

"What good will it do you? After all, nobody has been harmed, Slade will be all right in an hour or two. You haven't paid your bet," she added fiercely. "You haven't lost a penny."

"That's no thanks to you, Mrs. Norton."

"Think of the scandal, the awful scandal it will make. It will ruin me, do you hear?—ruin me—and how will that profit you?"

"It is a thing that no decent man could tolerate," he answered firmly.

Tall, and grim, and square, he stood, unyielding as a rock. Many things it was possible for Hiram Pettigrew to overlook and to forgive, but a mean and treacherous act towards a man whom you called friend, aroused him to passionate indignation. He was long past pity, nothing could touch or soften him.

As I looked at him, I feared poor Frankie's hour had come. It seemed to me that she, who had boasted herself more than a match for any man, at last had found her master.

The next moment I thought differently.

"You think I have acted meanly, despicably," she said, "and in your indignation you think no punishment can be too great. Do you know why you think so? Why are you so bitter and so hard towards me? Because"—she faced him proudly, her eyes ablaze, her head well up,—"because I am a woman. Oh, you may smile, you may deny it, tell yourself a thousand times it is not so. But I know better. Answer me this, if I were a man driven to desperation for the want of money to carry out some scheme, speculation, politics, any of the things by which men make both fortunes and success, would you judge me so hardly for having run so great a risk? If I were a man with a future, a brilliant future before me, would you, because of this one act, crush me, ruin me, spoil my chance for ever?"

"The cases aren't the same. The man as you present him, would have had some urgent reason for the act. You—" he sneered. "What was your reason? You wanted to indulge in some expensive folly, some extravagant freak—if you're not stopped to-day, you'll go to greater lengths to-morrow. When will you stop?"

"When I've attained my end—marriage with Lord Kinross. Can't you understand how hard I've had to fight, how desperately I've had to struggle to get as far as this? How can I help it if I have to use my wits to get out of this, my strength of will to out-manœuvre someone else? You won't treat me as an equal. You wouldn't have played a match at billiards with me to-night, nor employ me on the Stock Exchange to-morrow. And yet there's not a man more capable than I." Then with a swift change she bent towards him.

"As you are strong, be merciful," she said. "I'm not a craven or a coward, but I ask, I beg for mercy."

She clasped her hands round his arm, and looked beseechingly at him.

Pettigrew cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry," he commenced, but she drew closer, clinging tightly to him. He made an effort to disengage himself, but it was only a faint one.

As they stood together, her white face raised to his, there came a sound of footsteps in the hall.

In an agony of terror lest the others should return before my cousin had persuaded Pettigrew to silence, I rushed to the door, hoping to delay them. I was too late, Chesterton had already crossed the threshold. Frankie, watching over Pettigrew's shoulder, saw him enter. In another moment the American would see him, would speak to him, and then—

With a despairing effort she flung her arms round Pettigrew's neck, and reaching up, kissed him on the lips.

Chesterton advancing, saw the embrace. He stopped short with a hurried exclamation. Frankie, in blushing confusion, disengaged herself. Pettigrew stood motionless, silent as a sphinx.

I caught my breath, surely he couldn't tell after—after what had happened. Besides, Chesterton would hardly listen to anything to Frankie's discredit from Pettigrew now.

The American caught my imploring look, and a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Norton," he said quietly. "You've won—the bet." And with that he departed, with a farewell nod to Chesterton, who returned the salutation somewhat coolly.

His lordship saw us to our carriage in silence. He smiled at me, however, when he said "good-bye." Turning to Frankie he remarked pointedly—

"Does Kinross return soon?"

"To-morrow," answered Frankie.

"I think it's time," he said. Then—"Do you think I'd better advise him not to leave town again just yet?"

"I know he's always glad of your advice, Lord Chesterton. But," she bent forward, leaning out of the carriage window, "if you tell tales, so shall I."

"My dear Mrs. Norton, I protest——"

Frankie interrupted with a laugh.

"I've not forgotten Mrs. Curtis-Blount," she said, "neither has Cynthia. Home, Fletcher," she called to the coachman, and we drove off, leaving his lordship quite discomfited.

I was too nervous and

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excited with all I had gone through to wish to talk that night, but Frankie showed an unusual disposition to chatter.

"I never thought I could persuade him, Cynthia. I never should if Chesterton hadn't arrived just at the critical moment. I am so thankful, so delighted. It's glorious to win a fight with a man like that against you."

"Frankie, did you really mean all that you said about Pettigrew's judging a man differently from a woman?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know if I believe it—but it's true. Look, Cynthia," she leant towards me, tilting her face in her hands—a rose leaf 'twixt two lilies. "What value do you think my cleverness would be to me without my face? Brains are all a man wants to get on in the world, they're no good to a woman without beauty."

"But you have both, Frankie."

"Yes, so I beat both men and women."

I pondered over what she said. Frankie had never spoken like that before, at any rate, I had not heard her. Her speech to Pettigrew much impressed me. It sounded a little like a speech I had heard at a political meeting I'd attended with Lady Gaveston, a meeting in favour of giving women votes.

Frankie had always warned me not to be political, she said it was the last refuge of disappointed spinsters, and that no man would tolerate them at any price.

I came to the conclusion that Frankie must have read the report of the speech I mentioned, she couldn't have said that sort of thing herself.

The next morning I woke early, troubled with the reflection that Kinross was returning that evening to accompany Frankie to Lady Daventry's dance, and that despite all her manœuvring, my cousin had not been able to get the money for her diamonds.

I expected to find Frankie horribly depressed, but, on the contrary, she was in the highest spirits. She had put on a delightful gown of pale blue linen, and wore a knot of cornflowers in her belt.

"Somebody's coming to see me this morning, Cynthia," she said. "Guess?"

Of course I mentioned every name but the right one; Kinross, Percival Hope, Chesterton, Cassilis.

"Wrong every time," she cried. "You little goose, who should it be but Pettigrew?"

"Surely not, after last night?"

"What happened last night will make him come all the more. There"—as the door bell sounded, followed by a sharp, short knock. "I knew I was right, that's he. Come, Cynthia," she took my hand, "we'll beard the lion together."

Hiram greeted her in his usual fashion, friendly and admiring.

"You're looking very well," he said, "and seem quite pleased to see me. Perhaps you can guess why I'm here?"

"Of course I can. You've come to pay your debts. You're going to hand me over the £3,000 I won last night."

Her audacity took my breath away. Pettigrew, however, seemed amused by it.

"I do admire you, Frankie," he said with a drawl.

It was the first time he'd used my cousin's Christian name. Somehow I did not like the way in which he said it.

"I always knew you had good taste," she answered.

"It's an expensive luxury at times," he said, and looked straight at her.

She laughed.

"I find it so," she said. "What of my cheque, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"I haven't my cheque-book with me—or my pocket-book, the one you gave me, either."

"That's of no consequence. You can write 'pay bearer so much' on a sheet of note-paper. It will hold good."

"I'm not signing anything like that this morning."

"I think you are. I will go further and say I'm sure you are."

"You're clever, Mrs. Norton."

"Sometimes, not always. To-day, for instance, I fee too utterly soft-hearted. A child could impose on me."

"A mighty cute child it would have to be."

"You're fond of children, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"I am. My own are both grown up, and I'm half sorry that they've left off being small. I've two sons, Mrs. Norton, one sixteen, the other twenty."

"I shall hope to know them some day."

Pettigrew smiled inscrutably, somehow I fancied he did not share the hope.

"You haven't told me how your wife is, Mr. Pettigrew? I trust she's better? She must feel your being away from her so often?"

There was a suggestion of malice in the speech, but he ignored it.

"Thank you, Mrs. Pettigrew is better. She suffers with her heart; so long as she is quiet she is fairly well, but anything in the nature of excitement upsets her directly. I'm told a shock of any kind would have a very bad effect."

"How sad. You must keep unpleasant things from her at any cost."

"I do. My wife has every care."

He did not speak with much enthusiasm, I thought; there was no tenderness in his voice such as had crept in when he mentioned his sons.

"It would be a bad thing for your boys to lose their mother," she said.

He nodded and displayed a wish to change the conversation.

Frankie relentlessly kept him to the point.

"It's a shame that the woman always has to stay at home, while a man can roam at will. A wife gets all sorts of fancies in her head when her husband is away, and then"—Frankie rose and went to her *escritoire*—"people say such hard things. No one is ever safe from gossip. What with paragraphs and interviews and what Society says and does facing one in every paper, it's a wonder anybody's name escapes. Have you seen this"—as she spoke she picked up a paper, apparently a press cutting, and held it towards Pettigrew.

"It's a proof of an article that's going into next week's *Gossipy Notes*. I'll read you a paragraph, it will interest you."

"The latest society beauty is adding daily to the ranks of her admirers," she commenced. "*On dit* the last addition is a certain wealthy American who is more than a little infatuated. It is suggested that sensational developments are expected likely to lead to a *cause célèbre* in the divorce courts."

"Well," said Frankie. "What do you think of that?"

"It's pretty scandalous. I suppose the beauty referred to is yourself?"

"Precisely."

"And the—American?" She looked up in his face.

"Can you doubt it is yourself?"

"Well, if you don't mind," he said, "it won't affect me."

"No?" She put down the paper and came quite close to him. "But your wife—what of her?"

Their eyes met in a quick challenge.

"She is delicate, you know, and can't stand the least excitement," Frankie's voice was mocking, "she is jealous and exaggerates trifles into happenings of great importance. Oh"—as he made a gesture of denial, "I know what I'm saying, you're not the only person who finds out other people's affairs. I have studied your family history to some purpose. If your wife sees *this*," she glanced at the proof, "she will magnify it, enlarge upon it, she will throw herself into an illness, and in a burst of outraged affection make the affair a nine days' wonder in the press. Then"—Frankie threw out her hands—"your domestic peace is shattered, your wife a helpless invalid, your sons estranged, worse than all your credit damaged, *now* shall she see it?" Frankie advanced and stood triumphantly before him.

Pettigrew's face grew dark, his mouth tightened, and he clenched his hands. For a moment I thought passion would get the better of him, but with an effort he mastered himself.

"Your price?" he said.

Frankie swept him a deep courtesy. "I only ask my own,"

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she said, "three thousand pounds in payment of my bet."

Without another word he sat down at the escritoire, and taking a sheet of note-paper wrote out a cheque for the amount.

Frankie smiled and thanked him sweetly.

The millionaire did not respond. "We've tried two falls, Mrs. Norton," he said slowly, "and each time you've come out, as the boys say, on top. I never bear malice, I always own when I am beaten. Only"—he turned and looked at her keenly—"beware the third." He left without another word. Frankie, in a fever of excitement, rang for the carriage, and tore off to redeem her diamonds.

She went straight to her room when she returned and remained there the rest of the day. Not till Lord Kinross called to take her to the dance did she appear.

She was looking exquisitely lovely. A shade paler than usual, there was a suggestion of delicacy in the waxen skin, the heavy lidded eyes. Her gown a shimmering tissue of gold, sewn with pearls and glittering with tiny rubies, was a cream. In her hair she wore a ruby star, and the diamonds—the diamonds that had cost so dear—were round her throat.

Kinross was very tender to her. She looked so young and so fragile, so appealing, with a touch of sadness in her eyes—and a pathetic droop to her mouth. Quite unlike the brilliant Frankie we all knew so well.

Lady Gaveston, in snuff-coloured satin with chrysanthemums to match, was entirely pleased with herself, and condescended to express approval of my frock. I wore lettuce green chiffon over seashell pink, with pink carnations in my hair.

The evening was a great success, the theatricals were good and the tableaux better.

Frankie as usual created a sensation, and hadn't dances enough to satisfy half the demand.

The event of the evening was the arrival of a certain Grand Duke, who condescended to grace the assemblage for a short time. Among his *aides-de-camp* was a Hungarian, one of the most magnificent creatures I have ever seen, very tall, handsome and most distinguished, his litho figure set off by his splendid uniform blazing with orders.

He asked almost immediately to be presented to my cousin; they met in the middle of the room, the handsomest man and woman there.

As he bent over her hand I saw a faint flush steal over my cousin's face, her eyes drooped, she seemed to lose her self-possession.

What could it mean, she who never knew timidity?

Later I learnt the reason. It was one fraught with danger—danger to Frankie, to the Hungarian—danger to me.

Much, much was to date from that meeting.

(The outcome of this meeting will be told next Tuesday. This series began in No. 702 of SHORT STORIES. *Back numbers may be ordered through any newsagent.)*

Your Editor Chats.

THIS week I would impress upon readers the usefulness of the Gramophones which are being offered in connection with SHORT STORIES. Each instrument, together with two records, is worth £2 17s. 0d., and will give an enormous amount of pleasure to those who are lucky enough to secure them. The instruments are remarkable for their power, and the human voice is reproduced with such exactness that it is practically impossible at a distance to tell whether a person is singing or whether it is the Gramophone.

Moreover, it is possible to make money out of the Gramophone by hiring it out at concerts or musical evenings during the winter. It is quite possible to make ten or fifteen shillings a week in this manner. So that you see, if you win a Gramophone it may be the means of considerably adding to your income.

MISS MADGE MORRIS ALL RIGHT AGAIN.

I am happy to be able to tell you that Miss Madge Morris has quite recovered from the shock which she received as the result of being thrown out of a hansom cab. As you will see, she has now resumed her duties as conductor of the feature "In Confidence."

THE TARTAN COVERS.

Several lady readers have written to tell me that the Tartan covers which have already appeared on SHORT STORIES have been used by them for pasting up in scrap books. Sometimes the complete Tartan has been pasted in, at others, a framework of Tartan has been placed around some picture or other, forming a very pretty frame. This idea is certainly a bright one and I recommend it to all those readers who keep scrap books.

Another correspondent wants to know how many Tartans we are going to produce. . . . They will appear at intervals for some time to come, and will form quite a valuable collection when they are all published.

Your Editor.

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Cousin Goldbags.

In which Love and a Fortune are Offered as Alternatives.

Poor George Clements! To look at him as, morning by morning, he passed up the same street, crossed the road at the same point, met the same fellow-worker on the same spot opposite the same shop, was to realise that the man whose life was so monotonous was indeed in need of sympathy. And truly Fate had not been kind to George Clements—until lately. The afterthought of "until lately" is the addition he himself would have made if anyone had so spoken to him.

Bereft of his mother, and with a father rendered hopelessly incapable by an accident, he had been thrown at an early age on his own resources. A clerkship in a London firm, very long hours for very small pay, had been his lot since then, and that was fifteen years ago. He had laboured hard for all those fifteen years with scarcely a break, but his advancement was terribly slow and the drain on his purse heavy, for he and his married sister in the north shared the expense of supporting the poor old father in something like comfort. They came of an independent family, and so it came about that after fifteen years of laborious work George Clements had still no money in the savings bank.

About thirty months before this time he had taken a trip into the country—his one holiday—and there he had fallen in with two companions who, it appeared, were distant relatives. They patronised him rather, it is true, but to him anything was better than the deadly monotony of the same morning walk, the same high office stool, which was beginning to eat into his soul, and it was on his return that his life—as he put it—began.

For now he noticed another who came out of a house a few doors below his own, walked up the street at the same time as he did, crossed at the same corner. It was a girl in her twenties, in a simple black dress—how neatly arranged—with soft, brown hair, a pale, tired face, and a certain sweet dignity of manner; for Jenny—dear, gentle Jenny—was a lady, alone now and penniless, who worked for a living wage.

Chance threw them directly in contact with each other one day, and an acquaintance was formed which soon developed into a friendship, and this still sooner into unavowed love. For Clements was too poor to marry, and Jenny could bring nothing towards a home. Still, it had come to be tacitly understood between them that if, and when it was possible, they would join their little, sad fortunes; and so, perhaps, George Clements was not so "poor" after all. He would not bind her, for he was independent and honest, and Jenny must be free to make a better marriage as was only her due, so he said to himself, but Jenny thought otherwise.

And now Fate suddenly remembered the toiling clerk.

There came to the boarding-house where he lived a breezy old gentleman, an old gentleman gruff of voice and kind of eye; a dictatorial old gentleman who laid down the law to the landlady till she was quite bewildered, and then filled her children's pockets with sweets. An eccentric old gentleman, who tipped the crossing-sweepers and helped nervous ladies across the street. He installed himself in the house, this hale, bluff, hearty old man, turned everything upside down until he was thoroughly comfortable, which, curiously, at the same time made everybody else thoroughly comfortable, and then settled down to an indefinite stay. He seemed to take a fancy to "poor George Clements," and was always ready to scold him, lecture him, advise him, encourage him, cheer him, and from whom he drew out all the story of his grey, uneventful life.

It was some three months after his arrival that one evening he called the younger man into his room, and then proceeded to double lock the door, and draw a heavy curtain across it.

"Sit down, my boy, sit down," said he, heartily. And Clements obeyed, feeling considerably puzzled. "You didn't know," said the old man after an embarrassed pause, "that I was a relation of yours. I thought not. No, don't speak"—he held up his hand imperatively—"yet I am a sort of uncle to you. I have hunted it all out, and yet four months ago I had never even heard of your existence. I have lived all my life in America, far out in the backwoods for many years, and the country has been kind to me and brought me in money by the sackful. And now this is how I found you out. You passed a holiday two years ago at Cavemore, didn't you? Yes, I thought so"—up went the hand again—"and met two of your relatives there, very cock-a-hoop young men. Well, I was there a few months back, and those same two soon hunted me up. Oh, yes; it was 'Cousin Dawes Cousin Dawes' from morning till night. Cousin Goldbags was what they meant. I told them at last—ha, ha!—that poor relations of mine should never touch my dollars, and it was wonderful how they proved to me that they were fine young gentlemen farmers. And from them I learnt of you, my lad—that hint about the poor relations had put them off the scent—and so I came to this house just to see you, my boy."

He clapped the other on the shoulder, blew his nose loudly, and then went on:

"And why did I want to see you? To find out whether I liked you well enough to—— My boy, I'm a very rich old chap, and I haven't got an heir, and I want someone who will be a son to me. Well, what do you think of it?"

He brought out his great proposal so abruptly and boldly at the end that for a few minutes Clements sat stunned. What, no more drudgery, no more deferred hopes, and Jenny—dear, sweet Jenny—to be his at last; his to surround with comfort and beauty, his to protect against all pain and evil as his heart had often ached to protect her!

The old man turned back from the window, where he had been gazing out on the street.

"Well, my boy?" he said. George looked up. His eyes were full of tears and his hands trembled.

"Sir," he gasped, "thank you! God bless you——" and here his voice failed.

His benefactor fidgeted about the room, altering the ornaments, moving the chairs, even opening and shutting the door; but at last, coming to a halt in front of his visitor, he broke out in his gruff voice and most dictatorial manner:

"But I must make some conditions."

"Dear Mr. Dawes," cried Clements, who had somewhat recovered himself, "what could I refuse you? Your great kindness—but I cannot find words to thank you, sir; only I would like to say that I am most gratefully and entirely at your orders."

The old man nodded approvingly.

"I belong to America," he said, "and I am going back at once. We will go together." He brought his fist down upon the table. "You must leave this life behind you. You are not happy here, so you won't mind, and I do not wish to be reminded of it either. You must break with your present surroundings entirely, sir. This is what I want you to do."

Clements raised his head, his face slowly turning white. It was a sturdy, honest face, and now the mouth tightened into lines of invincible determination.

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"Mr. Dawes," he said, "if that includes Jenny, I can't accept your offer. I couldn't desert Jenny, sir; not for any money you or anyone else could offer."

"But don't you see, you silly fellow? You're not formally engaged?"

"No, sir."

"And it's very unlikely if you stay as you are that you'll ever be able to marry. You break no pledge; you even give up no happiness of which you are sure. Now, with me and the position my money gives us, you can marry any lady you please. Come, my boy, you surely won't throw all your future away upon a chance!"

"That can't be helped, sir. She trusts me, and comes to me with her affairs, and I look after her as best I can. I can't desert Jenny, sir. Even though I could never marry, still, here I am at her side, and I can do much for her protection in many ways, and that is sufficient happiness for me. Thank you, sir, for all your proposed kindness, but I couldn't desert my Jenny."

Clements lifted his head with unconscious dignity as the emphatic words that put all success for ever beyond him fell from his lips.

"Listen to him!" broke in the old man testily. "I offer him everything, I propose making him my heir, a man who has no claim upon me, and whom I had never even heard of before this year, and he throws it all back in my face. You'll accept, sir, oh, yes, easily enough, as if you were doing me the favour, on the principle of taking all and giving nothing, and throw it up ungratefully the moment I ask for any return. Without even reflecting for a time over my condition, without paying me such a small compliment as that. Oh, no, I'm the hard taskmaster at once; my offer is rejected, flung back in my teeth, and all because of what—because of a chance when you are a decrepid old man of being able to marry a woman who will probably be in her grave by that time. There, get out of my room!"

"Sir," said Clements, rising, "I am, indeed, most grateful to you for your undeserved——" But his uncle waved him impatiently to the door, and he crept sadly away.

He spent a sleepless night, and Jenny cast many a troubled look at him the next morning as they trudged side by side to their work. He was very gentle to her, very protective, and once he stopped and bought her a tiny bunch of flowers, offering it almost apologetically. She had been so nearly an heiress, he mused wearily, for it was already as "Jenny's fortune" that he had thought of the proposals of yesterday. As it had haunted him all the night, so it haunted him all the day—that offer of yesterday that had so suddenly opened up a vista of happiness before him only to withdraw it even more abruptly.

It was Saturday—happy Saturday—and he was free at an early hour, but instead of waiting for Jenny as was his wont, he dragged himself sadly back to the boarding-house and up to his room, tired in body and mind. The first thing that caught his attention was an envelope on the empty table, and mechanically he picked it up and opened it. The next moment he started back in amazement, almost in fear, for there fell out of the paper and slowly drifted to the floor, a fifty-pound banknote and with it a torn leaf, on which were scrawled a few words.

George Clements was trembling; almost reverently he replaced the money on the table. Was this really to go towards that almost impossible home for Jenny, or was there some condition attached again that would wrest the banknote from him as it had wrested his hope of a fortune?

In an agony of apprehension he bent down for the letter. It had slipped under a piece of furniture, and he spent a feverish five minutes before he could capture it.

It contained only a couple of lines in a crochety scrawl, and wonderingly he pieced out the hieroglyphics.

"To buy an engagement ring for Miss Jenny. She will explain it all."

He stared at the paper in mute astonishment. It was from Mr. Dawes; he had guessed that from the beginning, but—but this was such a contradiction. And what did Jenny—dear Jenny—know about it?

A flash of light burnt in his eyes which a moment before had been dull with disappointment and sleeplessness. There was something behind this—something he had not guessed at—something that suggested a hidden hope. Vague possibilities began to crowd in on his brain, at times threatening, but always opening out in the end into wide dreams of an intangible, happy future. Jenny knew—he must see Jenny at once.

Then, snatching up his hat, he bounded down the stairs and out into the street. Had he ever moved so boyishly before? Had such a rainbow-tinted vision ever flashed before his eyes in the past with such suggestions of a probable fulfilment! A minute brought him to Jenny's lodgings; he was in the sitting-room; the door was opening; it was Jenny's own sweet face that he saw.

But now suddenly a bashfulness fell upon him, a terrible fear lest his golden hopes were to be broken again and for ever. He could only murmur hoarsely:

"Tell me! tell me!"

She stopped his stammering words with uplifted hand.

"I think you ought to read this," she said simply.

She held out a letter to him, and his blurred eyes recognised the handwriting. Eagerly he took it from her, and she half turned away as if to hide her face as he opened it and began to scan the lines:

"DEAR MISS JENNY,—You have won a heart of gold. I am his uncle, and I have lived in this house for three months on purpose to satisfy myself about him, and I am now about to give a signal proof of my opinion. I am a very rich old man, and I long ago determined not to leave my money to any relation who set it above other ideals. In my search for such a man I travelled far, and I never knew before I started on this hunt what crowds of blood relations I possessed. But they none of them satisfied me. Quite recently I heard for the first time of the existence of George, and I came up to London with small hope of satisfaction so far as he was concerned. He soon put my doubts to rest, Miss Jenny, and last night I offered to make him my heir but on condition that he sacrificed you, my dear. I do you the honour of believing that you will understand my reason, and he has fully justified my trust in him. As I expected, he flung back my proposal, and even without hesitation. I need not tell you that after this I have adopted him as my son. And you, my child, come and be a daughter to a lonely old man who needs a little love very badly. George knows nothing of all this—I have left him to hear it from your own lips.

God bless you, my dear,

"PHILIP DAWES."

Clements looked up at the girl. A bright colour burnt in her cheeks as she drooped shyly over the table, and as he gazed, a gentle tear gathered and lost itself unheeded in the lace at her breast. She raised her head and her sweet eyes met his, now as bright and eager as any boy's.

The letter fell to the ground between them as he stretched out his arms.

"Jenny!" he called softly.

* * * * *

A month later, a brisk old gentleman and two younger companions, evidently a newly-married couple, stood upon the deck of one of the great ocean liners and watched the blue English shores slowly dip below the horizon. The father—or so he seemed—turned to the husband and wife, and his bright eyes were twinkling as he saked:

"Well, Mrs. Jenny, and have you forgiven me yet for my horrible treachery to you?"

The lady was hanging on his arm, and she only smiled in reply. It is curious how much a smile can be made to mean by a pretty woman.

J. Pritchard.

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The Man of the Miniature.

Or, in Love with a Portrait.

No one suspected that the visit to that old country house would leave an impression on the mind of seven-year-old Agnes Wilton that the course of her life in later years would be materially affected by it. Her mother, Mrs. Wilton, certainly did not suspect it. Yet, so it was.

It was a quaint house, not a large one, but full of curious antique furniture and ornaments, dating back to the early years of the reign of George III. There were strange brass candlesticks, miniatures of persons who had flourished about the year 1800—in short, it was more like a curio shop than a dwelling house. Its owner was Mrs. Monmouth, an old lady of sixty, or thereabouts, whose dress and manners were old-time, and in complete accordance with the furniture and all that surrounded her.

Mrs. Monmouth had been the bosom friend of Mrs. Wilton's mother, and Mrs. Wilton felt it incumbent on her to pay the old lady a visit from time to time. While her mother was talking to her hostess, Agnes decided that she could roam over the house and inspect all the curious things it contained.

The oaken chests attracted her, with their ornamental carvings of goblin heads; the great, four-post bedstead was an object of awe, but the hand-painted miniatures interested her more than anything else. She went from room to room in search of a fresh one, and at last entered an apartment where she espied one that captivated her entirely.

The others had been of elderly men and women, but this one was the portrait of a young man, probably of five-and-twenty years, with a bright, handsome face, merry-looking eyes, and a firm mouth just curved for a smile. Agnes was too young to read those details, but she was charmed by the general appearance of the young man, and the position of the lips, denoting a desire to laugh, impressed her greatly. A pleasant smile always attracts children, and Agnes was emboldened to take the miniature from the bracket and gaze at it more intently.

"If you were my uncle I should love you very much!" she decided, turning the miniature at different angles, and noting that the eyes appeared to follow her at every turn.

She looked at the back of the gold setting, and there she saw two locks of hair, one dark and the other fair, with the initials H. F. The discovery did not interest her particularly, so she again looked at the face.

"Agnes!"

Her mother's voice recalled her to herself. She hurriedly replaced the miniature, and ran downstairs to answer the call. They went into the garden, but Agnes took no notice of the flowers that were growing, nor did she remember how long they stayed with Mrs. Monmouth; all her thoughts were centred on the miniature.

Agnes never visited the house again, and the memory of it faded from her mind, except that she retained a hazy vision of the face in the miniature. She went away to school and developed into a beautiful maiden ere the recollection of that face was brought back to her in all its vividness. She seemed to recall the smile, and that it was a face to love, but the whole picture did not come back to her till Fate threw the miniature once more into her hands.

Whether it was that the love of the antique was born in her, or whether that childish impression had engendered the fondness for ancient things, she could not determine, but the fact remained that she developed a great liking for antiques and curios. She was constantly on the watch for small "bargains" of that description, such as she could afford out of the generous supply of pin money allowed by her father. Among her young lady friends she was secretly regarded as a bit of a crank on the subject, and they wondered how so charming a girl could bestow so much attention on musty, out-of-date articles.

There was one curio dealer, in a little shop situated in an off-street in a large West End thoroughfare, who knew Miss Wilton very well. She was often in his shop, looking for things that she was able to buy, and admiring other articles which were beyond the limits of her purse. When anything likely to suit Miss Wilton came into his hands he invariably reserved it for her to have the first chance of acquiring it.

"Good morning, Miss Wilton," said the curio dealer one morning, as Agnes entered the shop, "I have something here which appears to be in your line."

"Oh, what is that?" queried Miss Wilton, with evident interest. "Let me see it, please."

The shopkeeper brought a small, cardboard box from the back of the dingy office and placed it on the counter. Removing the lid and a layer of tissue paper, he drew out an object that made Agnes utter a cry of surprise and pleasure.

"I believe it is the very one!" she cried, taking it from him. "Yes, it is! The miniature I saw in that old country house, and there are the two locks of hair, and the initials at the back!"

It all came back to her. There was the handsome face, the merry eye, the lips parted ready to smile. The costume of the early years of the nineteenth century—the frilled shirt, the scarlet coat and the stock round the neck. Agnes gazed at it with eager eyes.

"I must have it!" she declared. "Where did you get it, and how much do you want for it?"

The dealer smiled at her eagerness, but he was too honest and too partial to his beautiful young customer to take advantage of her enthusiasm and raise the price.

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"It was brought here about a week ago by a respectable old lady, who said it was hers, and who wanted to sell it. I did not doubt that it was her own property, and, to speak the truth, I believe she was very hard up. Quite an old woman I should say, although she carried her years well. I'll let you have it for five shillings more than I paid her; I think that's fair—I must earn a living out of my business."

"Hard up!" echoed Agnes. "Poor old lady! But you have her address?"

No, he had not asked for it. Agnes was disappointed, for she knew how small a chance there was of finding the old lady and helping her. She was positive that the seller of the miniature was Mrs. Monmouth.

It was with rather a sad heart, in spite of her pleasure at having secured the miniature, that she returned home.

Her mother smiled and quieted her fears; the dealer had no positive information and, moreover, the old lady was well-connected, and her relations would not have allowed her to be in want. Mrs. Wilton had lost sight of Mrs. Monmouth, who had removed from the old house.

Had Agnes' friends known how she treated that miniature they would have felt perfectly justified in calling her a crank. There was a ring in the setting, and Agnes attached a gold chain to the miniature, passing the chain round her neck, and wearing the miniature in the bosom of her dress. Often and often when alone, she drew forth the treasure and gazed long and earnestly at the features of that young gallant of a century ago, whose features appeared so real, so life-like, that she sometimes looked up, fancying that the original might have stepped into the room unawares and be smiling at her admiration.

At night, before retiring, she hung the miniature on a nail over the head of her bed, and one night she laughed confusedly as she caught herself saying—"You will act as a protecting spirit. I can imagine that you were a strong and honourable defender of our sex when you were alive. With you near her, a woman need fear no danger!"

"How foolish I am!" Agnes exclaimed. "Yet, I think my opinion is correct. I am sure it is! Alive? It seems as if he ought to be alive and just like that, but he is—dead!"

Her gaiety vanished, a troubled expression overspread her lovely features, and she sighed unconsciously as she turned from her contemplation of the miniature to that of her own reflection in the mirror.

Two days later there came an invitation to a fancy-dress ball, which threw Agnes into an ecstasy of delight.

"Do you know, mamma, that is the very opportunity I have been waiting for!" she declared. "Ever since I discovered that old-style dress in the chest upstairs I have been looking for a chance of wearing it. Now it has come. The dress fits me fairly well, and with a few alterations and a little touching up, it will do splendidly."

Mrs. Wilton laughed.

"I suppose the dress belonged to some ancestor of your father, Agnes. I really cannot understand why it was so carefully preserved, but that is how things happen in this world. The mother saves it for the daughter, who venerates it because it was her mother's, and she hands it down to her daughter, who, not having known much of her grandmother, doesn't set much store by it, and keeps it to please her mother. In time, the old thing is turned out by some practical descendant, who doesn't want useless articles. I don't believe anyone knew what was in that chest. Well, wear it if it pleases you."

Agnes arrayed herself in the ancient gown and ruffle, and did her hair after the fashion of long ago. She looked quite like a grand young lady of the Georges'; one might have fancied the Regent bowing to her and requesting the favour of a dance. Agnes thought something of the same kind, but with this difference—that instead of the future George IV. standing in front of her, it was H. F., the man of the miniature.

Agnes was all excitement during the intervening days, but at length the great evening arrived. She created envy and admiration in the ballroom, for she was the prettiest girl there, and her quaint costume became her marvellously. Round her neck was a chain, the end of which disappeared within the front of her bodice. It is needless to say that the miniature was attached to the chain.

Agnes' eyes wandered over the room in search of someone, and just a shadow of disappointment clouded her bright face.

"I felt certain that I should meet *him* here," she murmured. "Yet it was foolish, I suppose! But that dream last night was so real. He came up to me and was about to speak, my heart seemed to give a bound of delight, and then I awoke! I wonder what he was going to say?"

She was seated in a quiet corner just then, while Mrs. Wilton was chatting to a friend near by. She drew forth the miniature and gazed at it longingly. Her mother's voice caused her to put it away hastily.

"My dear Agnes, we must be making our way to the scene of action and not sit here in this quiet nook. Whatever made you bring that portrait?"

"Part of the costume, mother dear!" replied the girl brightly, affecting not to notice the tone of reproof and vexation. "Oh!"

Mrs. Wilton, startled by the exclamation, followed the direction of her daughter's glance, and also uttered a little "Oh!"

"There he is, coming this way!" murmured Agnes.

"That young man looks just like the portrait—your miniature, I mean, Agnes! How extraordinary!"

Two gentlemen were approaching, one was an elderly man who looked inelegant in a cavalier's dress, and the other was a handsome young fellow who, as Mrs. Wilton remarked, was exactly like the treasured portrait. If Agnes had looked pretty previously, she now became positively bewitching as the colour mounted to her cheeks and her eyes sparkled with joy.

"May I introduce my friend—Harry Fairfax——"

That was all that Agnes heard. Her brain was in a whirl for a few seconds, and when she recovered her self-possession she was seated next to him, and he was talking to her.

"Do you know, Miss Wilton, I was afraid that I should find no one here with a costume corresponding with mine chronologically. My friend, Mr. Bateman, was even willing to bet on it, and I was so sure that he would win that I declined the offer. But I had not been here five minutes before I saw you, and I maintain that our costumes match exactly. It is almost as if we had known each other, but——"

"I seem as if I do know you, although we have never met," said Agnes shyly. "Is this not like you?"

She drew the miniature from its hiding place and held it out to him. He stared at it in amazement.

"It certainly is!" he exclaimed. "But where did you get it?"

Agnes briefly explained.

"Your name, too, is 'H. F.' is it not?" she asked. "Can it be the likeness of a member of your family?"

"Mrs. Monmouth," he mused aloud, "I seem to have heard the name. That portrait must be the likeness of my great-great-grandfather. We have a similar one of his brother, and it was from that miniature that I got the idea of dressing in this fashion. I have been told that I resemble my ancestor. I bear the same name, certainly. Mrs. Monmouth was probably his daughter, the sister of my—— Oh, I forget who, but that doesn't matter! Do you know, Miss Wilton, I envy you!"

"Why?" asked Agnes wonderingly, and she could not help observing how, at that moment, he resembled the portrait. It was the same curve of the lips, ready for a smile, the same merry eyes.

"Because you have known me so long, and I have only just made your acquaintance!" he answered pointedly. "See what an immense advantage you have had over me!"

There was no time to reply, for the first dance was beginning and Agnes was claimed for it, but she could not hide the tell-tale blush which made Harry Fairfax wish to push her partner aside and take her off to a seat where he could say all that was surging within him.

They danced together several times, and an attentive

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observer would have noticed that Agnes was all life and movement when Harry Fairfax was her partner, but appeared somewhat listless, even a trifle awkward, when dancing with others. And while he was not dancing Fairfax was scheming to obtain an invitation to the home of the Wilton's.

Agnes, quite unwittingly, gave him the desired opportunity. It was during the interval.

"Mr. Fairfax," she said in an anxious tone, "I have an idea that the dear old lady, Mrs. Monmouth, who must be some sort of a relation of yours, was in distressed circumstances when she parted with that miniature. Would it be possible to find out and allay my anxiety?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Harry Fairfax, jumping at the chance. "And I hope that Mrs. Wilton will permit me to call and report the result of my inquiries."

Mrs. Wilton threw a quick, shrewd glance at her daughter and the young man, and replied in the affirmative.

"We shall be pleased to see you, Mr. Fairfax," she said quietly. "I feel an interest also in the old lady, who, I am half inclined to believe, was distantly related to us, as well as to the Fairfaxes."

Harry bowed, and his heart throbbed with satisfaction.

"I will not fail to make diligent search and to let you know the result," he declared.

Harry Fairfax kept his promise to report; in fact, he "reported" before there was anything of interest to mention. Agnes, however, seemed to think that it was a matter of importance and listened with marked attention. Mrs. Wilton who was not one of those elderly persons who forget their own youthful days, judged it best to leave Fairfax to her daughter for a time, which fact had the effect of prolonging the young man's stay.

Harry Fairfax made three calls within twice as many days, and on each occasion the young people deemed it necessary to minutely examine the miniature together, no doubt in the hope of discovering a clue. On the occasion of the fourth visit, Fairfax was able to announce that he had discovered the whereabouts of the old lady, who was a daughter of the man in the miniature; she was living in very reduced circumstances, having been too proud to apply to the distant members of the family for help. He had made arrangements whereby she would be relieved from anxiety on the ground of obtaining the wherewithal to pass the remaining days of her life in peace.

"I told her," he said to Agnes, when Mrs. Wilton had once more left them alone, "that the miniature had fallen into the hands of one who thought a great deal of it, and——"

He paused. Agnes looking up at him for an explanation of the pause, saw something in his face that made her confused and happy, although she could not define the sentiment.

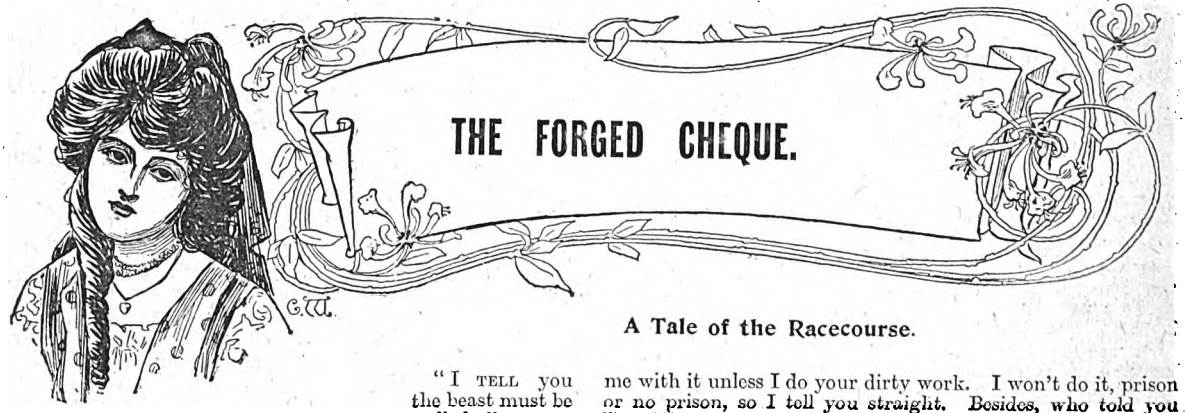
"Shall I say what I was on the point of saying?" he asked. "Why should I not? Agnes, it is the first time I have called you by that name. Agnes, I told her that the portrait was in the hands of one whom I hoped would soon become the wife of a man bearing a striking resemblance to the man of the miniature, and having the same name. Was I right in hoping so much? You have bestowed much love on that portrait, can your transfer that love to me and increase it?"

"I think," said Agnes, with a divine blush, "that you may hope, for I feel that it is not the portrait, but you, whom I have loved ever since I have possessed it."

"I do not know what magic influence has been at work—magnetic influence, telepathy or what not," he said a moment later, when he had released her from his strong grasp, "but it appears to me that the attention given by you to my portrait, as I shall call it, had the effect of drawing me to you. I dislike fancy dress balls as a rule, but I was impelled to go to that one by some secret power. I didn't want to go, and yet I did want to go. How was it?"

"I was waiting to see you, expecting that I should meet you somewhere and at some time in the near future, and my desire drew you to me, Harry!" she declared with a mixture of gaiety and gravity. "I am so happy that you have come!"

George Day.



A Tale of the Racecourse.

"I TELL you the beast must be pulled!"

The slightly-built man, who looked little more than a lad, fixed a pair of sad, hollow eyes upon the ground between the pointed toes of his boots, and listened to his companion's imperious directions in mute despair.

"It's done every day for much less than this affair means to either you or me," the other urged. "It means beggary to me and prison to you if the beast gets home. If it doesn't, you shall have that unfortunate cheque together with a hundred-pound note the evening following."

"I never pulled a mount yet, Mr. Hall, and I'm hanged if I do now!" the jockey ejaculated through his set teeth.

"It will mean prison for you, then."

"I daresay it will," cried the jockey, in a shrill voice. "You kept that cheque until you knew it was too late for me to prove I didn't forge it, and now you come and threaten me with it unless I do your dirty work. I won't do it, prison or no prison, so I tell you straight. Besides, who told you I'm riding Merrymay?"

"Do you take me for a mole?" said Mr. Hall. "I know you have been asked to ride the beast, and if you refuse or fail to pull him—well, you know how unpleasant will be the consequences."

"I suppose you've got on to The Baker for all you're worth?" Sillings said thoughtfully.

"That's none of your business. The Baker's got to win, that's all you need worry about, and if you pull Merrymay, all will be well."

"For you—yes, I don't doubt it. But what about Lord Shannon? P'raps you don't know that he backed my mount for all he's worth, and that Merrymay is relied upon to pay off the mortgage on his estate? A win to The Baker would be absolute ruin to his lordship."

"More fool he! I can't be expected to drop all my money because a friend has backed the horse to win. Now, look here,

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Joe, don't let us have any more words about the matter. Will you or will you not ride and pull?"

"No!"

"Tut! Confound you! What do you think Miss Mastman will say when you're thrown into gaol, and branded a felon? What will she say when she knows that you have been courting her with the crime of a forgery upon your conscience, such a high-minded young woman as she, too?"

"She'd think less bad of me than if I pulled Merrymay," Sillings returned in a hushed voice.

"Well, put it another way. How can you marry her after three or four years in prison? You may not get 'beefy' in gaol, but your skill will be spoilt, your name will be ruined, your career, which at present promises to carry you into the first rank of jockeys, will be cut short. In a word, you will be hopelessly ruined!"

"Surely the Prince of Tempters might come to you for hints!" the jockey hissed. "But even if Merrymay loses, The Baker may not win. He may go all wrong within the next three days. Then where will you be?"

"Fool! I have not backed The Baker; I have laid against Merrymay. If The Baker turns up fit on the course, then I may back him. But that is quite beside the point."

There, apparently, was Joe Sillings' last hope gone. No compromise between him and his tempter was possible. He had to choose between prison and ruin, the loss of the girl he loved and degradation in her eyes, which was perhaps even worse than losing her, and the mere tightening of a rein.

"Which will you do?"

"I'll think it over, and you shall see," the jockey replied weakly.

"Can't you decide now? Think what 'No' means to you."

"Can't you decide in your own mind what I shall do when the time comes?" Sillings replied doggedly.

"Yes, I think I can, Joe," said Mr. Hall, smiling quietly. "You're a wise man, Joe. The *pros* are out of all proportion to the *cons*."

"Have you anything else to say?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Then get out of my paddock, Cuthbert Hall."

Mr. Hall knew he had succeeded in his mission, and therefore took this insult with better temper than he would otherwise have done.

He went away without a word, but with a smiling face and a light heart.

Sillings watched him disappear, and groaned.

He was in the hollow of the man's hands, and how could he surrender a successful career, a life's possiblities and a life's love to racecourse ethics? Yet was it merely a question of racecourse ethics? Was it not rather an ephemeral effort which would be reflected by his conscience through all his life; an effort which would ruin many a home, and wreck many a life?

On the other hand, there was no certainty in horse-racing, and those men who had backed, or would back, Merrymay to win, knew they might lose; and if he pulled the horse, and the world knew why, would not his reason justify him before all except those who had lost by this act?

He wandered through his stables, his heart lonely and sick within him, debating with himself which course he should take, and it suddenly occurred to him that if he could discover the whereabouts of his old friend, John Grainger, all would yet be well; John could prove that he never committed the forgery.

But where was John? Perhaps a thousand miles away; perhaps in the very next town. He had not heard anything of him for three years, and knew no one who had. John might be dead. Still, there was hope in this idea. He would endeavour to find John before the day of the race, and if he failed—then he would have to choose.

* * * * *

Late in the evening of the following day Cuthbert Hall was hurrying about his chambers in Sloane Street, preparing everything so far as he could to enable him to get down to Epsom early, without the necessity for rising before his usually late hour.

He was in high feather, flushed, and not absolutely sober. He was looking for the morrow as a day that would see his making, a day of events which would wipe out his financial difficulties and put a handsome fortune in his pocket, and a day, too, which would ruin for ever the chances of his friend, Lord Shannon, redeeming his fortune sufficiently to marry Clair Dudley.

Mr. Hall was not the man to play half the game; he laid a plot to enrich himself and developed it to ruin his rival. He had schemed for months to reach these ends, and he had omitted nothing which could further either object.

He had even forged a note to meet a creditor, whom he could easily have paid, to husband for a day or two a few hundred pounds which he would lay to his own gain. Then he would redeem the note, he decided, and wipe the matter out.

It was all planned to the finest point, and he was naturally elated. It was the honey of satisfaction to him to prepare for the eventful morrow.

At last when all seemed done, he paused and pondered to know if there were nothing else he could do to anticipate the next day. Then he sat down at his writing-table, and took a cash-box from a drawer. From the cash-box he extracted a folded cheque.

He satisfied himself that it was the one he wanted, took a sheet of plain note-paper, and, pinning the cheque to it, wrote, "The B. N. follows to-morrow." He folded the two up, slipping them into an envelope which he closed, addressed and stamped.

"He shall have the hundred to-morrow," he said, glancing down at the letter upon the blotting-pad, as he rose and lit a cigarette; "meanwhile I can make four or five of it. I will take this with me, post it at the station on my return to town, and he will see that I am a man who keeps his word in either way."

He smoked the cigarette half through in restless meditation, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, went out of the room, picked up a hat and stick from the hall rack, and passed out of the building.

He had not been gone three minutes when his man entered the room. His heavy eyes wandered over the room from one object to another until they rested upon the letter.

Picking it up, he read the superscription apathetically, and he glanced at the clock on the mantelshelf.

"Juggins!" he muttered calmly. "I thought he was a bit wavy to-night. Two minutes to twelve. I can just catch it, and if I don't, I suppose I shall catch it—in another way."

Reluctant to cross the muddy road in his indoor shoes, he made a detour to a crossing, and posted the letter at the box opposite the chamber buildings. He returned by way of the crossing, availed himself of the lift and entered the flat just behind his master who had used the staircase.

"Been out, Pink?" Mr. Hall inquired.

"Posted your letter, sir."

"Posted—my—— You blithering idiot!" cried the master, white with fear and rage. "Where did you post it?"

Pink told him, and followed him down the stairs three steps at a time, and across the road.

With fumbling fingers Mr. Hall struck a match and looked at the little enamelled plate, which indicated the time the box would next be cleared.

"Eight-twenty! The box is cleared. Oh, you vast fool!" he cried, turning passionately upon Pink.

He sprang into a hansom and drove to the district sorting office, with all possible haste.

"By mistake a few minutes ago my man posted a letter in the pillar-box at Camden Street corner," he said to an official who came forward. "It is of vital importance that it should not be delivered. It was addressed to Mr. Joseph Sillings, Darcy Lodge, Epsom. The box has been cleared."

"Are you sure it was posted?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I cannot help you; once posted the letter belongs

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to the Postmaster-General until it is delivered at the address of the addressee."

"But I must have it, man!"

"Out of the question, sir."

It was useless to argue; the official was obdurate.

"What time will it be delivered?" Hall asked anxiously.

"Epsom, you say? Between eleven and twelve—about eleven."

And Joe Sillings would not be on the course until one or two o'clock! He would probably get the letter before leaving home. Why, in that case, should he pull Merrymay?

Hall strode out of the office in a frenzy of rage and despair.

Somehow he must draw Sillings away from his house before the letter arrived there, and keep the letter from him till after the race. But how?

"Pink," he said, when he had got back to his chambers, "I want you to send a telegram for me."

"Sillings, Epsom. Meet me at Leatherhead Station eleven sharp, Wednesday. Important. John Grainger," was how he worded the message.

"That will draw him if nothing else will," Hall said, as he affixed a sixpenny stamp.

But even when this was sent off he was uneasy in his mind. He knew Sillings would be at Leatherhead Station at the time appointed, that he would wait anxiously for the appearance of Grainger, and that the chances were a thousand to one against Sillings returning home before the race was run.

But there was the bare chance that the prematurely-posted letter would get to Sillings' hands in some way before Merrymay was paraded, and Hall could do nothing to obviate this contingency.

Next morning, however, refreshed by sleep and no longer muddled by drink, Hall was perfectly sanguine. On his way down to Epsom, he had sent a telegram to Sillings' head groom to ask where his master was, and at Epsom telegraph-office he found awaiting him a reply to the effect that Sillings had gone early to Leatherhead to meet a friend.

This was good news indeed, but opened an ugly doubt for Hall.

Sillings' groom was almost certain to attend the race, and the letter must already have arrived at Darcy Lodge; and might not the groom take it to his master? It was a torturous doubt.

By chance, however, Hall met the groom just outside Epsom station, and satisfied himself that the man had not brought the letter, which had not arrived when Sillings left home, and that no one was coming from Darcy Lodge to the meeting.

Lounging about the paddock some considerable time later, Hall caught sight of Sillings out of the corners of his eyes.

The jockey's face was pale and haggard, and there was a hard, sad look about his mouth.

"What a fool the man is." Hall said to himself. "One would imagine he was required to do murder."

Shortly afterwards Merrymay passed by where Hall was standing. Sillings was up in his purple and white silk.

Instinctively he turned his head, and as he caught sight of Hall, he gave him a look of mute despair. But Hall did not see it.

He was running his eye over The Baker and admiring the horse's wonderful condition, which so impressed him that he moved off and laid every penny he had with him upon the animal.

By the time he had edged himself into a good position for viewing the race, the starters were already off. He could just make out the coloured jackets of the jockeys bobbing along in the distance.

The Baker was third to get off and Merrymay was running in a batch of five of the field behind the first three.

"How-d'ye-do, sir?" said a voice over Hall's shoulder.

Hall turned and blanched as he recognised the sunburnt, chubby face of John Grainger.

He could find no words to speak in his surprise and alarm.

Fate was surely trying to unhinge his mind; first by the hideous mistake about the letter, and now by John Grainger, the vanished man, turned up at such a time. If he had seen Sillings the day was lost, the lifetime ruined!

"I only arrived from South America last night, sir, but seeing my old friend, Joe Sillings, was up on a favourite in the big race, I was bound to come down," Grainger explained.

"Have you seen Sillings?" Hall inquired hoarsely.

"Not to speak to, but I've put a pony on his mount, you may be sure."

Hall turned his head away and shuddered. Fate had played a waiting game with him, he thought, but luck was all on his side.

There, behind him, breathing in his very ear was the one man on earth, who, by a few moments' conversation with Sillings, could have ruined his masterly schemes, and snatched Sillings out of his net; and he had come too late.

Twice in twenty-four hours Hall had been within an ace of ruin, and had been saved by chance.

There was a roar and a pushing forward of the crowds that lined the course, as the horses swerved round the bend and began to come down the straight.

"Marcus!" roared half the crowd. "Harefoot!" yelled the other half, as two horses broke from the leading five and challenged each other.

There was a panting pause, then a roar that made the blood tingle in Hall's flushed cheek.

"The Baker!" shouted the crowd together, as another horse overtook Marcus and Harefoot and showed them his heels.

A moment later a fluttering patch of white and purple seemed to leap forward.

It flashed passed Marcus and Harefoot, and began to overhaul The Baker.

"Merrymay does it! Merrymay!"

Inch by inch Merrymay drew down upon The Baker. The shadow of the favourite's nose flickered on The Baker's thigh, then upon its flank, ribs and shoulders, and then The Baker's nose began to fall back from the level of Merrymay's shoulder to its thigh. when suddenly Merrymay seemed to pick himself up and leap forward a hundred yards—two hundred yards, and Merrymay had won.

* * * * * *

Half an hour later Hall, white, haggard, and aged by many a year, too desperate to hurry from the scene of his ruin without an understanding with Sillings, met the jockey face to face.

Sillings was no less pale and hardly less haggard than Hall, but there was a triumphant light in his face which was naturally wanting in Hall's.

"You blackguard," Hall hissed, half raising his stick.

"You can't honestly call me that," said Sillings quietly. "Not now, at least; I've given all my world to keep faith with Merrymay's backers, and I gave you the chance to hedge. I know what it means to me—ruin, unless I can find John Grainger."

"To hedge?" Hall ejaculated.

"Aye. I sent you a telegram to tell you that Merrymay was not as fit as might be, but if the horse could win he should.

Hall turned and slunk away.

He crept to the station, into a train. He crawled to his chambers by back streets to avoid meeting acquaintances.

Pink greeted him.

"There's a telegram for you, sir," said Pink. "It came a few minutes after you'd gone."

Hall snatched it up and read:

"Merrymay none too fit. But if can win shall—Sillings."

Hall groaned.

At precisely the same moment Sillings at Darcy Lodge was burning a cheque he had found waiting him.

He watched it crumble away in the flames, and smiled up at John Grainger who stood by, watching him.

C. R. L.

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Nobody would be Hurt.

HE: "You were getting ready to go out, and I'm afraid my call is inopportune." She: "Really and truly I would much rather stay here and talk with you than keep an engagement this afternoon." "I am delighted. But can the engagement be broken without causing bad feeling?" "Oh, yes. The dentist won't mind."

Not a Private.

MISTRESS: "Well, I'm sorry you want to leave me, Mary; but what's your reason?" (Mary keeps silent.) Mistress: "Something private?" Mary (suddenly): "No, mum; please, mum, he's a lance-corporal."

Pessemistic.

MISS A.: "The wedding was as sad as a funeral." Mr. Benedict: "Why shouldn't it be? Both have the same result. In one case two are made one; in the other, one is made nothing. One less each time."

The Sort of Work he Wanted.

APPLICANT: "Please, ma'am, can you help a poor man who is out of work?" Woman: "I think I can find something for you to do." Applicant (gratefully): "Thanks. If you could give me some washing to do I'll take it home to my wife."

A Gentle Hint.

MR. SPRIGGINS (gently): "My dear, a Kensington man was shot at by a burglar, and his life was saved by a button which the bullet struck." Mrs. Spriggins: "Well, what of it?" Mr. Spriggins (meekly): "Nothing, only the button must have been on."

A Dress Rehearsal.

HARRY: "Clara, dearest, you are the only woman I ever really and truly loved." Clara Dearest: "You said that very same thing only last week to May Blossom. She told me so herself." Harry: "True but that was only a dress rehearsal; this is the first performance."

Same Old Story.

FAIR PATRON: "Look here! You told me a horrid story about the way my husband was acting, and I've found out, on investigation, that it is not true. He's just as good as can be." Fortune Teller: "I've told that same story to about ten thousand different women, and you are the first who has made a complaint."

The Sixpence Gave out.

THIS is the message the telegraph messenger handed to him: "Come down quickly. I am dying.—Kate." Eight hours later he arrived at the hotel, to be met at the door by Kate herself. "Why—what did you mean by sending me such a message?" he asked. "Oh," she gurgled, "I wanted to say that I was dying to see you, but my twelve words for sixpence ran out, and I had to stop."

Clever Little Wife.

YOUNG WIFE: "I knew you would like the slippers, Harry, if for no other reason, because I made them." Husband: "You don't mean this is all your work? Why, what a talented little wife I have, to be sure." Young Wife: "Yes, all my work, of course. I bought the uppers and Mary sewed them together, and I got a man to sole them, but I put the bows on and did them up in the box. And do you know, Harry, I am awfully proud of myself. I didn't think I could ever do such things."

Very Jealous.

"Is Mabel jealous of her husband?" "Jealous? I should think so. Why, on the honeymoon, she wouldn't even let him admire the scenery?"

Not Entire.

MAUD: "How could you be so free with Mr. Gable, an entire stranger?" Kate: "He is not an entire stranger. He lost an arm several years ago."

Rather Biassed.

SHE: "Oh, yes; I quite believe there's a fool in every family. Don't you?" He: "Well—er—my opinion's rather biassed. You see, I'm the only member of the family."

There was a Wedding after all.

ADA (pensively): "I hope you'll invite me to the wedding when you get married." Jack (boldly): "I'll invite you before I ask anyone else, and if you don't accept there wont be any wedding."

He Could Make it go Further.

HUSBAND: "My dear, I wish you would let me carve that fowl. I am sure I could make it go further." Wife: "I know you could. I've seen you send it right off the table, and I wouldn't attempt to make it go further than that."

When Fortune would Smile.

YOUNG VAN MARKS (in a melancholy tone): "Oh, I suppose I shouldn't brood, but Fortune seems reluctant to smile on me." Harry Gray: "Well, never mind, old fellow, she will when she sees some of your pictures."

A Terrible Loss.

HE: "Then I am to understand that you absolutely reject my offer?" She: "There is really nothing else for it." He: "Well, I think it very selfish of you! Here I've actually gone and purchased a guide to Margate for our honeymoon."

Another Angler.

MRS. BROWN: "I had to cook that fish at once as I was afraid it wouldn't keep." Brown: "Great Scott! I'll go straight down to the market and give that man a piece of my mind." Mrs. Brown: "Stop a minute, my dear; it was the fish you caught yourself this afternoon."

Somewhat Muddled.

LINDA: "Bella, I'm greatly puzzled over a matter." Bella: "So am I. Tell me your trouble and I'll tell you mine." Linda: "Well, Dick Hardaway told me last night he loved me, but did not ask me to marry him." Bella: "And he asked me to marry him, but didn't say a word about love."

A Matter of English.

MINNIE: "Jennie's engagement with the French count is broken off." Mamie: "Good gracious! Why?" Minnie: "You know her hair is so long that it can almost touch the ground when she is standing. He tried to tell one of his friends the fact, and said she had 'hair almost as long as her foot,' and the goose got so mad about it that she won't see him any more."

He was Particular.

BROWN: "Why don't you marry and settle down?" Jones: "Well, I've got my reasons for it. The woman I want to marry must have lots of money and be smart, but when I find a woman who has money and who is willing to marry me, her willingness to marry me is positive proof to my mind that she is stupid, and then, of course, she doesn't suit me. I want a smart woman for a wife."

Uncertain as yet.

LADY OF THE HOUSE (to cook, having discovered a policeman in the kitchen): "You told me when you came here that you had no sweetheart." Cook: "Yes, I told you so, and it's the truth, too." "Who, then, is the policeman in the kitchen if he is not your sweetheart?" "He isn't my sweetheart. Indeed he isn't. He is only trying to be, and I don't know whether he will succeed or not."

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Out of Great Tribulation.

By Henry Farmer.

Benny Determines on Treachery.

But we must return to Benny.

The night that had seen his one-time partner artistically burgling the Towers had been one of unrest and torturing anxiety for him. Visions of Esther, of a haggard-faced convict, fettered and wearing the black and yellow dress, had haunted him. He rose from his bed, unrefreshed and leaden-eyed. He scarcely touched his breakfast. As he mechanically opened the newspaper that his landlady brought him, he was looking a very different person from the dapper, comic-faced Mr. Faversham who, at the village concert at Warham, had convulsed his audience with his humorous singing. His conscience seemed to have made a physical as well as a mental wreck of him. He looked an older man altogether.

He was wondering how the Marquis had fared on the previous night, as he glanced down the columns of the paper; but he could expect no news till the evening papers came out. But the Marquis—nothing ever went wrong with him, at least up to the present! Then Benny glanced nervously to right and left, and the paper crackled with the restless movement of his fingers. The next moment a sharp ejaculation burst from his lips, and he struck his forehead with a clenched hand. A paragraph, tucked away in the corner of the paper, had caught his eye.

Alec Scarsdale, well known to the public now as the notorious convict 35, had broken down in health, and had been removed to the infirmary of Wrackam prison, where he was lying seriously ill.

Benny flung the paper from him, sprang to his feet, and paced the room, in an agony of remorse. Presently he was seated at the table, writing at a feverish pace, only to stop abruptly and tear up what he had written. Then he rang the bell, and asked his landlady for a time-table. There was no such thing in the house.

"Masters won't be back till this afternoon or evening," he said to himself. "I must see him first. Wonder how the trains run to Dover to-night. Post a letter after eight o'clock and it wouldn't be delivered till first post to-morrow. If there's a decent train to-night, I should be across the water and well away by then. Or shall I wait till I'm well away before writing? Well, I'll first find out about the trains."

Shortly after, he was on his way to Victoria station. He had risen late. It was one o'clock before he reached his destination.

"I'm altogether chippy," he muttered, making his way on to the platform. "I want a brandy and soda or something of that sort to buck me up."

A train had just run into one of the arrival platforms. A number of passengers were streaming through the barrier gate.

Benny suddenly reeled a little. His lips quivered. All the others passengers seemed to have faded away, all but two—a grey-haired man and the white-faced girl whom he was supporting.

John Mansfield and Esther. The lines had multiplied on the banker's face. His eyes were bent upon his daughter.

"Esther, my darling," he whispered tenderly, "I hope this journey has not been too much for you?"

She smiled up at him bravely. There was no barrier between them now. Crump had swept that away. John Mansfield no longer doubted Alec Scarsdale's innocence. He, too, had suffered. He, too, like Esther, was waiting and hoping. He dared not trust himself to return to Warham, lest he should meet the man whom Crump had unmasked, whom he knew now to be an unutterable scoundrel, the man whom once he had hoped to welcome as his son-in-law.

"No, father, I feel ever so much better than I expected. Of course, I feel a little weak; but one can't expect to get well, quite well, all at once!"

Her eyes and her father's almost simultaneously caught sight of Mr. Faversham. The banker's face flushed red. His free hand clenched up. For a moment he had forgotten the promise of secrecy made to Crump.

"The scound——"

"Father!" whispered Esther, her arm tightening on his. "Remember!"

It was too late for Benny to make believe that he had not seen them. He raised his hat, and would have thanked Heaven had the platform opened and swallowed him up. John Mansfield, with an effort, returned his salutation. Esther bowed.

Benny was only conscious of one thing now—her eyes. The old expression was there, only intensified, more wistful. It stabbed him like a knife. He must do something, say something. She had been ill, lying at death's door, so it had been said. He could not pass by with a mere salutation. If she had only been wearing a veil or something, it would have been easier for him; but those eyes, with their wistful, I-haven't-forgotten-him look in their depths, seemed to fascinate him, draw him towards her.

Why, in God's name, had he ever taken a hand in that foul night's work? He hesitated; then, as if irresistibly drawn, stepped towards Esther and her father. He raised his hat for the second time. Again Esther's arm tightened on her father's.

"I had no idea," he stammered. "I'm so glad to see that you're able—er—to be out and about again, Miss Mansfield. You—er—Mr. Mansfield, must also feel a—er—happy man to-day!"

He was looking everywhere but into Esther's face.

"But I—er—mustn't keep you. Only I'm glad—er—more glad than I can ever tell you to have seen you again, Miss Mansfield; to know that you—you—well, that you're better. I'm going abroad for a bit. Perhaps, it may be some time before I see you again. Good-bye, Mr. Mansfield. Good-bye, Miss Mansfield. Never forget how good you were to me when I came that cropper. Excuse me; but I'm not quite myself to-day. Worries, business worries. And I'm keeping you. Good-bye!"

There had been no shaking of hands. He had spoken after the fashion of a man who was desperately pressed for time, giving those to whom he was talking no chance of getting a word in edge-ways. With a jerky, nervous salutation, he hurried away abruptly. When, a few moments later, he entered the refreshment buffet, his limbs were shaking, and tiny beads of perspiration were standing out on his forehead.

He was in the act of gulping down some brandy, when the door swung back, and a man sauntered up to the counter, and ordered some refreshment.

"The scoundrel!" breathed out John Mansfield, after Benny's abrupt departure.

"But I'm so thankful," whispered Esther, "that you didn't betray yourself. And, father, he talks of going abroad! Mr. Crump ought to know this. Would you send him a telegram now!"

And when the banker had seen Esther safely into a cab, he dispatched a telegram to "Penworthy." But it was superfluous.

It was Grogan who had entered the refreshment buffet. When Benny, who tried to steady his nerves with more drink,

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left, he had made up his mind. That glimpse of Esther had given him strength. The die was cast.

He intended to betray the Marquis!

A train left for Dieppe at ten o'clock that night. He returned to his rooms. The evening paper contained no account of any robbery at Warham. Had the Marquis changed his plans at the last moment? Shortly after dusk, Benny left his lodgings for Chancery Lane.

"Mr. Masters returned yet?" he inquired of the office boy.

"No, sir. I have had a telegram from him, saying that he has been unexpectedly detained, and won't be back to-night; but he'll be here for certain first thing to-morrow morning!"

Benny rapped out an oath under his breath. The sooner he was out of the country, and the load, that pressed so heavily, off his conscience, the better! Should he wait till the morrow, or leave that night, and trust to chance for some future opportunity of changing the diamonds into cash? He had sufficient money in hand for immediate purposes. Wavering in his mind, he returned to his lodgings. A later edition of the evening paper contained no news of any jewel robbery.

Shortly after his return, Benny was writing again, and tearing up. Sometimes the doomed letter commenced "To Miss Mansfield." Sometimes "To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

"Oh, God! How Long?"

"I SHALL not be back to-night, Railton. I shall put up at the Hotel Royal."

"Very good, sir!"

Railton opened the front door for his master. A brougham was drawn up outside the Firs. Revelle, a cigar between his teeth, portmanteau in hand, entered it.

"Good evening to you, sir!" said Railton, with a respectful obeisance.

"Good night, Railton."

As the broughan rattled away stationwards, Revelle leant back, and laughed. The Normanhurst jewels were in his portmanteau; at what time they were presumably supposed to be lying, snug and secure, in the safe at the Towers. The irony of the situation tickled his sense of humour.

"'Pon my soul!" he muttered. "They'll probably be off my hands and across the water before they're missed. A record, I think!" He laughed again. Then the handsome face hardened a little. "And when I've done my business with Masters I'll give Benny a look up. I think he'll probably be deuced sorry now that he showed the white feather, and backed out of the business."

At the station a porter sprang to his brougham, and opened the door. Revelle did not, however, intrust him with the carrying of his bag. He sauntered on to the platform. It was growing dark, but the station lamps had not yet been lighted. A few moments after a man passed on to the platform—the artist who had been sketching the Firs. He took no notice of two other men already on the platform, seated apart in quiet corners. Nor had Revelle noticed them. When the train arrived he entered a first class carriage. The three men entered the same third class compartment.

"Gentlemen," said Crump, when the train was in motion, "I am experiencing a feeling of excitement such as I have not known for years. Our plan of campaign is perfectly clear to all of us, is it not?"

"Quite!"

"He is an unutterable scoundrel; but it has been a most remarkable and masterly performance on his part. I have postponed interviewing Rumbey till to-morrow. I trust to be at leisure then."

London reached, Revelle sprang into a hansom, bidding the man drive to Chancery Lane. A couple of hansoms followed. Shortly after Revelle had entered the block of buildings in Chancery Lane where Lewis Masters rented chambers, three men sauntered up. A fourth man joined them.

"Masters," he said, "isn't in. He's not returning till to-morrow morning."

"Gentlemen," whispered Crump, "this is disappointing.

Some Big Eaters.

Many men who have made their way in life have been big eaters. Premier Seddon and Pierpont Morgan are names which immediately occur to the mind; while it is a well-known fact that the great Napoleon died from a disease brought on by eating too freely of his favourite dish—stewed onions. Eating means, or should mean, the intaking of energy. While this was the case with Napoleon, he was great. When his digestion gave out, he became weak, ill, and at last succumbed. Every worker, man or woman, should know that the appetite is the index to the health. Can you eat? Can you store up energy? If not you should not work and expend it. Is your digestion sound? If not, look to it. If it is weak and disordered, it is a screw loose in the great machine which continues your existence, and if it once becomes lost, it can never be replaced. Fortunately, nature has provided a remedy for all digestive ailments. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans when taken, assume in the body the exact form of nature's own bile. They aid digestion, clear the bowels of accumulated impurities and fermenting food, and stimulate the liver in the only way which nature has said this shall be done. Don't take mineral medicines, but take nature's own vegetable cures. Nature makes your ailments, let nature cure them. Bile Beans being purely vegetable are nature's own remedy. You get them from any chemist at one and three half-pence a box. Economical buyers get a two and nine-penny box which contains three times the quantity of the smaller box at a little over twice the price.

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H. SAMUEL (Dept. 29) Market Street, MANCHESTER.

Let us move a little way from the entrance. We shall be having Mr. Revelle back in a moment."

He was right. A moment later Revelle emerged, and hailed a passing hansom.

"The Hotel Royal!" he cried to the driver.

The words reached Crump. Hotel Royal? Esther Mansfield was staying there with her father. Crump's lips tightened up. Was it coincidence, or intentional?

When he reached the hotel Revelle engaged a bed-room; then asked to see the manager.

"I've one or two important papers and things in my bag," he said to the manager, "I should be obliged to you if you'd lock it up in your strong-room, and give me a receipt for it."

"With pleasure, sir."

This having been done, Revelle obtained the key of his bed-room and ascended by the lift.

"And now," he muttered, on reaching his room, "a wash and a brush-up, and then Benny! A confounded nuisance, Masters being away; but to-morrow will do, and the stuff's safe where it is!"

When he left the room and passed out into the corridor, the lift-boy was in the act of pulling the trellis gate.

"Wait a second! I'm coming down!"

The boy flung back the gate, Revelle stepped in; then, catching sight of a seated, girlish figure, started in spite of his admirable self-control.

Esther Mansfield!

She had glanced up as he had entered. Their eyes met.

The gate crashed to. The lift was descending. He had not seen her since that day when, on the brow of the cliff, he had held her unconscious in his arms, had pressed a burning kiss to her cold lips. For all his self-control the hot blood surged to his face.

"Miss Mansfield!"

He held out his hand. She rose to her feet, took it mechanically.

"I have never thanked you," she whispered, speaking after the manner of someone repeating a lesson, "for what you did at Gurlston Bay!"

"Ah!" he said, hoarsely, quickly, "don't speak of that. Any man would have done what I did. But you are better? Tell me that you are better?"

"I'm much better!"

But she could not trust herself to look at him. Yet she must play her part! The lift stopped. The boy flung open the gate. Esther moved away.

"You are staying here?" questioned Revelle quickly.

"Yes!"

"May I hope to see you to-morrow?"

"I don't quite know what my father's movements will be. Good-night, Mr. Revelle!"

She passed out into the corridor, never glancing at him, and hurried away to her room. Once within, she clasped her forehead with her thin, transparent hands.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, "how long, how long?"

A moment later there was a tap on the door. The chamber-maid handed her a note—a slip of paper that had evidently been torn out of a note-book for want of more suitable material. The address was in pencil, and had evidently been written hastily. The handwriting was familiar. Esther feverishly untwisted the paper.

"In great haste I scrawl this. Mr. Revelle is staying at this hotel. I trust you will be spared the pain of meeting him. The end is looking very much nearer now. Courage, my dear young lady. Circumstances prevent me from seeing you now. To-morrow, perhaps.—PENWORTHY."

It had come too late to save her the pain of meeting the man she loathed beyond all expression; but not too late to cheer.

That scribbled note almost seemed an answer to her passioned cry of a few seconds before: "Oh, God! how long, how long?"

Revelle quitted the lift on the ground-floor. He was fiercely biting his lips. The game was up where Esther Mansfield was concerned, and a great bitterness was rankling in his soul. And she had seemed to him more beautiful than ever. Never had he desired her more! All his scheming, all his villainy had ended in nothing. She loathed him, saw through him, and he knew it now. He left the hotel and sprang into a hansom, his destination the quiet rooms in the north of London where Benny was staying.

Crump and Inspector Winton followed in another hansom.

The Shadows on the Blind.

"To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

Having thus topped a sheet of paper, Benny laid aside his pen, and, springing to his feet, proceeded to pace the room nervously. The slamming to of a door in the house caused him to start violently.

"Yes, I won't wait for Masters. I'll get across to-night; post the letters from the other side; but I may as well get them written now."

He drew a small revolver from his pocket, then returned it.

"I've got the jumps to-night. Have a sort of feeling, somehow, that perhaps the Marquis will be turning up. I was a fool to give him my address. And yet if he does turn up—but why should he? No, I've got the jumps, that's what's the matter with me!"

He sat himself down at the table again, and had covered a sheet of paper with writing before the old restlessness seized upon him again. He read through what he had written.

"Yes, that seems pretty clear, as far as it goes!"

He placed the sheet under the blotting paper, and began a fresh page. It was all but covered, when a sharp knocking on the front door produced another violent start.

Quickly he thrust the paper under the blotting-paper; then sat listening with straining ears.

"In here?"

It was the Marquis' voice. The next moment the door opened.

"Hallo, old chap, taken you by surprise, eh? 'Pon my soul!"—Revelle closed the door behind him—"you don't look very glad to see me, Benny!"

He laughed languidly, and held out his hand.

Benny sprang up. As he did so, his cuff caught the blotting-paper and shifted its position slightly.

"Oh, but I am, Marquis—ever so glad; but you've taken me by surprise—I wasn't expecting you—but sit down, old chap. I'm dying to hear about things! You needn't be afraid to talk out here. My landlady's the only person in, and she's as deaf as a post. Sit down. No fizz on the premises; but whisky, brandy. Have a drink! Have you pulled it off? There's been nothing in the papers!"

"Yes!" drawled Revelle, sinking into the chair that Benny had vacated, and resting one elbow on the blotting paper. "Not a hitch. You were a fool, Benny, not to stand in with me!"

Outside, two men were watching the blinded window, and a shadow upon it.

"I would give a great deal," whispered Crump, "to be able to hear the conversation."

"No, Marquis, I wasn't. I was best out of it. I congratulate you. You deserved to succeed; but I was better out of it. Same time, it hasn't made any difference to our friendship, has it?" Benny seemed very restless. "And, Marquis, don't stick on that chair. Take—take this easy chair. You'll—you'll find it more comfortable. Do, old chap, and let me mix you a brandy and soda! Of course I don't live up to 'The Firs' style; but, come over here, and make yourself comfortable!"

"No, thank you, Benny. I'm all right here. Of course, dear old chap, your standing out hasn't interfered with our friendship in the least!"

Then suddenly his dark eyes dilated.

A piece of paper sticking out from under the blotting paper on which his elbow rested, had arrested his attention.

He could just see the words—

"To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

(Developments regarding Benny's letter are recorded next week.)

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A Plain Talk about Catarrh.

In a late number of an Ear, Nose and Throat Journal the Editor devotes a considerable space to a very clear description of the different forms of catarrh, and of a treatment which is curing cases where other methods have failed. A large number of these cases are described so plainly as to give every hope of a cure to those who have suffered for years, especially as the new treatment can be followed at home. For deaf people there is also a report upon the successful treatment of defective hearing by external application, with a summary of some really remarkable cases cured even after operations have been performed. For the benefit of those who are interested it is announced that a free copy of the "Journal" can be obtained by addressing the Editor, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. With the Journal a special "Supplement" will be enclosed, which gives details of upwards of forty cases cured by the new Method during the past month, also a Report Form by means of which anyone can obtain full particulars and free advice as to the use of the treatment in their own case.

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By Madge Morris.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Is Deformity a Bar to Marriage?

SHOULD a deformity be allowed to interfere with marriage? This question often crops up in various forms in my correspondence, and I may say that all must depend on the depth of the affection of the parties. "ERIC" was engaged to Ethel, "the best girl in the world," but some time ago she lost her left hand. Now she thinks she ought not to marry "ERIC" because her opinion is that a woman thus disabled could not make a good wife and housekeeper.

* * * *

In "ERIC'S" case, I see no reason for any cessation of the engagement. The loss of a hand is perhaps one of the least serious results of an accident, as, in course of time, one can learn to use the other hand with almost the same effect as two. So, "ERIC," tell Ethel from me that I think she is misjudged in overrating her misfortune, and should not allow it to disturb the happiness of you both.

The Law Regarding Presents.

CAN "W. H." claim presents from a girl to whom he was engaged, but who has since broken the match off? Some of the presents were very expensive, and the girl, after offering to return them, now refuses to do so. "W. H." asks if he can recover them by law.

* * * *

Certainly not, "W. H." A present is a present all the world over, and law cannot possibly compel her to return them. At the same time, I think a girl with any pride or decency, knowing that a man has asked for his presents back, could not hesitate for a moment about returning them. But the matter must be left to her, and no gentleman should have the bad taste to press for the return of presents if the other party shows no disposition to return them. What has been given, "W. H.," has been given.

The Best Age to Fall in Love.

THANK you very much, "ETHEL W.," for your kind congratulations. What is the proper age for a girl to have a young man? Well, I don't know that propriety enters much into the question. Everything depends on when the young man comes along. Some girls are predisposed to receive attentions at seventeen, others not before twenty, or seventy.

* * * *

I think the best judge of your own susceptibility will be the young man, and when he comes along don't bother much about the age. At the same time, I am not referring to the age at which one should think about marriage. That must depend on a host of other things, such as your own mental and physical fitness, and the position of the young man—quite another question.

Don't Give Him Up.

"TROUBLED ONE," if your sweetheart really loves you, as he evidently does, seeing that he has revealed to you what he has about his past life, I think you should not allow the circumstance you mention from standing in your way. There are very few single men who have led spotless lives, and the fact that your lover's experiences in a previous love affair have brought him trouble does not make him any the worse than thousands of more fortunate fellow men. Take it philosophically, "TROUBLED ONE," and look to the future, not to the past.

The Mother to Blame

"DESPERATE" is in love with a young lady who returned his affections. Her mother has been notified of the fact, and since then the young lady has been very cold towards "DESPERATE," but still accepts gifts from him.

* * * *

I should imagine the mother has not received "DESPERATE'S" suit for her daughter with very much enthusiasm. She might almost have forbidden her daughter to allow matters to go too far. The girl's coldness is possibly caused by her anxiety and worry over the matter. "DESPERATE" had better see the mother himself and make a clean breast of his own feelings, and find out the true state of affairs.

Etiquette when Out with a Lady.

"S. S. S." wishes to know three things: Firstly, on which side of a lady he should keep when cycling with her; secondly, on which side when walking with her; and thirdly, how he should introduce the lady to a gentleman.

* * * *

When cycling with her, of course ride on the outer side, so as to place yourself between her and any vehicle that may be passing. The same rule applies in the case of walking; where there is no footpath always give the lady the inner side of the road. Lastly you do not introduce a lady to a gentleman at all. If you are out with a lady and meet a gentleman friend, introduce the latter to the lady saying "May I introduce Mr. Blank?" adding, as you indicate the lady, "Miss Dash." This rule obtains in all ranks of Society, where the gentleman, no matter what his social standing, must be presented to the lady.

Romance of a Photograph.

"DOLLIE" has been impressed with a young man, whom, she says, she has never met. The whole affair arose through her constantly seeing his photograph in a friend's house, and hearing accounts of his character which have so attracted her that she feels herself madly in love with him. How can I advise one who is in love with a man she has never seen?

* * * *

I think it is a form of attachment likely to lead to disappointment. No doubt "DOLLY" attributes to him all sorts of qualities he does not possess at all, and when the meeting does take place he will probably strike her as a different being from the ideal of the photograph frame. I once knew a girl who had taken a great fancy to the likeness of the brother of a friend of hers. The friend worshipped her brother and had told my acquaintance all sorts of beautiful things about him. Consequently she began to fall in love with him herself.

* * * *

One day it was announced that he was to visit his sister, and my friend was astounded to see, not a tall, broad, handsome man enter, but a small youth of only moderate attractiveness. His conversation was the very opposite to what she had hoped and expected, and before the meeting was over she was disappointed to the verge of despair. In "DOLLY'S" case there is no harm in falling in love with a photograph, but she should be careful of building too great hopes on its likeness to the original.

Correspondents, Please Note.

WILL "SINCERE," who wrote to me some months ago about the question of educating his *fiancée*, kindly forward his address, as I have a communication from another correspondent to forward him which is likely to be of interest to him regarding the information he is seeking.

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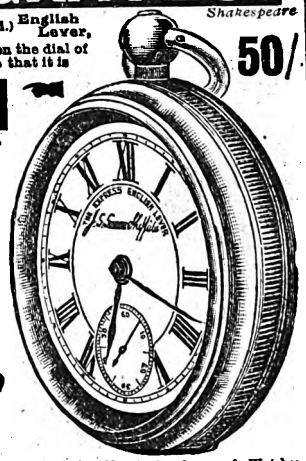

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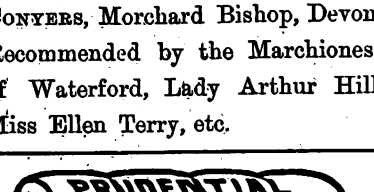

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Short Stories

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For the Week Ending October 4th, 1902.

A Fair Maid's Mischief.

"So you refuse me the very first thing I have ever asked you? So much for your speeches and professions. You're distressingly young, Jim —and not clever."

"I'm not so stupid that I can't see it's not the thing for you to have this fellow hanging about you."

"Pooh! when did I consider etiquette? Besides, it's my own business."

"May be. It won't be mine to take your message."

"Beware of jealousy, my lord, it is——"

"Jealous? Not I. Do you think I'd be jealous of a nigger? Not if he were fifty times a prince."

"Do try to hide your ignorance, Jim. Prince Osma is as little like a nigger as you are to a gentlemen—when you go on in this ridiculous fashion. Such nonsense; why he's the son of a Rajah, and, as you know, has been educated at Oxford."

"I won't quarrel over terms, Gladys. You may consider him white, if you prefer; to me he will always be a nigger, and a black one at that."

"All the same, Jim, dear, I'm sure you will give him my message, and tell him I have something particular to say."

"I'm—I'm hanged if I do."

"Ah, but I want you to, and you're such a nice boy, Jim, quite the nicest boy I know. Give me your reason—your true reason why you won't?"

The boy flushed and raised his eyes to hers.

"Well, then," he said doggedly, "I don't think it's treating Edward squarely. You ought not to go sitting out dances and that sort of thing with other fellows when he's not there, and as to the Prince, I believe Ted would knock him down if he found him in the conservatory with you."

"But I'm sitting out with you, Jim dear?"

The little white hand that had been lazily fluttering a huge red fan, crept up the boy's sleeve till it rested on his shoulder.

"Oh, Ted knows all about me. I don't count. In fact, he relies on me to keep you out of mischief."

"Really?"

The boy shot a glance at the fair face resting against the silken cushions.

"He knows I'd give my life for you, Gladys," he said slowly.

She shook her head.

"Sounds pretty," she murmured sweetly, "but it isn't real."

"Test me."

"Take my message, my message to Prince Osma." Her voice was still soft but the eyes flashed, and the pale cheeks were tinged with red.

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"Do you really mean it, Gladys? Is it really important, or only one of your freaks?"

"Jim!" she started to her feet. "It's terribly important. Fail me, and I don't know what I shall do."

"But what does it mean? Has the fellow dared to annoy you? Has——"

"Don't ask me, Jim, don't ask me. Only if you care for me, go at once."

Her slim figure was drawn to its full height and she pointed to the door with a gesture half imploring, half commanding.

But he still hesitated—and the time was going fast.

For a moment they faced each other, then with a catch in her voice, but with her eyes bright, she leant against him.

"Will you go, Jim—will you go?"

And while the answer trembled on his lips she stopped them with her own.

"*Now* will you do as I ask?"

And, man-like, he consented.

A moment later he was regretting his own weakness. Who was this Indian chappie? he reflected, and what did this mystery mean? Besides——but he had promised, and to promise, with Jim Carton, was to perform.

He managed to deliver the message he had been charged with into the Prince's ear alone. Then, filled with a vague idea of keeping his cousin's name from the tender mercies of the scandalous, he fell to pacing to and fro the passage, with a dogged sort of persistence eminently characteristic.

To Gladys it seemed ages before the Prince arrived, and yet when the door opened she wished, how ardently, that the delay had been longer.

"You have sent for me?" Despite a certain duskiness of skin Osma was an imposing, even a handsome figure. His air of distinction marked him out no less than the pale olive skin and the brilliant eyes.

"Yes," she answered quietly, "I have something of importance to say."

"Everything you say is of importance—to me," he answered, and raising her small white fingers to his lips, bent low his head.

The girl trembled under the gaze of those passionate eyes, and something in her own made the Prince draw back. Next instant she was speaking quickly, with emphasis.

"I sent to tell you that, that——" She flung out her hands—"I am engaged," she panted, "engaged to be married."

"Since when?"

She wished he would look anywhere rather than at her;

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that she could feel contempt, hatred for him, anything rather than as she did—like a culprit detected in a peculiarly despicable crime.

"I was engaged when I met you last year. I know I have treated you badly—behaved shamefully, in fact; but"—here she raised her eyes pleadingly, only to let them fall before the intent look in his—"you will forgive me, and forget."

"Forget? It is impossible."

"But——"

He stopped her impatiently.

"It was not without a struggle that I allowed myself to love you. There were reasons why it would have been better that I should not take an English girl for my wife. But I could not resist. Gradually you dominated my thoughts, my will, my life, until all that was worth living and striving for, was you. You knew this; you cannot look at me and deny it. True, I did not ask you in so many words to marry me. But—you understood. You read my heart and knew that when the time came I should ask you to be mine."

"I have no excuse to make," she said piteously.

"Ah, but you loved me also. This engagement that you speak of is some family affair arranged by your relations. You tell me of it in obedience to their commands. You do not love this man?"

For a moment words failed her, then she said simply, "I love him with all my heart. Edward Vaughan and I were engaged three years ago, but last year we quarrelled. He went to India to shoot big game and find distraction. Being a woman I had to stay at home, and—" Her eyes finished the sentence. She had found distraction in Osma's conquest.

"And this man whom you love, and who showed his love for you by going away to India, has he returned?"

"He is expected every day."

"But perhaps he would not be anxious to renew the engagement?"

Her eyes flashed at the sneer, but with an effort she controlled herself.

"We are already reconciled," she answered.

"And you imagine that you will marry him—this man?"

Her hand went to her side with a gesture of pain. Truly she was paying a high price for her vanity.

"Will you not be a little merciful?" she said piteously. "I know I have acted meanly, wickedly towards you. But I am sorry, very sorry; surely I can say no more."

"You can say more, much more than that. You can say, as I mean you to, that it is not him nor any other that you love, but me."

"This must end," she said firmly. "I have told you how deeply I regret any pain that I have caused you. I can only once again ask your forgiveness and bid you farewell."

She gave him her hand as she spoke—a slight fair figure in her draperies of shimmering white.

For a moment he hesitated. She thought the game was hers, and smiled in the slow, sweet fashion that he remembered all too well. She was so lovely, it was impossible that he could leave her—resign her to another.

"Farewell," she murmured softly.

"Never," he answered fiercely. "I will hold you against all the world. Of your free will if you are wise. If not—against it."

She was powerless to stem the torrent, her words were impotent to check the passion and despair which overwhelmed him.

"Be warned," he cried at last, "be warned. If not mine, you shall never be another's. I will kill him first—you after."

"Coward!" she cried. "Coward!"

But in a moment he had his arms about her, calling her strange love names in a curious tongue, kissing the fair head that rested all unwillingly upon his shoulder.

She could hear Jim's voice in the passage. "Gladys, Gladys, Edward's come." But she was powerless to reply. The room seemed filled with a thick cloud, through which a pair of dark eyes glowed, holding her own in bondage.

"Go," she murmured hoarsely. "In Heaven's name *go!*"

The voices were coming nearer, her uncle's voice and Jim's.

"For pity's sake," she cried, and strove to free herself. Then, with a woman's cunning she simulated yielding.

"Leave me," she said, "and I will see you again to-morrow evening."

"Give me a token," was the answer, and shuddering she let him kiss her face.

"Jim," she cried, as her cousin's boyish face appeared, "Jim, I'm—I'm tired. You must tell Edward that I'll see him in the morning. I can't meet him to-night. Promise, promise you won't let him know of Osma."

The boy nodded. "Is he annoying you in any way?" he asked, jerking in the direction of the Prince. "Because if so, I'll give the governor a hint to bring his visit to a close."

"Don't ask me anything to-night, dear. I'm ill; I'm tired, and I wish—I wish I were as old as Methuselah!"

With which astounding statement Gladys went upstairs to bed.

Next morning Gladys gave herself up to the happiness of conciliation with Edward—Ted as she loved to call him.

"Why did you behave so badly, Gladys?" he asked, stroking her hair. "It would have been as easy to say you were sorry a year ago as now. And you did flirt with Charlie Carew, you can't deny it."

"Only a little," she whispered penitently. "But I've turned over a new leaf now, Ted. I'm never going to flirt any more."

"After all, I was to blame. I might have known you only acted as you did in pique. But there's something—to me, so utterly ignoble in the idea of a woman encouraging a man to love her when all the time she means nothing. It is little to her; a tribute to her vanity; an hour or two's amusement; but to him it is often a hard and bitter experience."

The girl trembled a little and hid her face upon his shoulder. She had been within an ace of telling him about Osma, but now it was impossible. She dared not face the possibility of his scorn, contempt, more than all the possibility that she might lose his love. She nestled closer to his side; how she worshipped, adored him! She, the woman who had played with hearts so often and so cruelly, at last had lost her own.

The day passed all too quickly and with a little shiver of apprehension Gladys remembered her promise to see Osma.

"I must go now, dear," she told Vaughan. "It's time to dress for dinner, and I want to make myself look beautiful for you."

As she passed up the stairs a low voice called her.

"When shall I see you, Lady Gladys?"

She stumbled, nearly falling, in her agitation.

"In half an hour, in the library," she whispered.

Fear suggested that Ted might have heard, and almost losing courage, she tapped at Jim's door.

"Will you be down by seven, dear?" she asked. "I want you to keep guard for me while I see Osma."

Jim came out and stood by her on the landing.

"Will this be the last time, Gladys?" he asked gravely.

"The last," she answered.

"At all costs keep Ted away," she implored some half hour later. "Oh, Jim, you are very good to me."

The boy's eyes followed her tall, slim figure longingly. He worshipped his cousin, did this seventeen-year-old Jim, and

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to his mind only one man in the world was worthy to possess her." And that man was Edward Vaughan.

"I can't stay long," Gladys commenced hurriedly, as she entered the library; "as it is I've had to fly over dressing, and my bracelets are not properly fastened."

She moved near the window as she spoke, and the sun caught her hair, and seemed to wrap her in a golden veil. She was gloriously, mercilessly beautiful in her gown of creamy satin, caught here and there with jewels, that shimmered with every movement of her long, lithe limbs.

"May I help you?"

Osma's voice was soft; his manner, as usual, quiet and self-restrained. Surely she could bend him to her will. With a charming gesture she held out her soft white arm.

"You won't hurt me?" she asked.

"Never—how could I?"

"Do you mean it—do you really mean you have no wish to harm me?"

He bowed still lower over her hand.

"What do you wish?" he said calmly.

"That you will forgive my thoughtless, unkind treatment and forget me."

"The first—yes. The second—never."

"You—you——"

"I was wrong," he said slowly. "Yesterday I spoke in the heat of passion. To-day I see things in the light of reason. Vaughan loves you. Vaughan shall marry you. I swear it," he added, with a sudden emphasis. "You shall not be cheated of your happiness."

"How can I thank you for your generosity?"

"Tell me one thing," he answered. "Had there"—he hesitated—"had there been no Vaughan, could you have found happiness with me?"

"Had I never met Edward," she answered, "I might perhaps have grown to care for you."

"Thank you," he said, raising her hand to his lips. A moment later Gladys was alone. "Thank Heaven, that's over," she murmured. "Jim," as her cousin entered, "here is the end of my last flirtation. Osma has behaved beautifully."

In any case the Prince took his defeat with unexpected good humour. He even congratulated Vaughan with well-feigned heartiness, gracefully complimented Gladys' uncle on the match, and won every lady's good opinion.

"I'm really quite sorry to lose him," Lady Fairfax exclaimed. "But he insists he goes to-morrow. Some wretched business or other compels him."

Jim did not share the general regret at Osma's departure. That young man had his own views on the subject of niggers, and opined that it would be a good thing when the Prince cleared out.

"I believe the beggar's hatching some mischief or other," he thought, watching the dark face with its passionate eyes. "I don't like the way he looks at Gladys—By the bye, Prince"—he turned to Osma—"there's a parcel just come for you. At least a sort of packing-case arrangement. It's in the hall—will you go down and inspect it?"

"It contains some curios from India," answered Osma. "I have been expecting them. They will, I think, interest you"—he bowed to Lady Fairfax—"with your permission I will unpack the case and show you the contents."

"I should like nothing better," said the lady. "India is such a wonderful place. It always makes me think of idols with big diamond eyes. Are there any idols in your case, Prince?"

"I fear nothing so interesting; a few trifles merely."

The case was brought upstairs and Osma deftly opened it.

Some beautiful specimens of Indian embroidery, and curiously carved ivories were handed round, examined and enthused upon. Then came bangles in gold, silver and copper. Lastly Osma produced a box of sandal wood.

"The inhabitants of a certain province in my country," he commenced, "have a curious custom of testing whether ill-luck or good is likely to attend an enterprise. They take a dart—a thin arrow-shaped piece of wood about eight inches long, sharpened to a point and aim it at a shield of parchment. On the shield they write the name of the place where they wish to go, or a malady they fear. The name of their beloved, or their enemy. They aim the dart at the name on the parchment. If, so the story goes, the dart enters the parchment, fortune is favourable to the thrower. If, on the contrary, the dart glances off the surface of the shield, and falls to the ground, luck is against him. I have here"—he opened the box of sandal wood—"a few of these darts. It might, I thought, be amusing if some of us were to try to work the oracle for ourselves. There are some six darts here—a piece of cardboard would, I think, take the place of the shield."

"What a *sweet* idea!" chirped Lady Fairfax.

"Too lovely!" said a dear young thing in blue.

"Beats fortune-telling all to fits," remarked a go-ahead young woman.

Altogether the suggestion was rapturously received. A stout piece of cardboard was formed into a sort of shield, and Gladys, as the most intrepid of the company, was selected as the first to try her luck.

"I think perhaps if someone held the shield it would be better. The darts are only wooden, not in the least likely to hurt anybody even if they do miss the mark. What do you think, Vaughan?" and Prince Osma smiled.

"Certainly. By all means. Gladys, I'll be your shield bearer. Let fly your dart at me and see if fortune speeds it." Laughing he grasped the pasteboard and posed some few yards distant.

Gladys scrawled something on a piece of paper and fixed it on the shield.

"What have you written, Gladys?" asked Jim inquisitively. "Oh! Ted, of course. Well, if there's any truth in the tale your dart ought to go right home."

And so it did; the little weapon flew straight as an arrow from Gladys to the shield, entering the cardboard with a twang.

"Again, Lady Gladys. Three is the mystic number, you know."

She laughed and pinned another name in place of Ted's. The name was that of Osma. Jim read and frowned.

Once more Gladys let fly. This time the dart fell short, and dropped inert upon the floor.

"Bad luck," said Osma; stooping he picked the weapon up and handed it to her.

Gladys smiled a little uneasily. It was all nonsense, of course. Yet it was strange. She still half-feared the Prince. According to the legend the dart had told her she had cause.

"Good luck to Jim," she cried and hurled the dart. It touched the shield, then fell limp as the other.

"My dear Gladys, don't tell me I'm to be the victim of misfortune," laughed her cousin, "for I shan't believe you. Here, Ted, you have a try."

Vaughan was succeeded by the girl in blue, who quickly gave place to another of the party. Lady Fairfax screamed in horror when the oracle declared her pet pug was in danger, but otherwise was quite content with the performance.

"Now, Osma, it's *your* turn. We are all anxious to hear your luck."

Osma bowed gracefully and quickly threw a dart.

"Myself," he called, and everybody clapped as the dart went home. "Lady Gladys," fresh applause and equal success.

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"Mr. Vaughan." The Prince stepped back and took a fresh dart from the box. "I want to make sure this time," he said. "Vaughan's too good a fellow for luck to miss him." He poised the weapon, Ted holding the shield laughed encouragement. A moment later the dart was flying through the air. It struck Jim that Osma had aimed too high, as though the mark was not the shield but Ted himself. Acting on a sudden impulse prompted by a strange indefinable sense of fear, Jim pushed Vaughan to one side, and instinctively put up his own hand. It was done so quickly that Ted himself was hardly aware what had happened. The next moment there was a general outcry; the dart was sticking in Jim's hand!

"Poor Jim," said Gladys, "your ill-luck has overtaken you. Let me pull it out."

"Allow me." Osma gently moved her aside.

"I can never apologise sufficiently," he said to Jim. He spoke huskily, and his dusky face looked curiously grey.

"It was my own fault," said Jim. "You weren't a bit to blame." But when on removing the dart it was found to be, unlike the others, fitted with a small steel point, Jim did not feel so sure that Osma was so innocent as he had stated.

It would be to Osma's advantage, or he would think so, if Ted Vaughan were out of the way. The Prince regarded him as a rival. "Niggers," reflected Jim, "weren't particular how they got rid of such. It was quite in the nature of a nigger to have planned the whole thing, and to have arranged to throw this very dart at Ted."

Altogether the business had a very ugly look. Jim decided he would confide his suspicions to Vaughan the next day. He wouldn't speak to-night, he felt horribly done up, and the scratch on his hand—the dart had entered the extreme tip of his third finger—was getting uncomfortable.

It was ridiculous to think a mere scratch like that could hurt a fellow so. Still it did hurt. He took a stiff brandy and soda and got off to bed.

He was awakened by a stinging pain in his right hand. The third finger was numb, from its base sharp agonising thrills shot up to his shoulder.

As he groaned, he heard a quick sharp sigh. Someone was in the room. "Who's there?" he called.

"'Tis I, Osma. I want to talk to you."

The Prince struck a match, lit the gas and locked the door. Then he crossed over to the bed and sat down by Jim's side.

"I have something to tell you," he said. "Promise me before I speak that you will hear what I have to say in silence. You will not cry out, make a disturbance, noise or alarm."

"All right, I promise. What is it?"

Osma leant over him and spoke in a quiet soft voice.

"The dart I threw at you was poisoned. In two hours you will die."

"Die!" Jim sat up dazed. Then as the meaning of the words came home to him he started out of bed and threw himself upon the Prince.

"You dog! you scoundrel! If I die it won't be till I have killed you!"

"Your promise, remember your promise," said Osma, forcing him back upon the bed. "There is still much to hear. I did not mean to hurt *you*. It was Vaughan I wanted to kill. I planned it all, no one would have known, the poison cannot be detected. He would have been removed from my path."

"Why do you tell me this," gasped Jim. "What good does it do now? Call somebody, fetch my mother, send for a doctor. I'm not going to give in without a fight."

Osma shook his head. "There is only one way you may be saved," he said.

"And that?"

"Wait. There is yet time. Tell me first why did you push Vaughan back? Did you feel any fear that I meant mischief to him?"

"Yes, I did. I always knew you had your knife in him and I wasn't going to let old Ted take any chances."

"But why should you suffer in his stead? That is what I cannot understand. You love Gladys also, I have seen it. If Vaughan were killed there might have been a chance for you."

"A chance no decent man would take. You fool, don't you see, it was because I love her I wanted to save her from unhappiness. For her sake, I would lay down my life. For her sake, I took the chance instead of Ted."

"Ah," The Prince drew a long deep breath. "You are a strange people," he said slowly. "Tell me, would it grieve her very much to lose you?"

"She'd be sorry, very. Gladys has been chums with me all my life."

"Then I give her that life. I also will make sacrifices to my love. Quick, throw on your clothes; come, follow me."

Urged by his voice and gesture, mastered by his impetuous will Jim obeyed and followed Osma from the room, down the stairs out to the stables. The dogcart stood ready, Osma's black servant at the side.

"Quick, it's a race for life. Another half hour and it is too late. I am taking you to a doctor that I know. If we are in time you will be saved. If not——" Osma closed his lips significantly, and furiously lashed the horse.

"Don't forget that this means ruin for me," he said hoarsely. "I shall have to tell the truth—and then"—he shrugged his shoulders.

Jim made no answer.

The horse had fallen into a swift and steady stride. They flew along the country road, past hedges, white in the summer moon, past homestead, cottage and farm, up hill and through the valley, a wild, mad race, the mare's hoofs clicking, the wheels skidding on the road.

"At last!" The Prince drew up at a small white house. Throwing the reins to his servant, he clutched Jim, dazed and sick with pain and terror, and dragged him to the door. A peal of the bell, a hurried parley from the window. Five minutes later Jim was in the surgery.

"You understand," he heard Osma say, "the poison is most virulent, amputation is his only chance. Otherwise"—he glanced significantly at Jim's white face. "The wound is from a poisoned dart. I——"

Jim feebly interrupted him.

"I was playing the fool with the confounded thing," he said in a faint, weak voice. "Pure accident—no one to blame." His voice died away. He fell fainting.

* * * * *

When Jim reappeared, some few weeks later, in Society he found himself the centre of attraction. The story of his race for life had leaked out, and had created an immense sensation. In default of Prince Osma, who had suddenly returned to India, Jim found himself the hero of the situation. He had to tell the story twenty times a day.

"Poisoned dart, don't you know, got mixed up with the others. Stuck it in my fingers. Osma, like a good chap, hauled me to the doctor. Saved my life? Rather, but I lost my hand."

This was the only explanation that Jim ever gave, even to Vaughan. But the latter had his own suspicions, and a wonder and reverence tinged his friendship for the boy.

Some few months after Ted and Gladys were made man and wife, the news reached them of Prince Osma's death. He had been killed tiger-shooting in the jungle.

"I'm sorry," Gladys said to Jim, with a little shudder, "but I was horribly afraid of him."

"He was not such a bad chap," answered the boy. "Consider, Gladys, he had some excuse." They were alone at the moment, Ted had gone into the garden.

"He had. Oh! Jim, it might have been much worse." She lifted his maimed arm gently. "I guessed about *this* long ago. I can never, never thank you."

Jim laughed. "It's all right, dear," he said, "the loss of a hand does not make *all* the difference."

She clung to him tearful and penitent.

"Think," she said softly, "what might have happened if——"

"We won't think of it. Sufficient to the day are the consequences even of your mischief. Though," he sighed, "you're still mischievous, you know."

She shook her head. "Never again," she said, "never again."

But at that Jim gave a smile.

John K. Prothero.

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Caught in the Act.

The Story of a Burglar's Adventure.

I HAD all but done the trick when suddenly the room was illuminated by a brilliant flood of electric light. So unexpectedly it came and so dazzlingly, that I was struck all of a heap, as it were, and stood stupidly caught in the very act, with one hand lingering over my booty and the other raised instinctively to shield eyes and face from the blinding glare.

A pretty position for a professional burglar. Taken completely at a disadvantage, like any greenhorn. Held up, as you might say, at the very psychological moment and by a girl—the prettiest creature, I swear, that ever donned lace and cambric for the distraction of mankind.

She sat up in bed, a symphony in white, all be-laced and be-ribboned, and confronted me, bending upon me two eyes as blue as twin sapphires, in which were neither alarm nor supplication, but satisfaction only—satisfaction complete and apparently long-anticipated.

The loveliest hand in the world, white as the lawn that fell back kindly to reveal it, and moulded like that of the Medicean Venus, held, as if well-accustomed to it, a silver-mounted revolver—a toy, yet unmistakably a weapon; a trinket such as a dainty woman might hang at her chatelaine, but still sufficiently convincing to hold me planted there deprived of any inclination to run the risk of testing its mettle.

"Well," said my apprehender, in a voice that betrayed no more emotion than did her lovely face, which was so intoned as to set my susceptible heart beating, "at last I've got you! Now, drop into that chair if you please. No, keep your hands in front of you, if you don't mind. Yes, so; and let me talk to you. Good gracious! But I'm in luck! To think of my getting hold of a burglar at last!"

Her charming features beamed with delight. She even smiled, revealing a double row of the whitest, dearest little teeth it is possible to imagine. Still keeping the muzzle of the little pistol levelled straight at me with a hand that never trembled, with the other she reached down to the foot of the bed and drew up a delicate woollen wrap of pale blue, which she flung deftly about her shoulders. After which she raised the pillows at her back so that they should support her in an upright position and sank back upon them with a luxurious air of establishing herself in comfort. It was evident from look, tone, and gesture that the situation was exceedingly agreeable to her and that she was bent upon enjoying it to the utmost.

"Now," she commanded, with a nod in my direction, "tell me about yourself. All my life I've longed to hear something of a burglar's history from his own lips. Pardon me, but would you very much mind removing your mask? It is only anticipating matters a little, you know. The police will do it anyhow when they come in."

"The police!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

She nodded.

"Yes; they're all over the place, you know. Or perhaps you didn't know that we were warned of your coming? One of their confidence-men (stool pigeons, I think they call them) discovered your intentions and divulged them."

"Confound it!" I ejaculated beneath my breath. "That skunk of a Boynton!"

The girl leant forward earnestly, it seemed to me almost solicitously.

"What did you trust him for?" she said, with a note of reproof in her voice.

"Heaven only knows," I replied, in fierce self-condemnation. "But he'll pay for it yet. Just let him wait till I get my grip on him——"

My fair captor interrupted with a mocking laugh.

"He'll have to wait a long time, I expect," she remarked. "I shouldn't wonder if you get about five years for this. Shouldn't you consider that would be about it?"

I regarded her anxiously through the eye-holes in my mask.

"So you mean to give me up, then?" I hazarded.

She returned my scrutiny with a look of humorous surprise.

"What had you supposed I meant to do with you?" she asked. "Wear you on my watch-chain as a curiosity, or fill your pockets with those trinkets, which appear to have caught your fancy, and show you a safe and sure way of making off with them?"

"I don't know," said I, gloomily, for I really appeared to be in rather a bad hole. "Women sometimes have tender hearts. Beauty and youth have often shown themselves generous and merciful to the unfortunate——" I broke off doubtfully.

The gleam of humour in her eyes deepened.

"Yes," she remarked, "the female heart might well be moved to pity a man in your embarrassing position. Are you, perhaps, an orphan? And is your present condition solely the result of the evil influence to which you have been exposed since early youth?"

I shook my head, entering into her mood. The girl was certainly a character, and I lost sight of my own danger for the moment in enjoyment of her raillery.

"No," I replied, "I cannot plead such extenuating circumstances even for the sake of saving my own skin. Thief though I am, the spirit of truth pervades my breast. Alas, I was born in a respectable street, and of respectable parents. Religion (of a kind) has ever been instilled into my mind, and I have more doctrines at my fingers' ends than I well know what to do with."

Her merry look changed to one of profoundest commiseration.

"Ah, poor man!" she exclaimed. "No wonder you have been driven to irregular courses with such incentives to crime. Now, would you mind removing your mask, I am consumed with curiosity as to your looks. But wait a moment, I feel quite nervous over the event. You see I've been anticipating this moment for years. I've formed a dozen pictures of you in my mind, and do so hope you won't disappoint me. Tell me first, are you good-looking?"

She paused, regarding me with most flattering interest. Certainly she was the most original creature under the sun. Moment by moment she bewitched me more and more.

"On the honour of a house-breaker, an Adonis," I answered, immensely amused.

A troubled expression crept over her face.

"Hm—m," she mused, half aloud. I don't think you should be. It's rather upsetting, don't you know. I didn't look for it at all. Aren't you in the least ruffianly-looking?"

"Not in the least," I said with conviction.

She looked quite dissatisfied.

"Perhaps you are not a competent judge," she suggested hopefully.

"I have perfect confidence in my own discernment," said I firmly. "But since you doubt me, pray permit me to——" I raised my hand to the mask, but she cried out loud and sharp.

"No, no; you are not to move your hands, you know. It is never allowed."

"Pray, then, my dear young lady, how am I to uncover my face?"

She considered a moment.

"I think," she remarked presently, "that I shall be obliged to do it for you. Please come nearer."

Still with my hands uplifted in the traditional attitude and covered by the small revolver, I advanced to the side of the bed. When I got quite close she reached out a beautiful hand and touched the mask that hid my face. I breathed the perfume of the exquisite flesh, and felt my heart beat in ecstasy at the near proximity of the lovely form. Joy was it to be a burglar, to find one's self detected in crime, to suffer, imprisonment—aye, even death itself, for the delight of feeling that soft hand steal to one's cheek, of drinking deep of the intoxicating beauty of those wonderful violet eyes, of tasting that fragrant breath upon the lips.

One moment—and the fair shapely hand dropped again to its former position, the mask held daintily between its white fingers. Another, and a soft murmur of pleasure and approval escaped the curved, red lips.

My divinity was evidently well-pleased with her capture. She smiled triumphantly. And I—I was completely captured in more senses than one.

But hark, what was that? A noise overhead! With astonishing rapidity, I was transformed from the spellbound lover to the commonplace burglar.

My divinity was far too much occupied at her own anxiety as to the noise to notice my change of expression. Burglar-like I took advantage of her pre-occupation and deftly snatched the revolver from her hand, and in another second was gazing back at her from the window-sill. She had completely recovered her self-possession.

"Yes, perhaps you'd better go," she suggested, "but please leave my revolver on the garden seat below."

I needed no second bidding, for footsteps were plainly audible. In another minute I was in the garden, expecting every moment to run into the arms of the police. But my divinity had lied. Not a soul did I meet, and my only memento of that night's adventure is a pretty little revolver which has not left my person from that day to this.

E. P. Train.

The Girl Who Dreamt.

And who Awoke when Too Late.

She stood under the boughs of an apple tree in the old orchard, and there never was, perhaps never could be, another orchard just like it, with its green hills and valleys and old apple trees with their moss-grown limbs. To-day they upheld a profusion of pink and white bloom against the blue and grey of the sky; and she stood there while the bees hummed over the clover at her feet. She was barely seventeen, and beautiful. The sunlight discovered gold in the brown of her hair, and there were golden lights in the depths of her dark eyes, and she was fair—too fair, some said who wished to find fault with her because she was fair.

She lifted one slender hand towards the apple boughs, and the sleeve fell back from an arm white and finely formed. Then she murmured softly: "Nature, I love thee, I love thee, and I shall devote my life to studying thy beauty, and nothing shall come between this love and me."

The vow was scarcely spoken when a youth of about nineteen, accompanied by a large setter dog, came over the hills to where she stood.

"Ruth!" he exclaimed on seeing her, and she said: "Henry!" then there was silence for a moment, and she said: "I did not know you were at home. When did you come?"

"Yesterday. Grandfather has been ill, but he is better to-day. Aunt Martha sent for me."

"I did not know your grandfather was ill."

"No, it seems you don't care to know anything about us any more. Aunt Martha says you seldom come to the house now. It seems rather hard when a fellow's old playmate gives him and his relatives the go-by like that."

"Well, Henry, we are no longer children, and mother does not approve of our playing together any longer"—this with a little smile—then, seriously: "She never did, much, you know."

"No, but you are making her an excuse for throwing me off, and you know, Ruth, that you are the only one in the world I ever shall care for."

"It's silly for you to talk that way; you have never seen the world. What do you know of it?"

"I know it contains nothing half so lovely as Ruth Dartmore."

Without commenting on this assertion she continued: "Mother says our stations in life are different. You are heir to all things desirable, while I must work for all I hope to possess."

He had pushed his cap back, and his fair hair lay in a wavy mass on his forehead; a most disconsolate look had crept into his blue eyes, while his handsome mouth quivered with a mingled expression of scorn and amusement.

"Heir to Gehenna!" he exclaimed. "Heir to a tumbled-down old house"—waving his hand toward the old, red brick building—"heir to an orchard whose every tree is mortgaged! Yes, our stations in life are different. Your father owns his little home and earns his living. I have no father, no mother, sister, or brother; but I have a hope of making my way in the world, and sustaining the honour of my name."

Ruth felt a yearning tenderness towards him when he spoke of having no mother or sister; but she always enjoyed making him angry. She loved to see the attitude he assumed, the fine scorn that flashed from his eyes, the varying expression of his flexible mouth. So she stood still and watched him, and when he lifted his cap and walked away she still stood there and said nothing.

After he had gone she gathered some apple blossoms and walked home—a pretty little ivy-covered cottage at the other end of the orchard—and the old orchard with all its bloom and beauty in the springtime, with all its golden harvest in summer and autumn, represented a great gulf fixed between

the cottage and the tumbled-down red brick mansion, because a labourer lived in one, and a judge in the other.

* * * * *

Ruth said nothing to her mother about meeting Henry in the orchard. She arranged the apple blossoms, took out her paints and palette, and was very silent and busy all the morning; but that day at dinner Ruth's father remarked to her mother: "I saw Henry Carridine to-day; the judge is ill." Next morning when Ruth put on her bonnet and started out, Mrs. Dartmore said: "I think I would find something besides apple blossoms to paint to-day."

There was an old man who lived in a suburb of the town in a little house, with his dogs and cat and an old housekeeper. He was a painter, and he had a strange theory that painting should be a labour of love, and the reward sought after—perfection in the work. He lived alone; for no one intruded upon him.

When Ruth Dartmore discovered her talent she applied to him for instruction. He would have turned away anyone else; but her youth and beauty were an inspiration to him and her enthusiasm pleased him, so, taking a younger brother or sister with her, three times a week she went to him for instruction.

Shortly after the incident in the orchard she came to him with a sketch of a youth and a maiden and a fine setter dog, under a large, old apple tree, laden with bloom, and told him her plan for the painting—and he was greatly pleased. So she worked all the summer, and he helped her, but she was hard to satisfy. The youth was not handsome enough; the pink and white blossoms did not melt softly enough into the blue and grey of the sky; the tender green of the foliage was not delicate enough, so she would lay aside a nearly finished canvas and begin again. This unrest delighted the old painter.

"You are coming along finely," he said. "You have caught the divine fire."

One morning in early autumn she looked up from the canvas to the old painter.

"It will do, it will do!" he said nodding his head. "It's as beautiful as a dream."

And it was indeed a dream-picture—the youth and maiden and the dog under the grand old apple tree.

"Do you think it is good enough for exhibition?" she asked timidly. A shade passed over the old man's face.

"And you feel the thirst for fame?" he said slowly.

"No; not that," she answered quickly and earnestly.

"It is necessity—I need money."

"And you will sell your birthright? Well, we will see what it is worth in the market."

The old painter had once lived in the world, and still retained a knowledge of the places where such work was sold. So he packed up the painting and sent it, with all its breezy freshness of youth and beauty and country air, away to the city. The young painter had said to him, "I can do nothing now until I see," and he had looked disappointed, and she grew thin and nervous while waiting.

She had seen Henry but once since their meeting in the orchard, and that was the evening after the picture was packed. She met him in the road, and he held out his hand and said: "I am going back to college to-morrow, Ruth. My vacation has not been what I hoped it would be when I came home, but two more terms at college, and then I hope to get into a place where I can command your attention."

"You had better build your air castles without me, Henry."

"You are building yours without me, I suppose?"

"Yes."

And he went away in anger. It was heartbreaking to have him go in this way; but her mother had said: "The Carridines are proud people, and you had better keep away from them." She thought of this, and it helped her to control her feelings.

One day the old painter sent for her; she came to him, white and breathing hard. He held out a roll of bank notes towards her. "Oh, is it enough, enough for a term at a good art school?" she gasped.

"And it is an art school, then, you aim at?" he asked, somewhat appeased.

"Yes, it is enough; we'll make it enough."

Then she left the country and went to London to study art, and her life became a life of labour, where a partial success was followed by failure; then a struggle to succeed again. She taught for a time, and studied for a time, and her name was printed in a paragraph of other names of toilers along the same hard way.

She rarely had time to visit her old home; time passed, and she realised it not. But there was a mixture of vanity and selfishness with all this devotion to art—a desire to write her name above that of Carridine. With this in view she triumphed over all natural feelings, and lost the sweetness that is in work for the work's sake. Her younger brother and sisters grew up, married, and moved away. Her father died while she was in London—and still she was not famous; still she had never painted anything as well as she had painted the youth and maiden under the apple tree.

Sometimes the memory of that early painting came back to her; sometimes in the heat and dust, tired and travel-stained, she would be wafted away in vision and be again in the old orchard.

"If only mother had let us alone!" she would exclaim fretfully.

She had admirers; but having discouraged her youthful lover it was easy to turn away the others.

Henry studied law and rose high in the profession. He married a lawyer's daughter. Ruth had read the details of the marriage in the papers. Even that was long ago now, and in Ruth's hair there was a touch of silver where there had once been a glint of gold; and the light was fading from her eyes.

She received a telegram one evening. It said: "Your mother is dying; come to her." She started for the old home—the home she had not seen for years. When she had changed trains and was on the little train that ran into the old country town, her attention was attracted toward a well-dressed lady and handsome youth, who sat opposite her. There was something about the boy that was familiar to her—something that brought again a vision of apple blossoms. She watched him intently, and noted his fondness for and devotion to the lady whom he called mother, and as she watched a feeling of loneliness came over her and a desire to have him come to her and smile into her eyes.

Then a gentleman who sat next to her leant forward.

"Mrs. Carridine," he exclaimed, "I am glad to see you and Master Henry coming home again."

"Thank you. My husband always wants us to spend part of every summer with his aunt. She is very feeble now and can't be induced to leave the old place."

Ruth Dartmore looked out of the window and knew that this woman was Henry Carridine's wife and the boy, his child.

She arrived in time to see her mother buried, and beside the grave she awoke and found that she was alone in the world!

L. E. Hays.

The Spider and the Fly.

"WILL you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly. But the insect only tossed her head, and tossed it very high. "Why, no," she said, with hauteur, "your style with mine won't run; your dining and reception rooms are, vulgarly, in one."

Wanted, a New Sensation.

THE girl was very rich and the young man was poor but honest. She liked him, but that was all, and he knew it. One night he had been a little more tender than usual. "You are very rich," he ventured. "Yes," she replied, frankly. "I am worth three hundred thousand pounds." "And I am poor." "Yes." "Will you marry me?" "No." "I thought you wouldn't." "Then why did you ask me?" "Oh, just to see how a man feels when he loses three hundred thousand pounds," and the girl smiled

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The Temporary Substitute.

The Tale of a Kitchen Adventure.

Felix Livingstone was not in a good temper.

He had a fortnight's leave, which duty required him to spend with his maiden aunt in the country, while inclination strongly urged him to go up to town in order to see the girl he loved. But on this occasion duty had to be considered, for Miss Drury, the aunt in question, was a wealthy old lady, and he was practically dependent upon her.

All things considered, however, Fate had not been so very unkind to Felix. Left an orphan at an early age, he had been adopted by his mother's elder sister, who had done her duty nobly by him. Now at the age of twenty-five he found himself a subaltern in one of the line regiments, with a handsome allowance from his aunt, and every prospect of becoming her heir. But—there is always a "but" in most people's lives—although Miss Drury had been more than liberal to her nephew and forebore to exercise any but a very nominal restraint over his actions, yet she had given him to understand that she meant to exert her authority in one important matter, namely, the question of his marriage.

In due course of time she intended Felix to become master of Woodlands, her beautiful old house, and since his wife would occupy *her* place as mistress, Miss Drury meant to limit, if not direct, her nephew's choice of a bride.

She did not approve of the modern woman, the up-to-date girl, with her cigarette and her slang, her talk of golf and bridge, her contempt for needlework, and all things pertaining to domesticity, Felix could see in his mind's eye the wife his aunt destined for him—a meek and modest young woman of ultra-refined speech and appearance, and always with a piece of fancy work between her fingers—and he shuddered at the picture. Then he thought, with a sudden tightening of his heart, of Kitty Bellairs, as he had seen her last summer at the house of a brother-officer—beautiful, mischievous, high-spirited, a keen tennis player, a brilliant horsewoman, full of life and laughter. She had charmed the young man's heart out of him, and though Felix tried desperately hard to banish her from his memory, absence, in this case, had certainly made the heart grow fonder.

"I daren't tell Aunt Minnie about Kitty," thought the young man disconsolately. "Of course, if she knew her as I do she couldn't help but love her, although she isn't quite her style, but I don't see how ever they are to meet, since my little darling knows no one in this neighbourhood, and Aunt Min never will come up to town."

In the depths of his heart, Felix was genuinely fond of the old lady, who had so generously mothered him all his life, and he was therefore rather disconcerted to find when he reached Woodlands that Miss Drury was very much perturbed and upset about something. Generally his aunt was a very dainty-looking little old lady, exquisitely dressed, and the perfection of a hostess. But on this particular afternoon she greeted her nephew in an absent-minded fashion, her cap slightly awry, her cheeks flushed, and her beautiful old hands trembling.

"Why, Aunt Minnie," said the young man anxiously, whatever is the matter?"

"Oh, my dear Felix," replied the old lady, looking into his handsome face with troubled blue eyes, "I have had such a dreadful upset. Two of the housemaids are down with influenza, and now Parkins, who is quite invaluable, has declared she can hold up no longer, and has gone to bed seriously ill, I fear."

Felix gave a long whistle of dismay. Parkins was cook-housekeeper at Woodlands, and the pivot upon which the rest of the household turned. She was an exceptionally good cook, and he knew that his aunt prided herself that her dinners were unsurpassed in the neighbourhood.

"I would not have minded had we been alone," continued Miss Drury, "but the house is full of people, and I have a large dinner-party to-morrow."

"What a catastrophe," exclaimed her nephew sympathetically, who knew how vexed was Miss Drury's orderly mind when any household affairs went wrong. "Can't you get a woman from the village to help?"

"Of course I can but you don't know what these village women are like, my dear Felix; dirty, incompetent creatures, and as incapable of sending up a dinner as you are. No, I must just leave Susan, the kitchenmaid, to do her best, but I know I shall be disgraced to-morrow, and I do mind so much if my guests don't have the best of everything. And to make matters worse, that greedy old Sir Gregory is coming, and he always says he never dines so well anywhere as here. You don't know of a cook that you can recommend by any chance, do you, Felix?" she asked desperately.

This wistful appeal touched the young man's heart. As a rule, a subaltern home on leave is not the person one would naturally apply to for a cook, but Miss Drury was at her wits' ends. Felix knitted his brows and thought hard for a minute, at the end of which time a brilliant inspiration came to him.

"Look here, Aunt Minnie," he exclaimed suddenly, "don't you worry any more. I'll go straight up to town first thing to-morrow, and I'll find you a cook somehow, and bring her back with me in the afternoon."

Miss Drury looked at her nephew with tears in her eyes. "Felix," she said solemnly, "if you get me out of this difficulty you may ask me for anything in the world."

Felix was as good as his word. He departed for town directly after breakfast next morning, smiling good-humouredly at the chaff of his fellow-guests, and reappeared triumphant in the afternoon proudly escorting the new cook.

"I've brought her, Aunt Min," he announced, rushing excitedly into Miss Drury's boudoir. "She was at the Rawson's last summer, and an uncommonly good cook she is. Blair is her name, it's a great piece of luck that she was disengaged, you know."

Miss Drury went hurriedly downstairs to inspect the new arrival, and to explain to her the arrangements for the evening's dinner.

"I was a little taken aback at first," she said later on to her nephew. "Blair looks so young and so pretty, and so—er—refined, but she seems very capable and fully qualified to send up an excellent dinner."

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"Yes," replied Felix eagerly, "she has had a course of cooking lessons at South Kensington. I believe she is no end of a swell at it."

"Really, my dear boy," said Miss Drury, looking affectionately at her nephew. "I am most touched by the interest you have shown in this domestic difficulty and the trouble you have taken. If only Blair does not falsify our expectations I shall owe you a debt of gratitude."

The dinner proved an immense success, and even Miss Drury had to confess that Parkins could not have done better. As for Sir Gregory, he chuckled with delight and went steadily through the menu from beginning to end.

"Really, my dear Miss Drury," he said when at length he was obliged to desist, "that cook of yours has surpassed herself. I don't know when I have eaten a better dinner, that soufflé was simply a work of art."

Only one *contretemps* marred the harmony of the evening, and fortunately Miss Drury did not witness this little incident, as it occurred when the ladies had retired to the drawing-room.

Felix was doing the honours of his aunt's table when the sound of a scuffle arrested his attention, and with a hasty excuse to his guests he left the room and rushed into the passage, where he found an ardent young footman trying vainly to embrace a very angry but bewitchingly pretty young woman in a white cap and apron.

"You impudent wretch!" she was saying, "how dare you try and kiss me? Mr. Livingstone, help!"

Felix turned on the man in a perfect fury and dragged him away.

"John," he said, looking as if he could have killed him with pleasure, "leave that lady alone at once and clear out. Here are your wages, go!"

"John," he said, looking as if he could have killed him with pleasure, "leave that lady alone at once and clear out."

The man gazed at him dumb with surprise.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Felix," he stammered at length, "I meant no 'arm. I often used to kiss Mrs. Parkins. I didn't know as 'ow Miss Blair would mind."

The cook's angry face relaxed, and she burst into a peal of laughter, in which, after some hesitation, Felix joined.

"Never mind, John," she said, "I'll forgive you this once, only don't try it again. I dare say Mr. Felix will allow you to stay, if you behave yourself."

Felix nodded impatiently, and the man fled to the lower regions, but it was some minutes before "Miss Blair" took her place at the servants' hall supper looking rather flushed, or before Felix rejoined the men in the dining-room.

Parkins' illness lasted a week, and throughout that time Blair continued to charm the palates of the inmates of Woodlands. All the same, Miss Drury was rather relieved when the last day of the temporary cook's stay came, for try as she would to disbelieve the evidence of her senses, there was no disguising the fact that Felix was always hanging about the kitchen on some pretext or another. That her nephew could so far forget what was due both to himself and to her, as to even carry on a mild flirtation with a servant, Miss Drury would not allow for a moment. Her horror can therefore be better imagined than described when, on descending to the kitchen the last afternoon for the purpose of paying Blair her wages, she saw, on opening the door, a pretty white-capped head reposing on her nephew's shoulder, while his arm was tenderly clasping an aproned waist.

"Kitty, darling," she heard him say tenderly, "I couldn't let you go away without telling you I loved you. I know I ought not to have done so, for goodness only knows when I shall be able to marry you."

"Do you think Miss Drury will be very angry?" asked the girl.

Miss Drury coughed, and at the ominous sound the guilty couple started apart and looked with dismay at the intruder.

The old lady's face had turned very white, and Felix, cut to the quick by her piteous expression, crossed the room hastily and took her hand.

"Don't look so shocked, Aunt Minnie," he said, "this is not a cook really; it is the lady I love, Miss Kitty Bellairs. I met her at the Rawson's last summer and fell in love with her, and I knew she could cook beautifully, so when you were in such a fix I asked her to come and help. We—we thought, perhaps, you might take a fancy to her and ask her to stop."

"Are you Archie Bellairs' daughter?" asked Miss Drury in astonishment.

"Yes," said the girl gently, "he is dead, you know, and I am an orphan and very poor—but I love Felix."

The old lady's eyes grew very wistful and tender as she remembered the far-off days of her youth when poverty had stood between *her* and the one whom she loved—Archie Bellairs.

She took the girl's hand and smilingly put it into that of her nephew.

"So do I, my dear," she said, "and I am sure you will make him an excellent wife. I shall be exceedingly glad to offer the temporary substitute a permanent place in my household."

Edith Bass.

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The Secret of the West Wing.

Telling of a Terrible Discovery.

"Welcome, Alf, my boy!"

My old friend Stephen Gregory grasped my hand as he said these words, and did not release it until he had led me up the steps of his home, and begun to assist me to unfasten my great coat.

"And how are you, my lad?" he continued, without giving me time to reply to his hearty reception. "Why, you look as brown as a berry, and certainly none the worse for your fifteen years nabobism."

I had just returned to England after having endured the trying climate of India for fifteen years, and had hastened at once to the old mansion where I had spent so many happy days in the company of my school chum Stephen and which was, at the time of my story, in his sole possession.

A substantial repast was provided for me in the old dining-room, and after I had done justice to it, and the grey-headed butler (who had officiated in my father's time) had brought in the wine, Stephen and I were soon deep in conversation on topics peculiarly interesting to me.

"So you think the old place is changed?" he said musingly, in reply to a remark that had fallen from me. "I've not noticed it; but it may be, it may be."

"Indeed it is, Stephen," I said; "and I think you are allowing the best part of the house to fall into decay. Now, in your father's day the west wing——"

"Hush!" he cried, interrupting me with a startled look in his eyes. "Don't mention that, for Heaven's sake! She loved those rooms."

In a moment I had grasped his hand.

"Forgive me, Stephen!" I exclaimed, as the terrible past flashed across my mind, and I saw I had opened an old wound.

"There is nothing to forgive, Alf, my boy," he said, looking into the bright fire with an anxious, troubled face. "You could not know of all the horror of that terrible time."

Indeed I could not; for I was but a boy when I went out to India. Nevertheless, I had heard sufficient whilst there of my friend's unfortunate marriage to convince me of the pain which any allusion to it would give to him.

I had heard how he had married a beautiful girl, and how fondly he had loved her, and how, after three months of married life, she had deserted him. With whom and whither she had gone, no one knew; and her name had become almost a forgotten sound at Stanley House.

I changed the subject of conversation, and tried to make him forget the unpleasant recollections which my words had raised, by relating some of the most amusing adventures that had befallen me whilst abroad; but, though he listened with interest, and seemed to try to shake off the gloom that had settled upon his mind, he never quite regained his wonted cheerfulness during the remainder of the evening, and retired early to rest, excusing himself by saying it was his custom.

Amongst the evils of civilisation which my somewhat stormy passage through life had taught me, that of late hours was by no means the smallest; and, knowing it would be useless for me to turn into bed before midnight, I put on my hat, lit another cigar, and strolled into the grounds to get a breath of fresh air.

It was a fine summer night. The moon was shining brightly from a clear starlit sky. I knew every foot of the ground, and visited many of my favourite haunts; and it must have been after eleven o'clock before I began to think of returning. My cigar had gone out when I reached the bottom of the long avenue of tall trees, and, beginning to feel chilly, I walked somewhat quickly towards the house, crunching the gravel beneath my feet as I went.

As I drew near the front door my attention was attracted by the sudden appearance of a man bearing a lantern, who had evidently heard my footsteps, for he stopped and awaited my approach. At first I thought he was one of the servants; but, upon drawing nearer, I was surprised to find it was Stephen. I hastened to speak to him, when, to my great astonishment, after glancing at me eagerly, he turned away without any sign of recognition, and hurried rapidly in the direction of the deserted west wing.

My first intention was to call out after him; but, upon second thoughts, I decided not to do so; for I was persuaded that he had seen and recognised me, and that perhaps my company might not be desired; so I retraced my steps, entered the house, and was soon in bed and asleep.

The next morning when I came downstairs, I found Stephen already in the breakfast-room awaiting me. He was standing with his back to the fire.

"Good morning, Alf," he said, smiling in his cheerful manner. "You are an exception to most lovers of late hours, I see."

"Yes," I replied; "I sleep soundly and therefore rise early."

"You'll find the nights long and dull here, I'm afraid, after the excitement to which you have been accustomed."

"Oh, no, not at all," I said. "There are so many old associations about Stanley House that I think I shall never be dull here. Now, last night, I strolled through the grounds, and did not return until close upon midnight."

"These late hours seem to me to be a very stupid custom, and one which I could never cultivate. I think, my boy, that you would have been much wiser if you had turned in when I did, and slept until morning."

"Why, I daresay I was in bed before you."

"In bed before me?" he repeated, with a puzzled look, "What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say—that I was in bed and asleep before you were; unless you finish your rest and rise before midnight."

"You must be joking, Alf," he said incredulously. "I was in bed by nine o'clock, and was up this morning at six."

"Surely you must be mistaken, Stephen; for I met you, or your double, at the top of the avenue last night, as I was returning to the house."

"Impossible."

"Indeed I did. I would have spoken to you, but you hurried away; and I thought you had seen me, and wished to be alone."

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"It could not have been me. I was never out of the house after seven o'clock."

All that day I was haunted by the recollection of what I had seen on the previous night, and of Stephen's denial. I had heard singular stories of his being a somnambulist, before I had left England, and could not help wondering if he was still addicted to freaks of that kind; but as I had never seen him walk in his sleep, and as I had only half believed the tales I had been told, I was inclined to accept this explanation as a solution of the problem. However, I was determined to solve the mystery.

As soon as all were in bed, therefore, on the night following that on which I had arrived at Stanley House, I again went out into the grounds, determined, if I met the mysterious person whom I had seen on the previous night, to follow him and discover who he was.

I had taken up my point of observation just in front of the west wing of the house, which had been so long shut up and left to fall into decay. So great indeed had been my friend's horror lest any portion of it should be touched by human foot, that not only had he boarded up every window and door that had communication without, but he had also caused to be built up every door that had given access from it to the main body of the building.

I walked to and fro until past midnight, and was about to give up my quest as hopeless, and return to the house, when I heard a footstep on the damp gravel walk approaching. I drew back into the shadow of the trees, and peered forth into the darkness, for at that moment a thick cloud shut out the light of the moon.

Nearer and nearer the footsteps came, and at length the glimmering of the lantern shone out on the darkness. The man bearing the light went up to the principal entrance of the west wing, where he paused, and a moment later I heard a key shoot back the heavy lock; the next instant the light and the man disappeared as the door closed behind them.

Animated and excited, I stepped quickly but softly, across the gravel walk to the door, where for a moment I paused and listened. A footstep was ascending the creaking staircase. I waited until I heard it on the second flight before I tried the door. I found it open, and entered softly, closing it behind me. Before proceeding further, I cautiously took off my boots, and then I ascended the cold, clammy stairs, that smelt of the tomb.

From the second landing there opened a suite of apartments, which I remembered had been called the strong rooms because they were in the very heart of the building, had few windows, and only one doorway for ingress and egress. The heavy oak door that opened into these rooms I found was ajar, and a bright light streamed out between the opening.

To my great astonishment, when I entered this room, I heard voices in the apartment beyond. At first I was so amazed that I could not distinguish a single word that was spoken; but as I became calm, and after drawing close to the door of the room from which the sound proceeded, I distinctly heard a woman's voice, in tearful accents, saying:

"Oh, if you love me, deliver me from this place! What have I done that I should be forced to bear this punishment? Have I not loved with a true woman's love? Speak to me. Do not look at me with eyes so glassy that they seem to see not. Give me one word, that I may hear you as the same Stephen that you were before this fearful malady overtook you. Let me again see the light of Heaven, and the faces of my friends."

I crept softly nearer to the door, and got into a position from which I could partly distinguish the occupants of the room and their surroundings. It was a handsomely-furnished apartment, half boudoir, half drawing-room. Every luxury which the heart could desire was scattered about in endless variety.

In the centre of the floor stood Stephen; but with such a strange, wicked, frenzied expression on his face, that, had I not known his features well, I should have thought it could not be he. Before him knelt a woman whose face was buried in her hands.

"You shall not leave me thus!" she said, as he turned to go, "I must, and will have my liberty!"

She had started to her feet, and ran to the door. But Stephen, still without any change in his fixed, staring countenance, seized her roughly by the arm, and pushed her from him, and walked quickly towards the door.

I had hardly time to draw back into the shadow of a heavy curtain, when he entered the room where I was, and walked quickly across to the landing, closing this last door after him, and locking it. Thus I found myself also a prisoner. I heard his footsteps descend the stairs, and then the sound died slowly away.

For a few moments I stood puzzled and wondering what course I should pursue.

I was aroused from my thoughts by a sob from the occupant of the next chamber. Going up to the door which Stephen had closed after him, I knocked, and then entered. My tap had evidently not been heard, for I found the graceful form seated in a chair, in an attitude which betokened despair, her arms upon the table, her head leaning forward, and her beautiful dishevelled hair falling in waving folds about her.

"Madam."

I had walked up to her, and placed my hand upon her shoulder.

"Oh!" And she turned towards me her pale, tearful, horror-stricken face, then shrank away in fear. "Who are you? Pray do not hurt me. I know I am helpless."

It was some time before I could convince her that I was really a friend; for so long had she been buried in these rooms that her mind had become almost unhinged, and her sense of perception blunted. By degrees, however, I made her understand who I was, and how I had come there; and then, in answer to my questions, I gleaned the history of her captivity.

When Stephen married her she was a handsome young girl of eighteen, and he was verging on the period of middle age. For three months after their marriage he had been kind and attentive—all, in fact, that a wife could desire of her husband. Just at the end of that time, however, he discovered accidentally several letters, which had been written by her before her marriage, to a former lover; and for some days afterwards, he was moody, jealous, and strange in his conduct.

One night he entered her room with that fixed, frenzied, wicked look upon his face which she had never seen there before, but which had marred his features in all her interviews with him since, and directed her by signs to follow him, a mandate which in her terror she readily obeyed.

He conducted her to a gloomy chamber, lighted only by a small oil-lamp, and then left her, locking the door behind him; but always coming in the night, and bearing himself in a silent, changed, peculiar manner.

At length he led her back again to her own suite of apartments (those in which I had discovered her), where, during her absence, all the windows had been built up, thus cutting off communication with the outer world. Here he had visited her almost every night since, bringing her the necessaries

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saries of life, coming like an apparition, and going as he came.

"I think those foolish letters of mine," she said, in conclusion, "written before I had learnt to love my husband, have turned his brain. I was warned before I married him that he was affected with the malady of sleep-walking, and that when under its influence he not only lost complete control over his reason, but also seemed to live a double life.

"When awake he was generous, frank and good; but when in a somnambulant state, I was told he was morose, jealous, wicked—in a word, insane; and that in his waking hours he had no recollection of what took place or what he did when in this latter state."

Between us we managed to smash open the door by battering it almost to splinters with the heaviest furniture we could wield.

I took my *protégée* to the rectory, where the rector, who was an old college friend of mine, was not a little surprised to receive such visitors at so early an hour.

Before returning to Stanley House, I rode on the rector's cob to my brother's doctor, who lived about three miles away, and consulted him upon Stephen's sad condition. He told me that he was quite aware of the facts of the case, but that he had not for a moment thought the malady could have been capable of working so much mischief.

He then made the suggestion that in all probability a crisis in the disease would now be reached, brought about by the mental shock which the discovery of the escape would give when next the somnambulist visited the west wing. The result of this crisis would either leave him a hopeless maniac or completely cure him.

At the doctor's request I arranged to meet him the same night at twelve o'clock, in order to watch Stephen's movements. I then rode back to the rectory, and from there proceeded with all haste to Stanley House.

After resting in my room for a short while, I came downstairs, and found Stephen more cheerful and genial than usual, all unconscious poor fellow, of the fate hanging over him.

At night he retired to rest at the usual time, and I went out into the grounds to meet the doctor, about an hour and a half afterwards. When I met him we proceeded to the west wing together, to watch the effect of the shock of discovery upon the patient.

As soon as we reached the door, I saw that Stephen had been before us, for the door was ajar. With a heart that beat fast with my fears, I hurried into the house, and was about to run upstairs, when I tumbled over some obstacle at the bottom. The doctor, who was following closely, carrried a dark lantern, and its light soon revealed to us the bleeding form of my unhappy chum.

"He is dead," the doctor said, rising from his knees, after making a hasty examination of the body. "In his frenzy he must have dashed himself down the stairs. Poor fellow! we have been too late to save him!"

Five years have fled since that time. Stanley House has been newly painted and renovated, and again holds a happy bride and bridegroom. A fair face looks over my shoulder as I write, and drops a tear upon the paper that contains a history of her sorrows. But a smile flits about her lips as I kiss her; and we look out together upon the beautiful scene, in the midst of which stands our home, and forget the darkness of the past in the brightness of the future.

G. P. Lane.

OUR TARTAN COVERS.

Reproductions of famous Scotch Tartans are appearing at intervals on the cover of *Short Stories*. The following have already been issued: Menzies (with No. 709); McPherson (with No. 711); McLeod (with No. 715). Copies of these numbers may be obtained through any newsagent.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 30.—Those whose birthdays fall to-day will have a favourable year; travelling and change are promised. Domestic affairs go better.

Girls have attentions paid them, and if engaged, they marry.

The day is good for serious and permanent undertakings; for marriage, visiting, and engaging servants.

A child born this day will be affectionate, thoughtful, and persevering. Will make a good speculator, and do well in business.

October 1.—A promising year for business, and making new friends; those in employ meet with preferment.

Young girls will find love affairs interesting; if born between six and seven p.m. they become engaged or marry.

A good day for most things, between one and five p.m. especially. Buy, sell, and speculate; ask favours of superiors.

A child born here will be fortunate in life, making many powerful friends. Will be generous, high-minded, and far-seeing.

October 2.—Those who celebrate birthdays to-day will need some extra care with health and in their business affairs. An active year.

Girls born near four p.m. will experience some disappointment in love and need care with opposite sex.

The day is not good for dealing with land or property, engaging servants, or for marriage. Guard against chills and falls.

A child born here will be fond of travel and change. The mind will be quick, original, but lacking in self-confidence.

October 3.—A better year for health and domestic affairs. Many pleasant events in the home circle.

Young girls will have opportunities of marriage, and find it a good year for such an event.

A child born to-day will be clever and skilful with its hands. The mind will be quick, strong, and business-like.

October 4.—An unfavourable year; quarrels, and much anxiety in business and home affairs. Health will need some care.

Girls born near nine a.m. or seven p.m. will have some worry and annoyance with opposite sex.

The day is not good to speculate, travel, or begin new undertakings. Have a care against accident.

A child born here will be stubborn, rash, and improvident. It should keep in the employ of others.

October 5.—With care business and domestic matters will progress favourably. Better for aged people.

Young girls will have attentions from elderly men or widowers.

A child born to-day will be fortunate in business. The disposition will be kind, steady, and persevering.

October 6.—A good year for business and money matters; health may need a little care. Those in employ will do well.

Girls born near eleven a.m. or eight p.m. will find love affairs very interesting.

The day is good to ask favours, deal with lawyers, the clergy, and professional men.

A child born this day will be fortunate and will rise in life. Will be ambitious, generous, clever, and active.

Asturel.

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THE GREAT CUT-PICTURE COMPETITION.

CLOSES OCTOBER 7.

THE FINAL PICTURE.

TWENTY-FIVE AWARDS OF VALUABLE GRAMOPHONES.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find fifty-four pictorial squares, which when placed together in their proper position will form a complete picture.

Each square is numbered; that, however, has nothing to do with their correct position, of course. What we want you to do is to cut the jumble below into the fifty-four squares and carefully paste the squares in their correct order on to a sheet of paper.

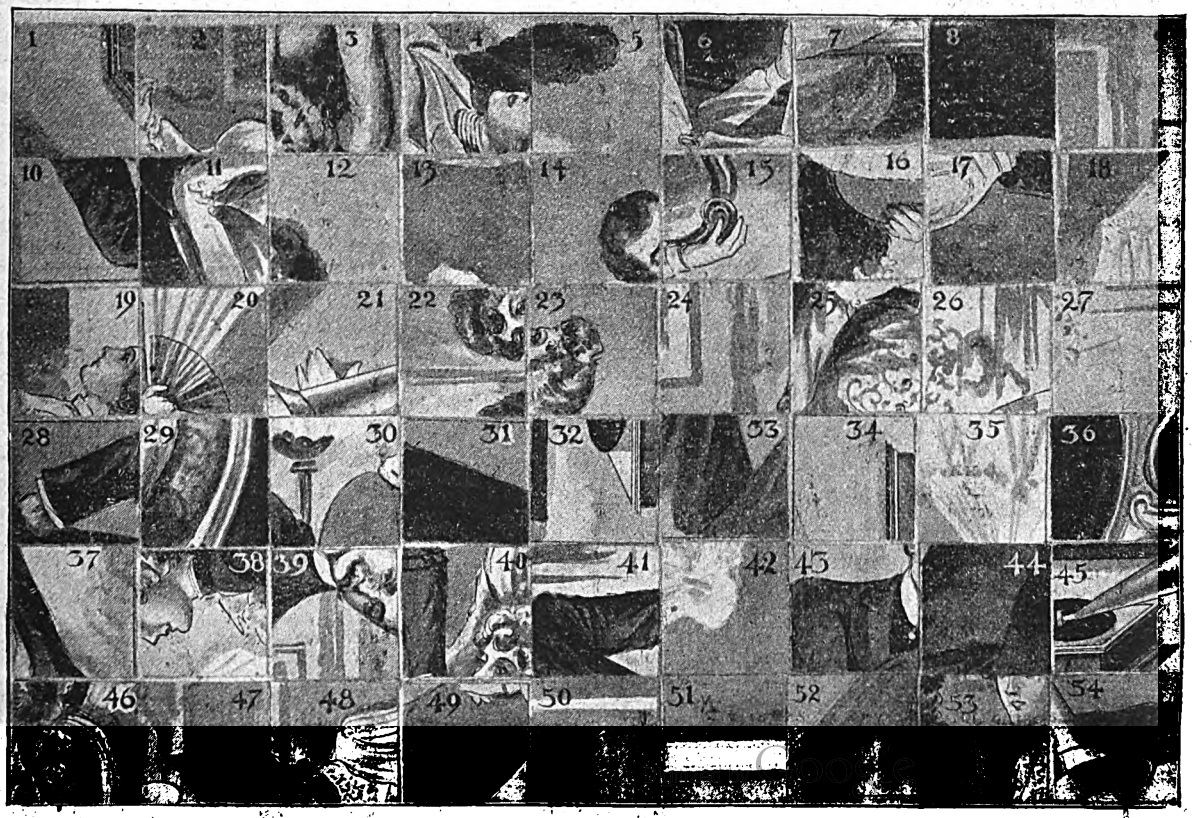
When you have pasted up the complete picture, pin it to the two pictures that have already appeared, attach your name and address, and send the three to us in an envelope marked "Cut-Picture."

All attempts must arrive by first post Tuesday morning, Oct. 7th.

A splendid Gramophone will be presented to each person whose pictures are correct or equally nearly correct. In the event of there being more than twenty-five competitors correct or equally nearly correct the prizes will be awarded to those whose attempts are most neatly done.

The Gramophones are beautifully made, fit to grace any drawing-room, and an everlasting source of amusement. They are fitted with concert sound boxes, and with each will be given two records.

The Gramophone is one of the most delightful companions for the long winter evenings. None of your friends can talk like a talking machine can, and give you the same amount of fun as it produces. It is the very essence of good and genial companionship, which never tires you. What it says, or what it sings, is always interesting. Once you have heard it you want always to hear it, and it is ever ready and willing to oblige.



Readers will please bear in mind the fact that the references in this week's article to Percival Hope (expressing Cynthia's feelings) were written long before her meeting with him in the early part of last month. After that meeting Cynthia wished to make certain alterations in this and the following instalments, but I felt that to allow her to do so would be to spoil the whole idea of the articles, so I was compelled to refuse.—ED.

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

NEW READERS START HERE.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, where Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, during which Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds, and that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis-Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably. Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived. He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell in a dead faint. Doctors were called, and pronounced it a paralytic seizure. Toby next called. In three days his uncle's bill must be redeemed. If this was not done he vowed that he would shoot himself.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. When alone she was accused by Pettigrew, who swore to condemn her before the whole world. She secured his silence by managing to be found in his embrace by Lord Chesterton.

My cousin now meets a Hungarian *attaché*.

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FRANKIE FALLS IN LOVE.

THE name of the Hungarian *attaché* was Reichardt Von Essler. He belonged to a very old, and therefore a most high family. That was proved by his lack of title—only very superior persons in Hungary can afford not to be Counts or Barons.

I was quite used to men admiring my cousin and falling awfully in love with her. But the effect that love and admiration produced in Von Essler was something quite uncommon. Early each morning there arrived from him a floral offering, acres of roses, lilies, orchids, rarest and choicest of blooms. The flowers were followed by a special messenger with a note of inquiry about Frankie's health. Close on the letter, Von Essler would himself arrive, and whirl my cousin off—he was impetuous as Frankie herself—for a spin on his motor or a drive on his tandem.

They made a splendid couple, her fair beauty set off by his dark and brilliant face, his gleaming eyes, his flashing smile. As for Lord Kinross, Frankie impatiently waived aside his claims on her attention.

"I don't care what he thinks," she said, when I suggested he might not like her to go out so frequently with Reichardt.

"I've given way to him too much already. If he doesn't approve of me"—she flashed a glance over her shoulder into the long mirror that showed her tall, lithe figure to perfection—"well, I can sustain the loss of his regard."

"Frankie, you don't mean you are going to break off your engagement with Lord Kinross? Why——" I paused, the thought of all she had done, all she had suffered and caused others to suffer to bring about that engagement choked me.

"Don't worry yourself, dearie, I'm not going to throw Hartland over. But I mean to enjoy myself. Cynthia, you can't tell what a joy it is to meet a man so fascinating and so clever as Reichardt. He is so strong, so fearless, and so light-hearted. He is——"

Her soliloquy was interrupted.

"Lord Kinross, please, ma'am," said the maid; "he's in the drawing-room.'

With an exclamation of impatience, Frankie swept downstairs, a vision in a dinner gown of pale green mousseline de soie.

"I can't spare you a minute, Hartland," she said. "I'm going to meet Von Essler at the Carlton at eight o'clock, and it's past seven already. Lady Gaveston is coming and Cynthia also. Well"—as he looked grave, almost troubled—"what is the matter?"

"I see so little of you lately, Frankie. It's a week since Lady Daventry's ball, and you've hardly spared me an hour."

"My dear boy, consider how much we shall see of each other in the future! Next week at Cowes, for instance, we shall be together every day, and all day long. I'm not going to run the risk of boring you."

"My dearest Frankie!" Hartland kissed her hand, and I felt horribly in the way; I knew my cousin wished me to remain, so, much embarrassed, I took up a book and studied hard.

"All the same, dear, it's hardly necessary to bestow so much of your society on Von Essler. Break your engagement for this evening, at any rate; send him a wire, and come out with me instead. I'll go anywhere, do anything you like, Frankie, if you'll throw him over."

"I do believe you're jealous. Don't deny it, it's quite charming of you, Hartland. But even for you I can't afford to be ill-bred. It takes a duchess at the least to act rudely and remain distinguished. I've promised Von Essler, and"—she paused—"I always keep my word," she said.

The flicker of a smile twitched at the corners of his lordship's mouth.

"Well, I'll give way to-night," he said. "What of to-morrow, are you engaged also?"

"Yes, and the next day, and the day after that. You're exacting, Hartland, and that's the truth. The more I give way to you, the more you ask. You are becoming a perfect tyrant. First, I mustn't bet or gamble, then I must not run up bills, or flirt, or be admired. Now——" she laughed and shook her head. "I'm going to make the most of my liberty, dearie; September isn't far off now, and then I shall have to be prim and decorous as—as Lady Gaveston. It's no use to look cross, Hartland—I mean to have my own way."

She looked up at him, mutinous, bewitching, and, as usual, she prevailed. As with others, so with Kinross, the admiration of other men for the woman of his choice increased his own. A month ago, and Frankie would not have ventured to dispute his will. Now things were changed. By a show of indifference she had riveted her chains more firmly. Fearful of losing her, Kinross gave way on every point.

He departed, troubled but amenable. Frankie kissed her hand to him from the window, then turned away with a gesture of relief.

"I've some good news for you," she said, smiling. "I've wired to Chesterton to join us at the Carlton. I didn't see why you should be afflicted with the 'testifier,'" such was my cousin's irreverent soubriquet for Lady Gaveston.

"It's very nice of you, Frankie," I answered. "But you know what Milady is. She will talk to *somebody*, and she likes Chesterton—he listens so attentively."

"She likes somebody else better," said my cousin. "Who? Why Hiram, to be sure; she'll revel at the opportunity of getting a subscription out of him for one of her societies. I've wired to him as well."

"Does he know?"

"What, that Milady is to be his fate at dinner? Rather not, he thinks he's going to take me out—alone."

It was quite unkind of Frankie, but it was most amusing all the same. The three men were waiting for us at the Carlton—Von Essler, Pettigrew, and Chesterton. I am bound to say the last named was the only one who seemed entirely pleased when we arrived. The Hungarian appeared disappointed to see *me*, and Pettigrew was not enraptured to meet Lady Gaveston.

I shall never forget that evening; it was one of the brightest the most delightful times I ever had, for the first part, at all events. Frankie was in one of her irresistible moods. Laughing, scoffing, grave and gay by turns, all smiles one moment, all demurity the next.

Even Lady Gaveston responded to her influence, and so far unbent as to express herself satisfied with the dinner, if not the conversation.

Town was already beginning to get empty, and the Carlton was not so crowded as the last time we were there, though it was far from being empty. When we were half way through our dinner we had a surprise not altogether pleasing. The table next our own was vacant, and when the party for whom it was reserved made their appearance I received something of a shock. It proved to be Mrs. Vernon and her daughter Mary, Lord Kinross and Percival Hope!

Frankie smiled and bowed to them all, with a specially kindly glance for Mary. Lady Gaveston made a grave salutation, and immediately assumed an air of great aloofness from the rest of us. Reichardt flushed angrily, and Chesterton looked glum.

HIRAM PETTIGREW

I don't know how I looked, but my heart beat so loud and fast that it was painful.

I nodded to Mary and Lord Kinross, but I could not meet Percival's glance. I stole a look at him unobserved. He was graver, older, I thought, than when I first knew him. I hoped he would not look at me; if he smiled or spoke I felt I should lose my self-control. The memory of that night at the

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ball, the Duchess of Warminster's ball, came back to me. I lived again those cruel five minutes, when, with his hand clasping mine, he waited for my answer. If I had answered differently!

Ah, well! It was no use to look backward. I had done as well as I was able, as well as circumstances and my cousin would permit me. But——

I drank some champagne and laughed a little hysterically at some remark of Chesterton's. His Lordship was behaving quite strangely that night. He gazed at me so long and so earnestly that I became embarrassed. He was looking very well; evening dress, the severest test of a man's distinction, became him infinitely. Next to Von Essler, he was the best-looking man present. Yes, he was better-looking far than Percival.

We finished dinner some time before our friends at the next table. Kinross sent a note over to Frankie, suggesting we should all go to the theatre. He had procured two boxes at the Lyceum. Reichardt seemed to understand instinctively what the note contained; before my cousin had time to finish reading it, he leant over, and in a clear, cool voice remarked:

"Don't forget, Mrs. Norton, that you are engaged to see my pictures this evening. I've quite a little gallery at my place. It's not five minutes' drive from here, you know, in St. James's Street."

I knew quite well that there was no engagement of the kind, and so, I think, did Kinross. He flashed an indignant look at the Hungarian, and seemed positively enraged when Frankie smilingly pencilled her regrets that she could not go to the Lyceum.

Oblivious of his frowns and Mary's reproachful air, she signified her intention of viewing Von Essler's pictures.

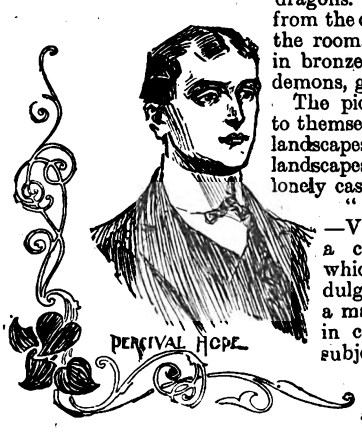
"We'd better be going," she said, glancing at Lady Gaveston, "I can't bear to be hurried when I look at beautiful things. I want to spend a long time over the pictures."

Lady Gaveston was bound to respond to the suggestion. She liked pictures but little, and the Hungarian still less, but her duties as a chaperon compelled her to endure both. She rose, and Pettigrew respectfully draped her shawl—she persisted in wearing a shawl—about her shoulders.

As Chesterton stooped to clasp my cloak, Percival's eyes met mine. Sorrow, regret, reproach, I read therein, and a faint tinge of the old tenderness. My cheeks grew hot, I felt the smart of tears, and a sob came in my throat. He saw my agitation and half rose from his seat. At the moment Chesterton leant down to whisper something in my ear. Percival gave a contemptuous shrug, sat back, and resumed his dinner.

I felt hurt, mortified, and most unhappy. That look in his eyes haunted me. I felt a tug at my heart every time I thought of him throughout the evening.

Von Essler had a lovely flat in St. James's Street. The rooms were beautifully furnished in the most perfect taste. The one I like the best was panelled in oak, with a wonderful Japanese freize of scarlet poppies and weird-looking dragons. A narrow shelf, a foot from the ceiling, went right round the room, supporting statuettes in bronze and silver of Japanese demons, gods and goddesses.



The pictures were in a room to themselves. They were chiefly landscapes, romantic Hungarian landscapes, remote fastnesses and lonely castles.

"There is a picture here—Von Essler paused before a curtained alcove—"for which I must ask your indulgence. It was painted by a man whose presumption in choosing so difficult a subject can be forgiven only by the earnestness with which he has striven to master it. I am that all-unworthy painter, and my picture"—he drew back the curtain. From a canvas, yet wet, there looked at us the face of Frankie. It was a wonderful likeness, the face, with its ever-changing eyes, now soft, tender, beseeching, now brilliant and hard, seemed real.

It was Frankie herself that looked at you, Frankie in her most brilliant, most inspired moment.

"It's a masterpiece," said Pettigrew. "I congratulate you, Mrs. Norton," and he smiled in an odd sort of way at Frankie.

"It's a great piece of work," said Chesterton, "I'd no idea you could paint like that, Von Essler?"

"It is rarely I have a subject so inspiring," answered Reichardt, with a low bow to my cousin.

Frankie stood silent, almost subdued, before her picture.

"Cynthia," she said suddenly, "am I like that? No, don't interrupt," as the men murmured a convinced assent, "I want the child to answer for herself, she can't help telling the truth. Well"—she paused—"speak out, Cynthia. Am I like my portrait?"

"Yes," I said softly, "only more beautiful."

Frankie flushed and squeezed my hand, and Reichardt looked gratified. Lady Gaveston evidently did not approve. She gave a loud and prolonged sniff. Then, as though her patience were exhausted, she turned on Pettigrew, and, with sudden and alarming unexpectedness, asked for a donation to her society for abolishing the idols of the heathen!

Hiram seemed inclined to question the aims and objects of the society. Nothing loth, Milady launched a stream of statistics at his head. The rest of us fled, leaving them to argue it out together.

Reichardt and my cousin walked into the smoking-room. I was about to follow them when Chesterton laid his hand upon my arm.

"Come in here," he said, opening the door of a cosy little apartment, one of those queer-shaped rooms you find in flats, all sides and angles.

I settled myself on a comfortable lounge and glanced expectantly at his lordship. He looked grave, as though he had something on his mind. I felt sure he had some bad news to tell me.

"You're going to say something dreadful," I cried. "I feel it, I know it; people always look like that when they've something horrid to say. They think it's better to tell it by degrees. What is it?"

He smiled, and shook his head.

"It's nothing very dreadful," he said quietly. "But it's most important. May I sit by you, Cynthia?"

I nodded, much astonished. Chesterton didn't ask my permission to—well, to sit beside me as a rule.

"You're looking very sweet to-night," he went on after a pause, "I like you in pink, Cynthia."

Somebody else I remembered had said that. I caught my breath. I wished I had not seen Percival that evening.

"What little hands you have," he said tenderly, "so soft and white." As he spoke he clasped my hand in his, and there was a pause. I did not dare to look at him, but I felt his eyes were on my face. Dimly I realised what it was he had to tell me, and—I was sorry.

"I wish I could say pretty things!" he exclaimed. "If I could only tell you what I feel—but"—he bent his head and kissed my fingers—"you know I am fond of you, little girl? You must, women always understand these things. And"—he drew nearer—"I don't think you quite dislike me. You know I asked if it was any use for me to enter for the Cynthia Stakes, didn't I? You said I might, and I've made all the running I know how. Is it any good, Cynthia? Tell me, speak out. Say 'Yes,' or 'No'! I'm not one to shirk a fence if I've got to take it."

He strove to meet my eyes, but I turned my head away. I liked him, sometimes I liked him very much. But was it fair only to give liking in exchange for love? And he did love me, I was sure of that. I could not answer, I wished he would not ask me for an answer. I did not want to lose him. Life would have seemed very strange to me without "big Chesterton," as his chums called him. And yet——

He grew impatient.

"Speak to me, Cynthia," he said. Then, as I still kept silence, he sprang to his feet, and with a swift movement pulled me up to him.

"I'm going to kiss you, Cynthia," he said deliberately, "Then perhaps you'll know your own mind, one way or the other. If you say 'Yes' it's all right. If not—well, I think you deserve it as a punishment."

"Lord Chesterton," I cried indignantly, "I—I——"

"You're a coquette, my dear," he said, "and deserve to be punished." And then I blush to say he kissed me—twice!

What did I do?

Collapsed into a chair and hid my face, crimson to the tips of my ears. I felt—I can't tell *how* I felt.

"You're not angry, Cynthia?"

I shook my head. Somehow, I wasn't angry, though, of course, I should have been.

"And you'll marry me? You must now, you know, after——" he smiled in a hateful way. I know it was hateful, though I wasn't looking at him.

"Look here, little girl," he said softly, "I'm not going to take 'No' for an answer. What is more, you don't want me to. You're not quite sure yet? Well, it's best to take time. I'll give you six weeks to think the matter over. Then you must answer. You agree?"

I looked up at him, big, tall and strong—and I agreed.

"I bar flirting, Cynthia," he said, "mind that."

"I'm glad to hear it," I returned. "Mrs. Curtis Blount——"

"Don't, dear"—he turned quite red—"there's a good girl, don't! Your cousin——" he paused. "She flirts a little, don't you know?" he said tentatively.

"Whatever Frankie does is right in my eyes," I said firmly.

"I know, and I like you all the better for it, still——"

"Make your mind easy," I said, laughing. "I'll be very good—for six weeks!" and with that I left him to find Frankie.

All the way home that night I thought of Chesterton. "Jack," he had asked me to call him, He had been very nice. Not a word had he said against Frankie, although I knew he doubted and suspected her of more than flirting. And yet he was every bit as honourable, as upright, as Percival Hope! *He* would not try and part me from my cousin, my dear Frankie whom I loved so much!

I did not tell my cousin what had happened between me and Chesterton, but, with her usual quickness, she surmised that something had taken place.

"Any news, Cynthia?" she said, as I wished her good-night.

I shook my head.

"Well, I've some for you!" She threw off her opera-cloak and stood before the glass, a flush on her cheeks, a light in her eyes.

"Reichardt Von Essler is the one man in the world I could care for!" she said passionately.

"*Frankie!*"

"I mean it; there's nothing I wouldn't do for him. For him I'd give up money, position, the frocks, the jewels, all that I've striven to gain. I'd leave everything, I'd go barefoot, I'd live on a crust, I'd work, ay, work hard for him."

"I don't see there's anything very wonderful about Von Essler, Frankie. He's good-looking, certainly, clever and—and tall. But so are other men."

"You foolish child, it makes no difference. He is the one man who made me, even for a moment, forget myself. I've been fond of others, yes, in a way. I was fond of Sir John, Kinross, and—and——" she paused. "But Reichardt——" she paused and flung out her hands in an ecstasy. "I'm as silly as you, Cynthia; no girl was ever more in love!"

"But you've only known him for so short a time. It's—it's impossible you can feel all this for a man you hadn't seen a month ago!"

"It's not the length of time you know a man, my dear, but the strength of the feeling he rouses in you. I might know some people twenty years, and care no more than when I met them first. Directly I saw Reichardt I knew that he was a man I could love with my whole heart, my whole strength. And he"—she paused, and a flush of rose tinted the whiteness of her cheeks—"he *loves* me, loves me more than all the world. He is ready to prove it, he will abandon his career, throw up his prospects, all for my sake!"

"Are you going to marry him, Frankie?" I asked in horror.

She smiled. "Why not?" she asked.

"You're engaged to another man, and—and—oh, Frankie, don't be angry, but I don't like Von Essler—I don't trust him. I think he's insincere. I beg you not to place your future in his hands. He is——"

Frankie interrupted me.

"That will do, Cynthia," she said quietly, "you've said enough. Get to bed now, you must be tired."

Much disquieted, I obeyed her. I felt frightened and distressed about my cousin. I could not understand this new development, and I feared it.

The next day or two I saw but little of Frankie, who spent the time riding or driving with Von Essler. My anxiety concerning her, however, was lessened by a piece of information which I had from Jack—perhaps I ought to say Lord Chesterton? He said that Reichardt was leaving England at the end of the week, and would not return until the following Spring.

I was immensely relieved at the intelligence; Frankie would soon forget the Hungarian. It would surely be out of sight, out of mind, with her.

We were due at Cowes in a few days, the change of scene would restore Frankie's spirits, even if she missed him at first.

One evening, however, my fears returned. Frankie had slipped out after dinner without saying where she was going or when she would return. It was the very evening that Von Essler was starting for the Continent. The coincidence alarmed me.

To make matters worse Lord Kinross turned up at half-past nine, and looked very glum at Frankie's absence. After waiting about half an hour he asked me straight out where Frankie was.

"I don't know!" I said, trembling.

"Have you no idea?"

I shook my head, a sudden terror seized me. Von Essler was leaving England this evening within an hour or two. Was it possible that Frankie had been mad enough, reckless enough, to make a runaway match with him?

I rushed upstairs to Lady Gaveston's room.

"You must come down and speak to Kinross, he's annoyed that Frankie's out, and is getting impatient and suspicious as to where she is. You must quiet him—you *must*, I say! Get him away, somehow, you can do it. And then——" I paused breathlessly.

"Where is your cousin?" said Milady.

"I—I—oh, Lady Gaveston, won't you help me?" I cried desperately. "I'm afraid for Frankie. She wants to marry Von Essler, and—and—send Kinross away," I pleaded, "but don't let him know about Reichardt!"

Milady rose, a stiff, unbending figure, her inevitable knitting in her hand. "I will see Lord Kinross," she said slowly.

"You won't say anything nasty about Frankie?"

Lady Gaveston stared in frozen astonishment.

"I do not need to be instructed in my duties to your cousin Frances!" she replied. "You forget yourself, Cynthia."

Humbled in pride, but thankful in heart, I followed her downstairs.

"I am sorry Frances has not yet returned," she said. "Did she expect you, Lord Kinross?"

He nodded. "Do you know when she will be back, Lady Gaveston?" he said anxiously.

"That," replied her ladyship, "is somewhat uncertain."

"Pardon me, but do you know where she has gone?"

Lady Gaveston lifted her glasses and stared Lord Kinross up and down. "Mrs. Norton is visiting some friends," she said.

Kinross coloured.

"Forgive me, but——" he paused.

Milady smiled. "Frances is a little heedless at times," she said, "but that is a fault of youth. It was thoughtless of her to go out when you were coming. But"—she stared at him hard—"it is only for thoughtlessness she is to blame."

"Thank you," he said, evidently much relieved; "thank you. I'd better go now, perhaps. I shall see Frankie to-morrow?" Lady Gaveston stepped towards him.

"Yes," she said slowly, "to-morrow you shall see her."

Barely had the door closed on his lordship when Lady Gaveston turned to me.

"Get on your hat," she said quickly, "we are going out."

"Where?" I stammered. "What for?"

Lady Gaveston gave a grim laugh. "We are going to find your cousin Frances," she said. "Make haste!"

(The result of their journey will be told next week. This series began in No. 702 of Short Stories. *Back numbers may be ordered through any newsagent. Readers interested in these revelations should turn to page* 443.)

A Tardy Reckoning.

The Story of a Long Trail.

"No, I'm absolutely certain that there is nothing in it, Lettice—nothing at all! Philip Tracy mayn't be everything that is nice, perhaps, but—so contemptuously unscrupulous as to, underhandedly, and for no apparently, earthly reason, compass my ruin, well—I can't bring myself to believe it; even though it is you that say it is so!"

"Stephen! I tell you Philip Tracy is your enemy. I know it!"

"You?"

"Yes. I!"

"But how?"

"Isn't it sufficient, dear, that I, who of all women, have the best right to fear for you, warn you—just warn you—against a man whom I instinctively dislike and distrust, and who, I am most certainly convinced, is scheming to bring about your undoing?"

"Of course, Lettice, darling! I appreciate your motive. I only suggest that you are, well—that you must be mistaken."

"Tell me, Stephen! Look me between the eyes, and tell me! do you not, in your own mind; and if you rightly interpret your own estimate of Philip Tracy, as a man with whom you have enforced business, and semi-social relations, judge him—much as I judge him—to be false whenever expediency and opportunity appeal to him that it is desirable so to be."

Lettice Orde was a girl who, without being in the least mannish, or ultra up-to-date in her tastes and principles, was sufficiently firm-willed and self-reliant not only to have opinions of her own, but also to have the courage of them.

She was one of the few beautiful women in the world, who, having absolute control of large means, hold it to be a special delight and glory to bestow their good things upon the men of their choice.

But Lettice Orde was more even than this—she was industrially artistic, and worked away at her residential studio in Chelsea, as though her income of eight hundred a year was non-existent, and that her living depended upon a steady output of pot-boilers.

Stephen Borrodaile met her on one of her sketching tours in Brittany, whither he had himself gone for his yearly holiday.

Bank clerks, are sometimes more than mere machines and Stephen Borrodaile was one of the exceptions. He was an artist spoilt, exceptional facilities for getting him into the "Consolidated Bank," together with the immediate necessity of earning, to help support a large family of unprovided-for young brothers and sisters, being responsible for the undoubtedly great mistake.

Lettice and he soon discovered mutual community of tastes, alike in things personal and artistic. She was going on to Paris before leaving for home, and though it made a big inroad in his not unlimited resources, Stephen, in the spirit of protectiveness, travelled with her to the French capital.

The journey was to be the life crisis of both of them.

The characteristic neighbourhood of Savernay had been their meeting-place, and they had, therefore, to reach Nantes before touching the railroad for Paris.

Most people will remember a terrible accident to the mid-day express on this line some half-dozen years ago.

It was midway between St. Pierre and Orleans that the thing happened.

It was suddenly discovered by the terrified occupants of a "wagon-lit" that the carriage was on fire.

Communication with both guard and locomotive was cut off, by reason of the early burning of the cord, while the pace at which the train was running but accelerated the mischief.

Stephen Borrodaile and Lettice were in the carriage immediately next to the one that had taken fire, and it was only when they, and a French lady and gentleman, their companions, were half-choked by the smoke, that Stephen awoke to the danger of the situation.

Briefly, he did a thing which stamped him as a hero in the men's minds, and won for him the more than admiration—the love of the girl whom, but a mere month before, he had not known even to exist.

Everything depended upon a quick setting-up of communication with the locomotive, and Stephen, leaving the carriage by the window, made his way, by means of the footboard, and by a risky clinging to any and every available projection, to the engine.

The train was pulled up, and though seven poor souls in the fatal carriage met their death, the bulk of the passengers, including Lettice, were saved by his timely heroism.

Two years have gone by since then, and it it is not wonderful that the pair should be all-in-all to one another, and that Lettice especially, as shown in the above recorded conversation, should have more than ordinary apprehension and anxiety with regard to her lover's personal interests.

Stephen tried to think it out, after he had left Lettice with some mutual friends, but by the next morning was no nearer to a solution of the warning mystery.

It might have been an hour after the bank was opened that Philip Tracy, standing at the counter, in his capacity of paying-out cashier, had handed to him a cheque for £500, signed by Lettice Orde, a customer of the bank, and counter-signed by Caleb Haughton, her trustee.

This double signature was necessary, under the provisions of her father's will, and would continue until Lettice's twenty-fifth birthday. It was an arrangement designed solely for her protection, without any reference to her ability to dispose of her means at will.

"Five hundred pounds!" remarked Tracy, with meaning deliberation. "Are you the payee?"

"No."

The tenderer of the cheque was a short, stout, and somewhat seedily-dressed middle-aged man.

"Then your name is not W. J. Scott?"

"No; my name is Hurd—Thomas Hurd."

"Ah! And you received the cheque, I suppose, in the ordinary way of business from Mr. Scott?"

"Yes."

"What is Mr. Scott?"

"A—a racing man."

"A bookmaker! Well, Mr. Hurd, I shall have to trouble you for your address, and to request you to remain for a moment while I show the cheque to the manager."

It was curious that the man did not betray any signs of alarm or extraordinary interest, such as nine persons out of ten would have done under the circumstances. He merely sat down on a bench, took the day's paper out of his pocket, and was soon deep in the latest turf quotations. In less than five minutes Tracy returned, without the cheque.

"We cannot pay this cheque until certain inquiries have been made."

The man who had presented it did not appear to be so very much astonished at this decision.

"Oh, very well!" he said indifferently. "When shall I call again about it?"

"To-morrow, this time."

"But, excuse me," the man asked, in the way of after-thought, "what's wrong?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, the cheque is a forgery."

"A forgery, eh!"

"Yes. The cheque is one out of Miss Orde's last issued book, but though the body of it is evidently in her hand-writing, the two signatures, her own and that of Mr. Caleb Haughton, are palpable forgeries."

"Oh! Then I suppose somebody will have to pay the piper?"

"I think it very likely," said Mr. Tracy, with a sidelong look at Stephen Borrodaile. "Very likely, indeed—good-morning!"

Stephen had promised to take Lettice to the Lyceum that evening, both being devoted admirer's of "Sir Henry."

The usual bank rule which compels attendance 'till the day cash is balanced, was in operation that evening until past seven, so that, by the time he had swallowed a chop and some tea, and driven westward, it was close on the stroke of eight, as he joined Lettice in the box lobby.

The play was *The Lyons Mail*, in which the innocent Lesurgues is dramatically made to ultimately triumph over Dubosc, the thief and murderer.

Lettice seemed strangely moved during the whole of the performance, the great actor's wonderfully sympathetic portrayal of patience under suspicion and accusation, suggesting to her mind disquieting ideas, which, try as she would, she could not shake off. It was Stephen's invariable practice to see Lettice to her door, after such expeditions as the one in question.

A journey by the Underground, a walk from Sloane Square to Hogarth Studios, and the two prepared to say "good-night."

"What's the matter, darling?" Stephen asked her; for her face was white, and she was, for her, absorbedly silent.

"Matter, dear? Oh, nothing!—well—that is—you know what is troubling me."

"That notion about Tracy?"

"Yes; I can't help it, Stephen! The belief is forced upon me that Philip Tracy is playing a game in which he hopes and expects to win the odd trick."

"You must have some good reason, Lettice, for thinking so."

"I have. Does he know of our engegament?"

"I think so—yes, of course he does!"

"Then, being aware of it, what do you think of him for asking me to marry him?"

"He—Phil Tracy ask you to——?"

"Yes, more than once. I have refrained from saying anything to you about it, for fear that it should cause friction between you."

"That was not right of you, dear."

"No, I see now that it was not. But you must forgive me, Stephen. I did it for the best."

"I quite believe that, darling, but——"

"Wait a moment, dear," she interrupted him. "During the past forty-eight hours I have had a cheque stolen from my new book. I have nothing tangible to go on, but it was borne in upon me—irresistibly so—that the stolen cheque and Mr. Philip Tracy are more closely connected in fact than he would, perhaps, care to acknowledge."

"Why, what have I been thinking of!—there is a bother with one of your cheques. It was paid over the counter to-day, and the signatures were disputed by Tracy."

"That must be it, then! It was made out for five hundred pounds, but was unsigned. It was for Laurie, my brother, who sails for Canada next week. Well, Stephen, dear, what was the result?"

"Oh! the man who presented it is to call again to-morrow. But it's strange that the bank haven't communicated with you!"

"Probably they have, but, as you know, I have been out since eleven this morning, and have not been home till now. I shall find a note inside, I dare say."

They were so interested in the subject of their talk that they failed to notice a couple of tall, respectably-dressed men come up from the direction of the King's Road, and halt within a short distance of them.

Stephen had just said "Good-night," and was stooping to kiss Lettice, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Mr. Borrodaile?"

"That is my name; but I will thank you to remove your hand."

"I am afraid that is impossible, now you have admitted your identity."

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps it will be as well for this young lady—Miss Orde, I take it—to get inside the house before I tell you."

"Certainly not!" said Lettice, hotly. "I will stay and hear anything you may have to say to Mr. Borrodaile."

"As you please, Miss," said the new-comer. "Stephen Borrodaile, I arrest you on a warrant for forging and uttering a cheque for five hundred pounds in the names of Lettice Orde and Caleb Haughton."

"Me! forge Miss Orde's na——! why you're mad, man!"

"Mad or sane, sir, you will have to come with me."

"Stephen! I don't understand! Officer, I am Lettice Orde! The money is mine! Mr. Borrodaile is my friend! I order you to let him go!"

"I regret, Miss, that it is impossible. I am acting on warrant, and any statement which you may wish to make in the prisoner's favour, you can do so to-morrow morning at Bow Street."

The other individual now came up, signalled a passing cab, and put Stephen into it.

His last words to poor stricken Lettice were, "I'm begin-

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ning to think you're right, Lettice, after all; and if it should be that Philip Tracy has laid this trap for me, he shall answer to me for it, if I have to wait a lifetime!"

The Picture of the Year.

It is more than two years since Stephen Borrodaile stood in the dock of the New Court at the Old Bailey to answer the charge of forging his own sweetheart's name to a cheque for five hundred pounds.

It was most subtly conceived, this plot to ruin an absolutely innocent man in the opinion not only of his fellows, but in the eyes of the woman he loved.

Not that the schemer reaped anything beyond revenge; the revenge of the unsuccessful pretender. When Philip Tracy presented himself at Hogarth Studios, a month or so after Stephen Borrodaile had been sentenced to two years' hard labour, Lettice would not see him.

"Return Mr. Tracy's card," she said to the commissionaire in charge, "and say, please, that I decline to see him now, or at any other time."

He hung about the neighbourhood for some two or three hours, thinking to waylay her if she came out, but he got tired and went home.

In spite of her rebuff, he called again in about a week, only to be told that Miss Orde had left the Studios and had gone abroad.

From then onward, until the opening day of the Royal Academy two years after, Stephen Borrodaile's conviction, he neither saw nor heard of her.

There had been mysterious talk, for long before the exhibition opened, of a wonderful picture by a Miss Lettice Orde, a young artist, who till now had been unrepresented on the walls of Burlington House.

It was more than hinted that there was a story connected with the picture; that, indeed, it had been painted with a purpose.

Philip Tracy, though caught by the many press references to Lettice's name, was not disposed to attach much importance to current rumours concerning her work.

Still, he felt irresistibly drawn to go and see, and, taking a day's leave from his duties, found himself one of the enormous and fashionable crowd that thronged the rooms.

So big and dense was the throng in front of "Not Guilty," which enjoyed a conspicuous place of honour upon the line, that it was fully an hour before he could shoulder himself into the front rank of viewers.

His first glance at the picture told him that he was in the presence of the accusing spirit.

Three feet by a little more than two in size, the canvas pictured with marvellous dramatic power the sordid interior of the Central Criminal Court.

Not much prominence was given to the legal accessories, human or otherwise; the whole interest being centred in two figures, the one at right angles to the other.

One was a man taking his trial at the bar, the other was also a man, but in the witness-box.

The whole *motif* of the picture lay in the expression of the faces of prisoner and witness. Instinctively the spectator felt that the man giving his evidence should of right be standing in the place of that other, whose evident plea of "Not Guilty" was fully borne out by his upright bearing and look of conscious innocence.

A curious murmuring of many voices around him, caused him to take notice that people were regarding him strangely.

"Most astonishing likeness, isn't it?"

"Wonderful!"

"Might have sat for the face," whispered one art critic to another.

There was certainly but little doubt about it; the witness in the picture and the sallow-faced man leaning with trembling hands on the rail, were assuredly one and the same.

Who was the prisoner?

That was what was exercising people's minds.

Then the drama developed a new and startling interest.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the "Consolidated Bank, Limited," Lord Hempstead, was a notable art connoisseur, and patron; and, of course, made it an inviolable rule to be present at the Academy on the first of May.

A rather stormy board meeting in the City had made him late in arriving in Piccadilly.

Never a man to be easily led away by popular runs after certain pictures or artists, he prepared to go the round in his own way.

Audible comments, however, as he proceeded, drew his attention to the crowded space in front of Lettice Orde's picture.

"Good gracious! why they're absolutely mobbing that man," he said to himself, regarding Philip Tracy with keenly searching eyes.

The latter's back was turned to him, so it was impossible to establish the identity of the man.

By dint of hard, if courteous, pushing, the old nobleman got almost abreast of Tracy, who seemed incapable of stirring from his position.

Then, as if goaded by the not too polite remarks of those behind, and about him, Tracy turned and faced his tormentors.

Self-conviction was stamped upon his face. He could not, for all he was worth, cease from justifying the suspicion of those about him.

"Why, Tracy!" cried the peer in astonishment. "Understood you were sick. Shall expect you to explain this to-mor—— Eh! wait a minute!—stay where you are!—the most extraordinary likeness!—and the other!—why it's poor Stephen Borrodaile to the life! There must be something in this."

"Lord Hempstead," said a woman's voice at his elbow, "if you will permit me, I think I can explain."

His Lordship faced about to see a girl, with the most expressive dark eyes he had ever come across, waiting for his acknowledgment of her presence and of her request.

Hastily glancing at the card she had handed to him, and which he had taken mechanically, he just said in an undertone to the cashier: "To-morrow, at eleven, in my room at the bank," and by a respectful inclination of the head, Lord Hempstead motioned his fair companion towards the entrance hall.

Half-a-dozen sentences, established perfect confidence between them; while across a lunch table at Prince's, Lettice told the story of her life-sorrow, and of all that she had done during Stephen's absence to bring the truth to light.

The trail had been long and weary, for it was only the day before that the last link establishing her lover's innocence and Tracy's guilt had come into her hands.

Time after time she had determined, in sheer despair, to abandon her quest—the intensity of her love for Stephen alone making her to take up the clue again.

"My dear young lady," said Lord Hempstead kindly, and with unfeigned admiration in every tone of his voice, "let an old man say—and mean it when he says it—that for your sake he is more than tempted to wish himself forty years younger. Stephen Borrodaile, in spite of all that he has endured, is to be envied. He must be a very happy man."

"It is good of you to say so, Lord Hempstead. Of course you know that he was released a week ago to-day. He is ill and has gone to Nice, to some friends of mine."

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"Poor fellow! But, tell me, what have you discovered?"

She then told him that, through the agency of the commissionaire, at her old Chelsea Studios, she had yesterday been able to find the man, Ephrah Noone, who had paid over the counter the cheque for five hundred pounds.

For a substantial consideration he had revealed every detail in the rascally plan to ruin Stephen Borrodaile, which had proved only too successful.

It seems that Noone had been employed by Tracy to convey a letter to Hogarth Studios on one occasion. While waiting in the corridor for a reply, he picked up an envelope half hidden under the mat outside Lettice's door. It contained a letter to the latter's trustee, Mr. Haughton, and a cheque, filled up for five hundred pounds, but unsigned.

Delivering his find to Tracy, the cashier forged the names both of Lettice and her trustee, arranging with the man Noone to present it. He himself posed as the virtuous detector of crime. Noone swearing at the trial that Stephen had given him the cheque, the proceeds of which he was to hand over to Lettice's lover.

There was now no longer a doubt of Tracy's conspiracy with the shady money-lender's tout No one to bring about Stephen's ruin. This, in addition to Tracy's disquietude in the presence of the picture, made the day of reckoning to be complete and sure.

The bank authorities did not wait for the unlikely—viz., for their cashier's voluntary attendance at St. Swithin's Lane to explain the unexplainable. Before the end of the afternoon of the Academy opening day, a warrant was applied for, care being taken in the meanwhile to secure the person of Ephrah Noone, as that of an important witness.

Late the same night, however, Tracy was arrested at Charing Cross Station as he was about to enter the Boat train.

At the subsequent trial, Noone received a comparatively light sentence, in view of necessary aid given the prosecution. Philip Tracy was sent to penal servitude for ten years.

* * * * *

At the marriage which took place at the British Embassy in Paris three months after Philip Tracy's conviction, Lord Hempstead specially gave the bride away.

Lettice looked not only lovely, but proud and happy. Stephen Borrodaile was as a man who gratefully takes a good gift, but whose heart is too full for words.

The last one to shake them both heartily by the hand, and to wish them "God-speed" as the Southern express left, the "Gare du Nord" was the old lord who firmly believes that Lettice Borrodaile is the only woman in all the world who both could and would have done as she did.

Ralph Enderby.

Rose to the Occasion.

Young Tutter (drawing closer): "I hope, Miss Clara, that your father, in the next room, can't hear what I am saying." Miss Pinkerley (with dignity): "I hope, Mr. Tutter, that you will say nothing to me that you would not be willing, if necessary, to say to papa."

A New Recipe.

They expected the hot weather, and were discussing lemonade. Tommy: "Ah, you should see the funny way that Mr. Smith and Clara make lemonade." Mother: "How, darling?" "Why, Clara holds the lemon, and Mr. Smith squeezes her."

Special Terms to Such Customers.

Hotel Clerk (suspiciously): "Your bundle has come apart. May I ask what that queer thing is?" Guest: "This is a new patent fire escape. I always carry it, so in case of fire I can let myself down from the hotel window. See?" Clerk (thoughtfully): "I see. Our terms for guests with fire-escapes, sir, are invariably cash in advance."

Your Editor Chats.

The new serial romance begins in the next number of *Short Stories*. It is a splendid story—the best of its kind we have ever had—and you will enjoy it thoroughly.

It is cleverly written, full of stirring incident and teeming with dramatic scenes.

And now, I will let you into a secret. Selecting serial stories is by no means an easy task. Although I don't wish to pose as a wondrous worker, yet you may be interested to hear that in my search for a story sufficiently excellent to please my readers, I have read, within the past few months, no fewer than eleven serials, varying in length from 60,000 to 150,000 words. This reading, of course, has to be done in addition to the ordinary work of editing, and most of it was done while the majority of you have been sound asleep.

So I hope that, after all this toil, I have succeeded in getting hold of a story that will please you all. If so, my labours will not have been in vain.

* * * *

Every reader will be interested in the discussion (republished on page 443) which has been going on in a big London Daily about the "Confessions of Cynthia."

* * * *

This week the last picture in the Cut Picture competition appears. Next week we shall hold another competition, complete in itself, of a bright and novel description, in which ten Gramophones will be awarded as prizes.

* * * *

If any reader has been sufficiently interested in the present serial to feel that he or she is justified in distributing a few leaflets about the new story I should be ever so much obliged, and I will gladly forward a small parcel for distribution.

If you decide to help us in this way please send a post-card stating the number you think you can distribute to the Publisher, *Short Stories*, 17—18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

A prize of £5 will be given to the person who distributes these leaflets to what I consider to be the best advantage.

Full particulars will be sent you with the leaflets when you have made your application.

Your Editor.

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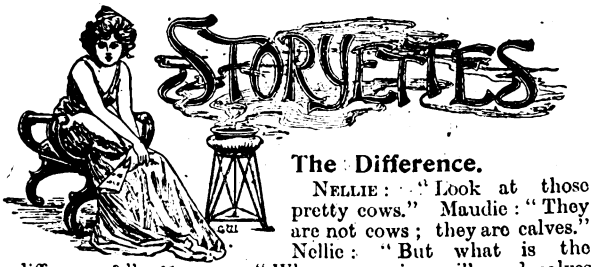

The Difference.

Nellie: "Look at those pretty cows." Maudie: "They are not cows; they are calves." Nellie: "But what is the difference?" Maudie: "Why, cows give milk and calves give jelly."

And George Tried.

Bride: "George, dear, when we reach town let us try to avoid giving the impression that we are newly married." George: "All right, Maud; you can carry this portmanteau."

Very Unkind.

Mr. A.: "Just look at that dolt of a man. What a charming wife he has. How true it is that the biggest fools always marry the prettiest girls." Mrs. A.: "Oh, you flatterer!"

After the Coronation.

"Yes," remarked Mrs. Malaprop, "it was a grand sight. First came the king, carrying a spectre in his hand, and wearing a beautiful red mantle all trimmed with vermin. It was a grand sight."

The Lips of Experience.

Penelope: "I don't like to see you dangling about with mere boys all the time. What do you find that's so interesting in that smooth-faced young Faris?" Perdita: "Why, Pen, his face isn't so smooth as it looks."

Rough on Kidder.

Askins: "Good gracious, Kidder! How came you by that fearful cold?" Kidder: "My wife leaves the window wide open every night when the baby is wakeful, and allows the wind to blow on me becauses it amuses the baby to hear me cough."

John's Mistake.

Husband: "Did you see me kiss my hand to you this morning after I had left the house?" Wife: "Why, John, I wasn't near the window then." Husband: "I wonder who it was?" Wife: "I don't know; but, by the way, John, Mary told me this morning she had decided she would stay with us another month."

A Question of Economy.

"Laura," said the young lady's mother, not unkindly, "it seems to me that you had the gas turned rather low last evening." "It was solely for economy, mamma," the maiden answered. "There is no use trying to beat the gas company, my daughter. I have noticed that the shutting off of the gas is always followed by a corresponding increase of the pressure." "Well, that lessens the waist, doesn't it, mamma dear?" replied the artless girl. And her fond parent could find no more to say.

A Level-Headed Maid.

Day was trembling on the edge of night. The sun had dropped behind the hills, and splashed the sky with red. For two hours Susan and Henry had been talking. Susan was sweet-faced and tender, and the amethystine tints of the evening touched her face softly, and the fading lights threw a halo about her head. He folded her to his throbbing bosom, and then slowly unfolded her. "We shall be so happy," he whispered. "Yes, Henry," was her murmured response, "and so harmonious. Whatever you say I shall believe now, henceforth and for ever." "I can never be such a husband as you deserve, Susan," he almost sighed. "No, Henry," she said, "I suppose not, but at my time of life I can't afford to be too particular. Come in and have some supper." And Henry went in.

Very Much Broken.

"I am a broken man," said the playwright. "So I should think," was the answer, "for I have seen your pieces."

Must be One or the Other.

"Notice that man over there, how nervous he appears, constantly looking round to see if anybody is watching him. I'll bet he's a burglar." "Yes, or a bridegroom."

A Very Good Match.

Mack: "Was the girl Hibee married considered a good match?" Robins: "I imagine so. She fires up at the least provocation."

A Blonde Income.

Clara: "Charlie Jackson prefers blonde girls." Laura: "Indeed. I am quite a brunette, you know, and he is always very attentive to me." Clara: "Probably because your income is fair."

She Got a New Bonnet.

He (indignantly): "Those insulting vergers put us into a back pew." She (calmly as a quiescent volcano): "They probably noticed that I wore a bonnet which I wouldn't care to have seen."

Another Chance Lost.

She: "If it were necessary, and I were your wife, would you go through fire and water for me?" He: "Do you think it would be necessary?" She: "It might." He: "Then I think you had better marry a fireman. Good evening!"

An Inspiration.

"Here are some sultana cakes I made myself," she said. He paled. "Thank you, darling," he faltered, and partook. That night the painter dreamt, whereat he rose, and in feverish haste painted an art poster, which brought a hundred and fifty-two pounds. Then he kissed his wife fondly, called her a brave little woman, and wondered what he would do without her.

Wanted Consolation.

"Don't you give any premiums for twins?" asked an anxious-looking man who had edged his way through the crowd in front of the railing behind which sat the judges at the baby show. "No, my friend," replied one of them. "We have thought it best not to offer premiums for twins. Here is the premium list. You can see for yourself." "I didn't know but you might have a consolation prize to offer," said the anxious-looking inquirer, edging his way out of the crowd again.

Saved in Time.

Wibble: "I hear that young Jinx has broken his engagement with Miss Flyer." Wabble: "Yes; and it's odd the way it happened, too. You see, he left a phonograph at the house, so she could whisper a 'good night' into it just before she turned out the gas, and send it to him through the post. Quite romantic, you see. Well, you see, in the excitement of the affair, she forgot to shut the machine off, and he not only received her words, but a large and varied assortment of snores that had accumulated while she was asleep."

The Modern Yellow-Back.

Farmer Hodge (reading novelette): "I'm out of all patience with that Gladys Fitzallwyn in the story—the way she's abusing her beautiful eyes. She doesn't deserve to have none." Mrs. Hodge: "What's she been doing now?" Farmer Hodge: "This book is full of it. First she threw her eyes up to the ceiling, and then let them drop on the floor; then she darted them down a long corridor, and rested them on the cool waters of the lagoon. Then she must have called them back somehow, for it says she bathed them in sad, salt tears, wiped them, and swept them with long lashes. Once she was fool enough to rivet them on the dome, and when I left off she was fixing them on the mantelpiece."

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The Double Knot.

The Tale of a Boot-Lace Union.

SYBIL FARRINGTON had come up to London, bent on that most delightfully feminine enjoyment, known by the name of a day's shopping. She lived with her father, the rector of Fern Dell, a most primitive and rural village in Kent, and a day spent in London was for her a delightful break in the monotonous round of parish work and duties.

Not that Sybil ever felt dull, her bright disposition made her feel happy anywhere, and she was the joy and pride of her father's heart, who called her his ray of sunshine.

Not alone to him did she appear to be a beam of gladsome light, but to all the cottagers of Fern Dell, and no one was ever more popular than she was among young and old. Even Mother Ricket, the most surly and grumpy dame of the parish, would welcome Miss Sybil with a smile when she tripped across the threshold with her pet Irish terrier, Sam, whose popularity bid fair to equal that of his mistress.

Sybil ran down the steps of the Army and Navy stores where she had been shopping rather promiscuously—gloves, veils and ribbons for herself, garden implements for her father, groceries for the old housekeeper, and sundry little commissions for different cottagers—and jumped into a 'bus. She was going to have tea with a former school friend now married and settled in a flat off Baker Street.

"Bother it," she mentally ejaculated, as she noticed that her shoe-lace had got undone for the fourth or fifth time that day. She was firmly wedged in between a gentleman and an old lady and had not much elbow room, still she bent down and set about tying the refractory lace. She gave it several vicious tugs and pulled it into a big black knot determined it should not worry her again by getting loose, and then she sat up with quite a sigh of relief, feeling that this time at any rate she had conquered the nasty stubborn thing, as she phrased it to herself. Then she opened the pages of her favourite paper and was soon deeply immersed in the thrilling details of a love-sick damsel's heart troubles.

Suddenly she felt her foot violently jerked and she looked up rather indignantly thinking her neighbour was both awkward and rude. Well, he was apologising most profusely and was very red in the face, and he looked very ridiculous too, he appeared to want to stand up and yet not know his own mind on the subject. What could be the matter with the man, marvelled Sybil, when she felt her foot jerked again. This was too much.

"Sir," she uttered in the most frigid tones, and was not mollified when she saw by his garb that he was a clergyman.

The unfortunate gentleman turned a deeper shade of crimson.

"Excuse me, madam—but I really wish to get out——"

Sybil raised her eyebrows in astonishment; was the man mad? What hindrance did she bring to bear on his getting in or out, and what could that have to do with his so unduly jerking her foot? But, still murmuring confusedly he went on:

"And er, madam, ahem, the fact is, er—you have, I am sorry to say, tied your shoe-string to mine!"

He jerked out this extraordinary statement in the last stage of confusion, being evidently distressed to inform Sybil of what she had done. But it was her turn now to get rosy red and to look the picture of misery. Good gracious! was such an awful thing possible? She quickly moved her foot, and nearly jerked the unfortunate gentleman over.

By this time the other passengers in the 'bus, who had so far been mute spectators of this drama being enacted in their presence, grasped the gist of the situation, and roars of laughter made the unhappy pair feel they would give anything for the earth to open and swallow them.

"Untie the knot," Sybil whispered imperiously, feeling inclined to vent the vials of her wrath upon his head which, of course, was most unfair as she herself had done the mischief. But Sybil was after all only a woman, and what woman can remain perfectly fair when she is angered? And, poor girl, she did feel terribly hot and miserable over this absurd situation. The young fellow smiled grimly.

"Easier said than done," and he bent down in obedience to her peremptory order.

Alas! Sybil had indeed succeeded this time in making the string into a hard and fast knot, only she had been unfortunate enough to be sitting next to a gentleman whose shoe-laces also had this unfortunate propensity to get loose, and she had tied the two wrong ends.

The gentleman strove and strove, but all in vain, and still the mirth of their fellow-passengers increased. He drew out his penknife.

"Do you mind?" he whispered. "It is the only thing to be done."

"Oh, yes," she answered back in an agonised voice, "cut it, do anything to put an end to this."

He severed the strings at last, as Alexander of old cut the Gordian Knot with his sword when he failed to untie it with his fingers. Hastily lifting his hat he prepared to get down, but Sybil felt she could not remain in this unpleasant atmosphere of mirth for which she had provided the subject, and she too hurriedly left the 'bus. She hailed a hansom and jumping in drove to her friend's house.

She poured forth her tale of woe but found little sympathy. Her cherished friend, dainty and pretty little Mrs. Rivers, actually found it in her heart to send forth a merry peal of laughter.

"Oh, Sybil, do forgive me, dear, but it is so excruciatingly funny! I would have given anything to see you coupled, tied by the leg—oh, no, excuse me, by the foot, to this stranger."

"Oh! Ada, how can you? It is cruel of you! And I feel so miserable, so crushed!"

"Never mind, darling, a cup of tea will revive you. Tell me, Syb, was he young and good-looking, this knight of the shoe-latchet?"

"Ada, it is disgraceful of you to go on so. I never thought you could be so horrid."

"Nonsense, old girl, do not be a goose. Do tell me, was he nice?"

"I am sure I do not know and do not care. I did not look at him even, and hope I shall never lay eyes on the hateful man again!"

"That's a bit hard on the poor chap, you know Sybil After all, you linked yourself to him, not he to you!"

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*
"A FOE IN THE FAMILY,"
Our splendid new serial, starts next week.
*

"He had no business to have his nasty shoe-lace just close to mine; horrid wretch!"

"Oh, come, Syb, you are hard on him! Had he a patent leather shoe? You must have observed that, surely, and at any rate one can always judge if a man is a gentleman by the way he is shod."

"I never looked at his vile shoe, but the man was in the Church, so I suppose he was a gentleman."

"Nonsense, that does not follow. Some parson folks are the biggest cads out!"

Sybil drew herself up with mock dignity to reprove her friend's levity.

"Ada, you forget; I belong to the Church."

"Well, the ritualists do wear petticoats! Still, I thought the female element was not considered quite the thing for ordination. What a jolly thing it would be though, Syb, if you ran up against this parson some time or other, fell in love with one another and had the knot tied, not in a 'bus next time, but before the altar."

"Ada, I am not going to stop here one minute more to listen so your sickening nonsense. Besides, I must be off to catch my train."

* * * * *

"Syb, dear."

"Yes, daddy," and Sybil Farrington looked up over the tea-urn and well-appointed breakfast service to smile at her father, the Rev. Mark Farrington.

"You know I have applied for a curate to help me at least temporarily in my work, as I do not feel quite so young as I used to be."

Sybil jumped up from her place and fondly hugged her father.

"You darling, dad, why you are as young as ever, and fit for more work than half these young fops of curates who think more of their collars than of the parish work."

Mr. Farrington smiled.

"You are rather hard on the youngsters, dear. However, I have just received a letter from a Mr. Cedric Vernon telling me he is taking a holiday from his work in the East End and can come to me for six weeks. That sounds good, and a worker in the East End is not likely to be one of these young, good-for-nothings you anathematize."

"He is a nuisance all the same, daddy, because he will be a very awkward third party and destroy our delightful *solitude a deux*. You and I never feel we want a stranger here, do we, dad, darling?"

"Well, little one, no doubt some day a stranger will come between us, only then you won't think him a stranger."

"Oh, daddy, for shame! As if I ever meant to leave you and marry! What an absurd suggestion!"

Mr. Farrington laughed.

"Why, Syb, the idea of your remaining an old maid is much more absurd!"

"I mean to, though! I can quite fancy myself in a mop-cap, with silver hair and gold-rimmed spectacles. At any rate I shall never marry."

"Yes, dear, all girls say that till Mr. Right turns up!"

"But, there is not a man in the world worth my giving up the dearest of all old dads!"

"Twaddle," responded her father.

"But, daddy, dear, it is not twaddle. I mean it!"

Having thus issued her decree which she thought then to be as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, Sybil stepped out through the open French window on to the lawn which stretched in front of the Rectory as far as the shrubberies which shut off the delightful old-fashioned rose garden. The beauty of the Fern Dell Rectory roses was celebrated all over the county.

Sybil called "Sam, Sam," and immediately the dog came bounding towards her holding in his mouth a basket in which lay a pair of garden scissors. Sybil had long since trained him to bring her these every morning after breakfast, ere she started on her rounds to pluck the supply of flowers with which she loved to deck every room in the house.

The girl knelt on the green sward, as she took the basket from the dog, and throwing her arms around his shaggy neck she kissed him.

"Dear old Sam, just fancy you and I are not going to have the grounds all to ourselves any more. That horrid curate is sure to be always sauntering about where he is not wanted. I dare say he will smoke too! Ugh, it is disgusting!"

Sam wagged his tail and quite seemed to understand all about the advent of this trouble—some curate which so worried his mistress.

* * * * *

"Syb," said Mr. Farrington a few days later, "Mr. Vernon is to arrive this afternoon at Sunly station; would you mind driving over in the dog-cart to meet him?"

"Oh, daddy, of course I mind very much. I hate it. I know I am going to dislike that man intensely."

"Child, do not be so unreasonable. Besides, you are incapable of disliking any one!"

"Oh, but dad, you do not know me. I could find it in my heart to hate people. I really could!"

And she tried to flash her lovely blue eyes in a most vindictive manner, and only succeeded in looking bewitchingly pretty.

"Will you please remember little spitfire, that Mr. Vernon is coming at my request to help me in my work, and that as my guest, I wish my daughter to treat him with every possible courtesy."

"Yes, dad, I'll do anything to please you."

"Even going to meet him, as I feel rather tired and you would be rendering me a service by going?"

"All right, then. And I shall promise to behave beautifully! There now, are you satisfied?"

A couple of hours later, Sybil drove up to Sunly station to meet the London train. She looked particularly sweet and fresh in a white tailor-made dress and a large white straw hat with roses crowning her halo of golden hair, Sam too accompanied her and trotted at her heels.

"Sam, old boy, I wonder what sort of a fellow he is," she muttered. "At any rate this is such a quiet station, it will be easy to spot him in his parson's rig"—and followed by her trusted companion she paced up and down the platform till the train steamed in.

A tall, dark, very good-looking young fellow jumped out who in his shovel hat and clerical tie was unmistakably the man. Sybil went up to him. "Mr. Vernon, I believe, my father being unavoidably prevented from coming to meet you, asked me to do so and——"

Sybil stopped; as she spoke the stranger turned his eyes full on her, and she recognised the gentleman of the shoe-lace episode. She flushed hotly and, in the wildest confusion, thought of turning her back on him and flying. Alas! such a course was not to be thought of. He was the first to recover his composure, and smiling mischievously:

"Miss Farrington, I am afraid this meeting is for you most unexpected and disagreeable. I am sorry, but cannot well help it! To me, it is unexpected, but"—he hesitated and added in a lower tone—"most certainly not disagreeable."

Sybil bowed stiffly, but not one of her features relaxed in a smile as she said coldly:

"We had better drive back. My father is waiting for you, and"—she went on viciously, determined to punish him for the impertinence of his personality, for which, poor man, he was certainly not responsible, "your business is with him, and not with me!"

"Oh, come, Miss Farrington, please do not take up this hostile attitude towards me, it will make things so uncomfortable for you and for me, and you know we are going to live in the same house for two months."

"Oh, no, there is no necessity for this. I can go and visit one of my friends during that time."

"You shall do nothing of the sort, Miss Farrington."

"Indeed, and who shall prevent my doing what I wish, pray?"

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"I shall, most certainly."

"You!" and there was a touch of scorn in her voice.

"Yes, simply by wiring to Mr. Farrington that I am sorry to find I cannot help him in his work as had been settled."

"Oh, you would not do that," and Sybil thought of the nice rest which the advent of the curate meant for her father.

"Most certainly I shall, if I find that my coming drives you away from your home."

"Well, I shall not go, but you must not disappoint my father. He has not been at all well lately, and he wants rest so badly."

Her voice softened with infinite sweetness when she spoke of her father, and Cedric noted how different she was so.

"I shall not disappoint your father, Miss Farrington, and I can promise I shall do all in my power to lighten the burden of church and parish work from his shoulders."

"Oh, thank you," and Sybil looked up and smiled for the first time, and then he saw how exquisitely fair her face was when so lit up.

"Miss Farrington, won't you forgive me? You know, it was not my fault—what happened the other day," he jerked out awkwardly.

Sybil frowned; this was rather too bad of him to revert to that hateful subject again.

"Come, the trap is waiting," she said shortly.

They left the station together and took their seats in the dog-cart; Sybil, gathering the reins in her hand lightly, touched the cob's side with her dainty little whip more used as an ornament than for any other purpose.

They sped down the village street in silence. Sam lay at their feet. Suddenly he raised himself, and put his nose right into Cedric's hand, looking up most confidingly into his face with his big brown eyes.

"Good old dog, why you are trying to make friends with me."

"More amiable than I am?" the spirit of mischief in Sybil prompted her to say.

"Excuse me, Miss Farrington, I made no rude insinuations; I am never rude."

"Meaning that I am!"

"Well, you said so, not I. Did I, my friend doggie?" And he stooped and patted Sam's shaggy head to the animal's evident delight.

"I can't think why Sam is so friendly to you; he hardly ever makes up to strangers."

"Yes, I suppose you do think it is marvellous how any living thing can be friendly to me."

Sybil laughed. "Oh, come, it is my turn to say I made no such unkind insinuations."

"Well, there's one thing, I have Sam's friendship if I cannot get yours."

"Is it not sufficient?"

"Most certainly not," he said, changing his light bantering tone for a more serious one. He sought her eyes.

"Miss Farrington, I never can bear to be at war with anyone, much less a lady. Do let us be friends."

"Nonsense, of course we shall be friends, if only to please my father. He would be very cross with me if he knew I had been so rude to you."

"Could anyone be cross with you?"

Sybil ignored this altogether, but somehow she began to feel that she must appear in a most ridiculous light, showing all this unfair resentment for the absurd shoe-lace incident. She could not help realising how thoroughly gentlemanly and good-humoured he was over it all. She was impulsive in all her moods and she now turned towards him.

"Please forgive me, Mr. Vernon, I have been so abominably rude to you, and you must think me horribly unreasonable and bad tempered."

"Well, I should not like to tell you what I think of you."

"Really, is it so bad?"

"No," he said slowly and deliberately, "but it might make you feel conceited."

Sybil blushed, but somehow she had ceased to feel angered with him.

"Miss Farrington!"

"Yes?"

"As we are really going to be friends now, won't you give me a token of this new friendship?"

"Well, it depends on what the token is," and her merry blue eyes looked laughingly up into his.

"You were so angry at the station when you discovered who I was, that you never even shook hands with me. Would you do so now?"

"What, and leave hold of Dolly's reins and give her the chance of bolting?"

"I shall see to that," and masterfully taking the reins from her, he gathered them into his left hand, and held out his right to her. She put hers into his, rather wondering inwardly at her docile meekness to his unreasonable demands. He clasped her hand in his in a strong grip.

"Now this seals the compact of our friendship, does it not?"

Sybil did not meet his eyes; there seemed to be a nervous flutter at her heart which she did not understand. She whispered, "Yes."

He immediately released her hand, and keeping possession of the reins.

"You are tired, you had better let me drive for the rest of the way."

She let him have his own way and the drive was after this more or less a silent one, except when Sybil gave him the necessary directions about the way. When they turned in at the Rectory gate, they found Mr. Farrington on the lawn to welcome them.

* * * * *

It was the old, old story, and what is bound to follow when two young folks are much thrown together, and when their tasks and pleasures lie in the same path. Cedric and Sybil visited the poor together, and played tennis and ping-pong when he was free from his clerical duties. The eloquence of his sermons touched her more than any had ever done before, not even excepting those of her darling father. Mr. Farrington soon guessed the true state of things, but he felt happy. His beam of sunshine would indeed pass from his life, but he loved her too unselfishly to wish to keep her when her love had gone out to a true, good man such as he knew young Vernon to be. Still, they had never spoken to each other and the two month's stay of the young curate was drawing to a close. Sybil could not bear to think that a time would come when he would no longer be with them.

One morning when she sallied from the breakfast room with Sam and the rose basket, Cedric stepped after her.

"May I be allowed to accompany you and hold the basket?"

"Certainly."

A happy light danced in her eyes, as they wandered toward the old-world rose garden. Sam barked and frisked about, but the young people got far too much absorbed in each other to notice poor old Sam. They entered the arbour which was a perfect wealth of crimson ramblers and honeysuckle. The fragrance filled the air; the birds twittered among the trees, and the sun's rays slanted down on the face of the old sun-dial to mark the speed of passing time. But they took no heed of all these things as they sat down on the old stone bench under the roses. Sybil felt strangely embarrassed, and yet her heart seemed to overflow in a new-found happiness.

"Sybil!" He had never called her by her name before. "I shall be going back to London soon; will you miss me just a little?"

She did not answer, but a lump seemed to rise at her throat, and silently the mist gathered in her eyes. He was quick to notice this.

"Sybil, darling, is this so, do you really care so much? Is it possible that I have won that pearl beyond price, a good woman's love?"

"Oh, Mr. Vernon, I am not good at all; it is you who are so far removed above me. I am not worthy of being loved by you."

A Grand New Competition Starts Next Week.

DON'T MISS IT!!!

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"My darling, how can you talk so?" and slipping his arm around her, he drew her to him till her fair head rested on his shoulder. Gently, almost reverently he pressed his lips to hers.

"Sybil, I love you. Tell me, sweet one, dare I hope that you care for me a little?"

She did not answer but nestled closer to him, feeling safe and happy by his side, as if no harm could ever come to her now; she felt secure in this great and noble love.

"Sybil, won't you tell me that you love me?"

"Oh, Mr. Vernon, you know I do."

"Sweetheart," and again he kissed her, "don't call me that horrid, stiff and formal Mr. Vernon. To you now and for ever I must be Cedric."

"It seems so strange to call you so," she murmured shyly.

"Well, Syb, darling, but it won't after a time. Surely you do not intend all your life through to call your husband Mr. Vernon," and he laughingly pinched her rosy cheek.

"Oh, you are a naughty, bad man," she replied with feminine inconsistency, all the time believing him in her heart to be the noblest and best of men.

"Well, but I want you just to say once, Cedric, I love you!"

She hid her head on his shoulder, but murmured very low, "Cedric, I love you."

"My darling! Look here, Syb, I want you to promise me something."

"What is it, Mr. Vernon—no, I mean, Cedric?" As she read the reproof in his eyes.

"You are solemnly to pass your word of honour you will never again tie your shoe-lace to any strange gentleman's whom you may happen to meet in the 'bus."

"Oh, Cedric, for shame! How can you?"

"How can I? Oh, quite easy, thank you. It will be a most delightful occupation to tease my sweet little wife!"

* * * * *

When Mr. Farrington heard of the engagement, he had the generosity not to remind Sybil of her rash vow about never marrying, and all things were arranged to the satisfaction of everyone when it was decided that Cedric Vernon should remain at Fern Dell Rectory as Mr. Farrington's permanent curate, as the work, he declared, was really far too much for him nowadays.

Sybil was supremely happy in this thought of living with these two whom she loved better than all else on earth.

When Mrs. Rivers was apprised of Sybil's engagement to a clergyman, she briefly wrote back: "Darling, Syb, let me congratulate you. Is the happy man the knight of the shoe-latchet? Something tells me it must be he. Wire back 'yes' or 'no.' Yours fondly, Ada Rivers."

Sybil telegraphed laconically, "Wretch," and Mrs. Rivers rested content that her random surmise was right.

Lily Butler.

NURSERY NEWS.

This is the title of an eight-page magazine for Children, which will in future be given away every week with *Pearson's Weekly*.

100 Prizes for Children every week

No. 1 of NURSERY NEWS will be found in the issue dated October 9th.

A BOON AND A BLESSING.

It has been remarked that the babies who are born in this age show greater wisdom than any ever born in the past, inasmuch as they have selected the golden age of babies.

Never before was known such ornate rattle-boxes, such successful teething rings, such satisfactory remedies for small interior pains, such ambrosial artificial food!

And now, with it all, comes the invention of Mr. Thomas Phipps, though we do not know that this is not more for the parent than for the baby. It must, however, prove a great boon to both.

It appears that Mr. Phipps is the father of a healthy and vigorous baby. This baby, like many others, delights in nothing so much as walking with his parent through the still hours of the long night, the parent, of course, being the active party to the pedestrianism.

Three months ago Mr. Phipps determined to devise some sort of odd mechanical means for doing his work. He fully recognised the many difficulties in the way of this, the chief of which he conceived to be, as his experiences proved, the crafty and suspicious mind of the infant himself, then some three months old.

Naturally Mr. Phipps's first idea was to make a steam-man to take the place of himself in the nocturnal pedal exercises. After a month of hard work he succeeded in making this sort of a man, and the first trial was fairly satisfactory. He experienced considerable difficulty in getting a lifelike expression on the wax face, but finally succeeded.

The great difficulty, however, was in guiding the automaton properly, and after the second night he insisted on falling over the furniture to such an extent that Mrs. Phipps would no longer allow him to be trusted with her offspring.

Accordingly Mr. Phipps abandoned the idea, and began working on slightly different lines. The result is the Phipps' Patent Panoramic Baby Walker. Mr. Phipps had become convinced that it was not so much travel as the appearance of travel which was demanded by the infant mind.

He now erected wire framework, somewhat resembling the "dummies" seen in front of ready-made clothing shops, which are sometimes mistaken by near-sighted people for our gilded youth.

By ingenious machinery in the cellar, which was connected with the figure through a hole in the floor, Mr. Phipps succeeded in giving it the exact motion incident to walking.

He then cried "Eureka!" in a loud voice, and placed the child in the arms of the figure, which he had fittingly clothed in white.

But it appeared that he had in his own words "eurekaed too soon," for what was his surprise when the child cried and refused to be comforted. He soon saw the trouble; the intelligent infant had got his eye on a picture of "Cæsar Crossing the Rubicon," which hung on the wall, and by this told that he was not moving at all.

Mr. Phipps was again baffled. He took the little treasure and walked on with him through the dark hours; but Mr. Phipps' mind was not inactive the while. Mr. Phipps saw that what was lacking was the moving panorama idea.

He accordingly mounted an endless strip of scene canvas on upright rollers. This he painted with the same pattern as the wall paper, and on it hung the picture of "Cæsar Crossing the Rubicon."

On the other side he placed a panorama of the opposite wall, with its picture of the Houses of Parliament.

He then arranged the figure to turn quickly every ten seconds, adjusted the infant, let on the steam in the cellar, which started the figure and the panoramas, and watched the result.

The child felt the swinging, rise-and-fall, lean-over-and-sway-back motion of the figure, saw Cæsar go past on the Rubicon' felt the turn, observed the Houses of Parliament roll past in fitting sequence, and closed his eyes and went to sleep.

Mr. Phipps crept into bed and enjoyed the first night's rest in five months. He expects to have his machines on sale shortly.

P. L. A.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Are They Proper Reading?

A Discussion in a Big London Daily.

On Thursday, September 4th last, a letter appeared in the London DAILY NEWS on the subject of "Is the Middle-Class Decadent?" After putting forward several arguments in the affirmative, the writer, signing himself "Verax," goes on to prove to his own satisfaction that one of the surest signs of decadence in the middle classes is the manner in which they appreciate articles that tell of the doings of the Upper Classes. He says:

What is the case to-day? "The Visits of Elizabeth," already discussed, Sir, in your columns, following on "Dodo" and "The Massarenes," has been followed up by a crowd of kindred books, all painting the roses and raptures of aristocratic vice, and now we find in the weekly periodical output of one of our journalist princes (we have no merchant princes now), a publication called SHORT STORIES, which has as its leading item a series of revelations entitled "The Confessions of Cynthia." This series, be it noted, is appearing in a publication which appeals solely to the middle class. It has as its central figure an adventuress, whom the author shows to be thoroughly unscrupulous and to move "in the highest circles," a very type of "smart set" wickedness. The editor refers in his paper to the interest displayed by his readers in this lady, whose doings, it is but fair to say, are chronicled with a force and clearness worthy of a higher model.

Now, what is the sadly significant fact about this? Not that the art of the fictionist is used to expose misconduct, but that in a purely middle-class journal the vices of the aristocracy should prove an attraction, vices which our forefathers reprobated and would not tolerate.

This letter was followed on September 5th by another epistle, defending the famous series of articles. It ran as follows:

SIR,—The point raised by your correspondent "Verax" regarding the series of articles entitled "The Confessions of Cynthia," now appearing in SHORT STORIES, is of great interest to me. I am one of the middle class to whom "Verax" refers, and know nothing about the way in which people in high society live. The articles in question considerably opened my eyes as to the real way in which the very wealthy pass their lives. I had been under the impression that wealthy people were supremely happy, and spent all their time in pleasure. I had no idea that money troubles ever worried them, consequently my own unhappiness resulting from comparative poverty was greatly intensified. After reading, however, of the misery and wretchedness of the adventuress and other characters in this series, I have realised that money is far from being everything, and consequently I am no longer eaten up with envy for the wealthy. I do not think it fair of "Verax" to deprecate the publication of this kind of literature. If vice and misery exist amongst the upper classes why should it be kept a dark secret from the middle classes? Yours, etc.

MIDDLE CLASS.

Following this were two or three further letters, including one from a school teacher:

SIR,—The point "Verax" raised concerning the depraving influences of cheap literature sold to hundreds and thousands of our young people to-day is very important. We are often asked to congratulate ourselves because the penny dreadfuls of the "Dick Turpin" type have been superseded by so-called "pure literature." But this pure literature is in some respects worse than the old blood-curdling romance. It casts a false and vicious glamour over a mode of life just as evil, and, alas! more real than that of the highwayman hero. Young girls who need this literature are taught to regard riches, a fine house, and a handsome husband as the sole aim of their existence. There is nothing in these so-called pure works to teach them that life has duties and responsibilities which must be faced, and that a time comes when a girl must put away childish things. "The Confessions of Cynthia," to which "Verax" alludes, is only one of many hundred productions which I find my pupils excitedly perusing, with the result that good literature, that perennial source of spiritual strength and pleasure without alloy, is a sealed book to them, for once a bad literary taste has been formed, the beauties of great writers can never be appreciated.

This point, I think, should receive attention. I am well aware that no law and no censor can regulate books, but let us at least recognise that there is nothing "pure" or beneficent in these cheap productions, which are still vicious and enervating, although they do not chronicle crimes of violence.—Yours, etc.,

TEACHER.

This violent attack on the morals of the series then brought forth a letter from the author of the series herself.

SIR,—It is a good rule that keeps the author silent under criticism; but when that criticism challenges the author's morality, and asperses her motives, it is but fair she should be heard in her own defence.

The correspondents who have referred to "The Confessions of Cynthia" do me great injustice. Whatever else may be said of the "Confessions" it is most certainly untrue that they cast "a false and vicious glamour over a bad mode of life." My aim throughout has been to show that a woman with beauty and talent, with friends in high places, with all the advantages that wealth can bestow, but a woman of no good aims, comes in the end to ruin.

Is this a decadent or an immoral purpose? If so, Thackeray, the great middle-class satirist—who wrote, be it noted, of the upper classes, was decadent and immoral also. Writing of Becky Sharp he says, "All her lies and her schemes, all her selfishness and her wiles, all her wit and her genius, had come to this bankruptcy." It is with great diffidence that I dare to mention Thackeray when writing of my own work; but this I may say, whether the adventuress I portray is a "high" or "low" model, she is taken straight from life. I have studied her at first hand and the career that I am outlining is, as you know, sir, one straight from life. As such I claim it has a special value.

The mistake my critics make is one of great importance. They imagine that a portrayal of vice is immoral, in that it excites sympathy with the vicious. That is not so. The art and aim of the fictionist is to-day the same as in the days of Shakespeare. "To hold the mirror up to nature, to show vice its own image, the very form and body of the age."

If it is true that the "smart set" count for so much to-day, surely the sooner they are known for what they are the better. And as one who has had the *entrée* to that circle, I have used my humble powers of narrative to show them in their true colours. Yours, etc.,

THE AUTHOR OF "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."

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Out of Great Tribulation.

By Henry Farmer.

"Seaton Revelle, consider yourself under arrest."

"To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

A greyness stole across Revelle's face, as he still stared down at the words; a greyness that seemed reflected on Benny's features now.

"And what, Benny, are your plans for the future?"

With the words, Revelle shifted the blotting paper. The rest of what was written was visible now.

Benny sprang to his feet, hurried across to the table.

"Excuse me, Marquis!" he stammered, his face the colour of ash, "but that—that letter's private and confidential—to a friend of mine!"

He tried to snatch away the letter; but Revelle was too quick. With one hand he pushed him back; the other hand he spread out upon the letter itself.

"Tell me, Benny," he said in a low, strained voice, "since when has the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard, been a friend of yours?"

Benny took a backward step and clutched at his collar.

Revelle cast a quick glance down at the letter.

"I see," he went on, his eyes riveted now on the other's face, "that I am mentioned in your letter—'Seaton Revelle, *alias* the Marquis, planned the robbery!'"

Outside the two men were watching the window.

"Winton," whispered Crump, staring at the two shadows that were now visible on the blind, "this is very tantalising, is it not? So near, and yet so far! If I might jump at conclusions from the attitudes of those shadows, the conversation is of a very serious if not strained nature. The smaller shadow's attitude betrays fear and surprise; the taller one's attitude is to me menacing. It looks to me like a row, and a serious row!"

Within the room, a moment's silence had followed Revelle's words. Benny's teeth were chattering. His right hand stole from his throat to one of his coat pockets, where a revolver nestled.

Revelle realised the meaning of the movement.

"You hound!" he hissed. "You mean to sell me!"

Only an old woman in the house, and she—had not Benny said so?—was as deaf as a post.

It was the instinct of self-defence that had made Benny feel for his revolver. Those words, "The man who sells me will be signing his death-warrant at the same time!" were ringing in his ears.

"Stay where you are, Marquis, or by——"

The revolver was out of his pocket, but before he could bring it up level Revelle had leapt, had closed with him, one hand round his throat, the other gripping his revolver-wrist. Then, tightening his clutch round his throat, Revelle forced Benny backwards on to the table. Physically Benny was no match for him. He could only writhe in noiseless impotence, his face darkening, his eyes glaring up with a frightful expression of horror in their depths.

Then Revelle wrenched the revolver from him.

"Sell me, would you?" he hissed. The working of his livid face told that the barriers of self-control were broken down.

It had all happened in far less time than it has taken to describe.

"It does very much look like a row, Winton! Great Heaven!"

As Crump was whispering the words the two shadows seemed to become one. The double shadow swayed for a moment, then bent over the table. The next second the one shadow became two again. A shadow arm, the hand gripping something, rose and fell twice with a terrible rapidity. Then the shadow tragedy ceased. The light in the room had been extinguished.

Crump's brain had worked at lightning speed. If not murder, frightful mischief had been done. It would be impossible to gain access to the house without raising the alarm, either by knocking on the door or ringing, or breaking into the room through the window.

"Winton, get round to the back entrance!" whispered the little man. "Quick, leave the front door to me!"

Crump unbuttoned his coat. A police whistle was slung round his neck. What had happened meant a complete alteration of his plans. Winton had hurried off!

Click!

Crump glided swiftly through the garden-gate. The front door was being silently opened. A dark figure noiselessly and hurriedly issued.

Crump straightened up and barred the way.

"Seaton Revelle, *alias* James Balder, *alias* Signor Balderini, consider yourself under arrest!"

The figure reeled back. Crump's rather long-winded speech had been intentional. It had had the effect of a blow.

The next moment, the police-whistle jammed between his teeth, he was blowing a screaming note! And, as he blew, he flung himself upon Revelle.

The staggering words, the shrill scream of the whistle, had momentarily paralysed Revelle. He had left Benny in the dark room within, lying on the floor, his skull battered in with the butt of his own revolver. He had fancied himself rid of the man who would have sold him; fancied that there would be time to realise money on the stolen jewels, and get clear of the country before suspicion would fall upon him.

But the paralysis that fettered him was only momentary.

He grappled with Crump, and a second later was fighting like a desperate tiger, fighting to save his neck from the rope. He must get away, if it meant killing another man—the man who had twined his arms round him, who, though he battered down murderous blows on his down-bent head, was holding on with the grimness of death!

Revelle, in the prime of his life! Crump, who would never see sixty again! Yet the little grey-headed man had a lion's heart, and for all the blood streaming down and blinding him, he held on with a grip of steel!

Voices, footsteps were sounding out in the distance. Lights flashed from houses; windows were flung up.

Yet Revelle could not break away from the old man's grip. He tore, bit, and tripped in his horrible frenzy of desperation. It meant the rope, the hangman's rope for him!

He had smashed Crump down on to his knees; twice he drove his clenched fist into his face; but the iron grip of the old man's arms still held him!

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God bless you, Crump, for that grip! You have conquered, and your task is well-nigh done!

A rush of men, some helmeted. A babel of voices that swallows up the sharp snap of the handcuffs. Only then Crump relaxes his grip, and reels back, and is caught in a policeman's arms unconscious!

They took him handcuffed to the nearest police-station, Seaton Revelle, *alias* the Marquis, *alias* Signor Balderini, murderer, thief, and coward!

They bore Crump into the house. Doctors were sent for. In the room on the ground floor they found Benny Beard lying on the ground, his skull battered, but still breathing! Whilst one doctor attended to him, another bandaged up Crump's wounded head, and administered restoratives. The little man was scarcely recognisable; but it was not long before he recovered consciousness.

"Where's Winton?" he murmured.

The inspector stepped to his side.

"Revelle safely in custody?"

"Yes. But you——"

"Never mind me, Winton! The Normanhurst jewels will be found in the strong-room at the Hotel Royal. You had better get out a warrant for the arrest of Masters!"

The little man had spoken with difficulty, but the next moment he raised himself into a sitting position.

"And Faversham?"

"He's alive," whispered the inspector, "but the doctor says he's under sentence of death!"

Crump staggered to his feet, and stood for a moment, swaying like a drunkard.

"Winton, I should—should be obliged to you for the assistance of an arm. Things have gone altogether differently from what I expected. Thank you, Winton! Let us go to the dying man!"

They had carried Benny upstairs and laid him on a bed. They were moistening his lips with brandy when Crump was assisted into the room. Presently his eyelids flickered, then opened.

"Have you got him—the Marquis?" he breathed out faintly.

Crump and Inspector Winton were beside the bed now.

"Yes!" answered the little man.

Then he bent down over the bed.

"Benny," he whispered gently, "play the man, and make a clean breast of it—for the sake of an innocent man and the woman who loves him!"

"Yes, yes!" he whispered almost inaudibly. "Quick—for God's sake—write down what I'm going to say. I'm—going fast; but I can't die—with that on my soul! Brandy."

More brandy, and the dying man's vitality temporarily flickered up.

"I meant to have made—a—clean breast of it. I had written it down, but the Marquis will have destroyed it. Masters got rid of the stuff for us; but you'll find three of the diamonds in my watch-case. Oh, my God! Those dark eyes of hers! I knew that you'd never win your bet, Marquis!"

His mind was wandering; but, presently, consciousness again returned. In a hoarse whisper, sometimes scarcely audible, and speaking so slowly that it was possible to write down every word, he breathed out his confession. Nothing was left untold.

"I can face my God with an easier conscience now," he murmured, as with a shaking hand he scrawled a dying man's signature across the paper, "if I hadn't been a coward, I should have owned up long before. I—I should have liked to—have seen her. I—I should have liked to have looked into her eyes—and seen forgiveness there. Ask her—Esther—to forgive me my share!"

When next he spoke, he was wandering in his mind, imagining he was at Warham, taking part in the village concert, and once he broke out into song—"Oh, when I was single, oh, then." Then they gathered from his babblings that he fancied that he was standing before a judge, in the prisoner's dock, pleading for mercy.

Where Electricity Failed.

A young lady named Lucy Ann Weasenham, living in Third Terrace, Hope Street, Grimsby, was ordered by a doctor to have slight electric shocks daily with a view to cure her of anæmia, weakness, and St. Vitus's Dance. The treatment failed to cure, but Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, which were then tried, succeeded. To a *Grimsby Gazette* reporter Miss Weasenham said:—Anæmia so reduced me and robbed me of strength that I could not lift a cup! St. Vitus's Dance followed, and I was in a shocking plight. It was all due to excessive weakness, and when the electric treatment failed we turned, as a last hope, to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans. A course of this wonderful vegetable preparation brought renewed life to me. The anæmia left me, and as my nerves were strengthened the convulsive movement of my limbs ceased. My appetite improved, my strength returned, and in a few months I was once more restored to health." Bile Beans are a certain cure for anæmia, debility, indigestion, "summer-end fag," loss of appetite, all female ailments, constipation, piles, and headache. Of all chemists at one shilling and three-halfpence or two and nine, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119, London Wall, E.C., upon receipt of prices. Avoid all imitations.

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"Guilty, your Lordship! Guilty!" he whispered. "But have mercy, have mercy!"

And with these pleading words still clinging to his lips, Herbert Giles, *alias* the Tinker, *alias* Benny Beard, *alias* Mr. Faversham, crossed the threshold of Eternity.

For some little time a solemn silence reigned in the chamber of death. Then one of the doctors approached Crump.

"You ought to get to bed!" he whispered. "You are not in a fit state to be about!"

The little man, his head and face bandaged, was supporting himself again on Winton's arm. One eye alone was visible. He shook his head.

"There is still work to be done! Winton, you will see to matters here, I know. Railton should be arrested at once. Would one of you be good enough to hail me a cab!"

The doctor remonstrated with him; but the little man only shook his head, and remarked with a shadowy smile that he was remarkably tough for an old fellow, and that the gruelling he had received, severe though it was, would certainly not deter him from doing what was a sacred duty.

Having assisted him into a cab, Winton asked the little man where he wished to be driven to.

"The Hotel Royal!"

The cab rattled away.

"At last," said Crump to himself, "the end is in sight!"

JOY DOES NOT KILL.

It was late when Crump reached the Hotel Royal, and the uniformed porter stared hard at the strange, bandaged, dishevelled little man who ascended the steps none too steadily.

"Now, then," he said roughly, "you've made a mistake. This is an hotel, not hospital. And you—at your time of life! You ought to know better!"

"Young man, curb that tongue of yours. I'm fully aware that this is an hotel, and I am going in. Nor am I intoxicated. Appearances are sometimes deceitful."

"Here, don't lecture me! You don't go inside until you tell me your business!"

"I wish to see Mr. Mansfield. Be good enough to see that this card is delivered to him at once!"

The porter huffily took the card. A few moments later John Mansfield himself hurried into the entrance hall. Crump rose with some difficulty from the chair in which he had installed himself.

"Penworthy—Crump!" gasped the banker. "Great Heavens! But what has happened?"

"Good news, Mr. Mansfield!" cried the little man, his one visible eye twinkling like a star. "Good news! Before a week is out, Alec Scarsdale will be a free man!"

"Thank God!"

And the banker was violently wringing one of Crump's hands, the tears standing out in his eyes.

"But you? What's happened? You're injured?"

"Never mind me! Miss Mansfield!"

"Come!" cried the banker.

"Yes! But would you mind if I took your arm? I am—I am suffering from slight giddiness."

Esther had not retired to bed, but sat alone in the private sitting-room that her father had engaged. She was reading through again the pencilled note that she had received earlier in the evening, the note that Crump, for all the strain and anxiety upon him, had found time to send her. Her eyes were upon the words, "The end is looking very much nearer now. Courage, my dear young lady," when the door opened.

Her father entered. The look on his face made her spring to her feet with a low cry! She had read something in his eyes.

"Father?"

She only saw him, was not conscious of the little figure in the background, very much bandaged and leaning for support against the doorway. Crump's one visible eye was dim now.

"Father?"

"Yes," choked out the banker, and stretched out his arms.

A moment later he had folded his child in his arms.

A woman's cry of joy; a man's choking sob; then a silence.

Crump still stood on the threshold, his one eye shedding tears; then he quietly stole away.

"This is no place for me!" he whispered to himself.

He had reached the end of the corridor, when he staggered very badly indeed, and when, a few moments later, John Mansfield, missing the little man to whom everything was owed, hurried out in search of him, he found Crump lying in the corridor unconscious!

* * * * *

Convict 35 looked up wearily as his cell door was flung open. They had sent him back from the prison infirmary as fit again for punishment diet and punishment labour.

His fetters clanked as he rose mechanically to his feet, and stood to attention. His grey eyes had lost their lustre now. There was a pathetic bend about his head, with its grey hairs. Nothing surprised him now. He merely stared dazedly at the little group of men, headed by the governor of the gaol, who had entered. Perhaps they had come to tell him that he was about to be transferred to some other prison; but nothing mattered now.

He was vaguely conscious of the fact that the governor held some papers in his hand.

"Alec Scarsdale," he said, and Scarsdale was vaguely surprised at being addressed, not by his number, but by his name, "Alec Scarsdale, I have good news for you!"

A shadowy, weary smile played round the corners of Convict 35's mouth.

"Owing to certain revelations, it has been proved that you are innocent of the charge on which you have been imprisoned, and I have the pleasure to inform you that His Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant you a free pardon!"

Free pardon, forsooth, for a man who was innocent, who had done nothing, who had suffered the tortures of the wicked—but let it pass! These things, in time, will pass away!

A shriek, a wild half-laugh rang out, and Convict 35 fell to the ground in a dead faint.

But joy does not kill!

(The conclusion of this story appears in next Tuesday's issue. The first instalment of our powerful new serial "A FOE IN THE FAMILY," also appears next week. You must not miss it.)

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Discovery of a Rational Treatment for Deafness.

A glance through the medical literature of the last twenty years reveals to the close observer a remarkable diversity of opinion among aurists as to what constitutes the proper method of treatment for deafness and diseases of the ear. Some authorities recommend, in obstinate cases, cutting away the drumhead of the ear, other aural surgeons are emphatic in saying that the results obtained are too uncertain to justify such severe measures. Another class of medical men base the treatment of deafness almost entirely on the application of medicated vapours forced through the nose into the middle ear by way of the Eustachian tube, but it is strange to find these same aurists acknowledging, in their writings on this subject, that it is doubtful if medication applied in this way can reach the seat of the disease which causes defective hearing.

In the midst of all this doubt and uncertainty there is, fortunately, the record of the discovery of a rational method. The Drouet Treatment, of treating deafness and ear diseases, which depends upon the scientific fact that the skin possesses the property of absorbing certain drugs applied to its surface and of conveying them by means of its underlying blood vessels to the adjacent diseased parts. In this method a plaster containing the necessary medicines is applied behind the ear and the medication, being absorbed by the skin, penetrates to the middle ear and inner ear, where the curative effects are exerted. To this simple procedure is subjoined, according to the merits of each individual case, such antiseptic medication for the ear, nose, or throat as may be needed.

Like all innovations, this treatment has received the severest criticisms, but, notwithstanding such opposition, ten years' test of the method has given results so emphatically successful that the usual medical opinions on the curability of deafness have been completely overthrown. In the long list of cases which, after being pronounced incurable by aural surgeons, have been reported cured by the Drouet Treatment, there are so many instances of recovery of hearing in advanced age, after fifteen, twenty, or even thirty years of defective hearing, and in the face of the worst forms of ear disease, that the victim of deafness finds renewed hopes.

Those who wish to thoroughly understand the Drouet method of Treatment will find a full description in a Special number of the "Journal for the Deaf," the Editor of this paper having written a series of popular articles on this subject, with which are embodied the details of a large number of cured cases. With this Special number is published a supplement containing a record of upwards of forty cases of the deafness and diseases of the ear, nose, and throat cured by the Drouet Treatment during the past month. To obtain a free copy of the "Journal" and Supplement it is only necessary to address the Editor, 72, Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. With the "Journal" will also be enclosed a Report Form, which will enable anyone to obtain free advice and instructions for applying the Drouet Treatment at home.

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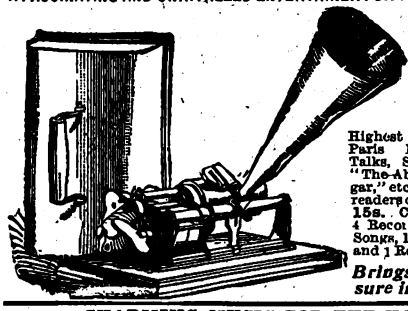

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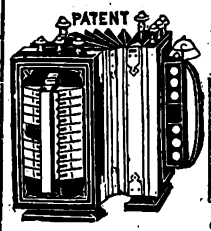

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Lawrie's Difficulties.

"Lawrie" is deeply in love with a girl who is engaged to another man. This man, is, in "Lawrie's" judgment, quite unfitted to be her husband, and the whole affair is, in fact, simply an infatuation which he thinks will, in the course of time evaporate. Meanwhile, how should "Lawrie" act so as to win the girl from the probabilities of an unhappy marriage and get her to return his own affection?

* * * *

"Lawrie" must not, of course, interfere in the attachment of the girl. She herself may see qualities for admiration in the other man which would very naturally escape the jealous eye of "Lawrie." Let him be as attentive and nice to her as his position as an outsider will permit, and if in time the affair does come to an end as he suspects, he should be ready to assume the *rôle* of suitor on the grounds of sincere friendship, to which a girl crossed in a passionate love would probably be only too ready to turn for refuge.

❦❦❦

Wife or Friends?

"Josh" is married, and some old college friends have been recently staying at his house. In order to be agreeable with them, he has spent several nights sitting up with them playing cards, while his wife has been downstairs alone. On rejoining her after the friends have gone to bed, he has found her very disconsolate at being left alone. Do I not think it is unreasonable for her to expect him to leave his friends to entertain themselves?

* * * *

I do not think much of the manners of men who, staying in the house of a married man, do not conform with their duties to their hostess. Neither do I respect very much the wisdom of "Josh" in giving his friends first place, and his affectionate wife second. He would do well not to repeat such conduct, as I have known of cases, when a wife, exasperated by neglect on the part of her husband, has left him altogether to go and live with relatives. You know the proverb about the fury of the "woman scorned."

❦❦❦

A Case for Patience.

"G. H." has a sweetheart who continually suffers from the "blues." Often when he meets her she is silent and capricious, grumbles at the smallest thing, and gets quarrelsome and uncommunicative. "G. H." has grown rather tired of it. Do I recommend him to grow cool to her in order to bring her to proper behaviour when with him, or how should he act?

* * * *

The girl is probably more a subject for a doctor than anyone else. She is very likely in a bad state of health, and this is one of the effects on her. Besides that, perhaps you have overstepped the mark in your devotion to her, and she acts in this way simply to annoy you, knowing that you would never be harsh with her. I should take no notice of her moods, save to correct her when she shows herself to be quite unreasonable. There is no known cure for a woman's caprices.

An Outcast of Love.

"What am I to do?" writes "Ada E." "I took rather a fancy to a man some time ago, and we corresponded and sometimes met. I thought he was well to do from his manner and dress. I have since learnt that he is not on speaking terms with his family, and has no occupation or means besides a small allowance. Ought I to encourage him further, or even to continue the acquaintance, seeing that he does not appear to be going the way to work to get on in the world?"

* * * *

Certainly you should not even consider any attentions from him, save that it is understood between you that they have no serious meaning. There is no harm in your knowing this or any other young man, but you should clearly infer that you know your own mind as to the kind of man you wish to marry, and let him know that unless he has some serious plan for making his way in life, you could not even think of an engagement. I am assuming that you are not head-over-ears in love with him, from the judicial way in which you write.

❦❦❦

What is a "Good Time"?

"Ettie" some time ago met an Edinburgh man at a dance in London. They enjoyed a mild flirtation, which however was not serious. One of his last words were: "If you ever come to Edinburgh, I hope to see you and give you a good time." "Ettie" is, as a matter of fact, going on a visit to Scotland next month, and would like to know if it would be proper etiquette for her to let this gentleman know. If so, how could he "give her a good time" and yet keep within the bounds of conventionality?

* * * *

I assume "Ettie" is going to stay with friends in Scotland. When there, she might mention that she has a gentleman friend in Edinburgh. The next thing would be to ascertain whether her friends would like him to call and be introduced, in which case "Ettie" should drop him a line saying that her hostess would be very pleased to see Mr. —— to tea, say, on a certain date. What happens after this should be perfectly regular. If the gentleman should carry out his promise to "give her a good time" by securing seats for theatres, or arranging an excursion, "Ettie" could avail herself of his invitation. All must depend on the extent to which "Ettie" thinks the man is serious, and how far she values his continued acquaintance.

❦❦❦

The Interesting Friend.

"J. W. C." is very fond of a young lady, and has taken several walks with her. On some occasions when he has met her, she has had a lady friend with her who has not seemed to like the idea of her leaving to go with "J. W. C.," and has shown this in her manner. The result has been that the former young lady has at times declined to walk with "J. W. C." for fear of offending her friend. Should she consider her friend's feelings before those of my correspondent?"

* * * *

Certainly the young lady has a perfect right to consider her friend's feelings. It shows a very nice characteristic on her part that she should be so considerate towards a friend as to forego her own pleasure rather than slight her in any way. If you are engaged to the girl, and she is fond of you, naturally she will lose no opportunity of trying to get with you alone. If she does not take the proper steps to do so, she cannot be particularly fond of you. It is her affair as to whether or not she neglects her girl friend for you. There is no course for you to take except to assume that if she returns your love she will not allow anyone to stand in the way, and therefore to leave the question of disposing of her friend to her own devices.

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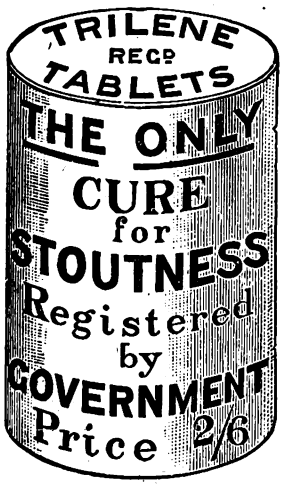

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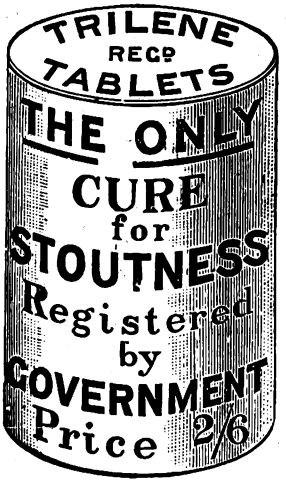

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Bisehoim Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18.b. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier,"

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a wonderful of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER, of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

Cures in Ten Minutes
Never Fails!
Nothing "Like It" or "As Good"

KAPUTINE

The Safe Remedy for

HEADACHE & NEURALGIA

Supplied for use in the Field Hospitals of H.I.M. THE KING OF GREECE, the Red Cross Society in the South African War, the Anglo-Chinese Hospitals, &c., &c.

Recommended by many medical men, including Dr. Alexander, M.D., Dr. Thompson, M.D., Dr. Boyd Williams, M.D., &c., &c.

There is no similar preparation, nor anything as good.

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KAPUTINE LTD., Huddersfield.

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"WAKE UP, ENGLAND."

DON'T PURCHASE FOREIGN POLISHES.

"MATCHLESS"

METAL POLISH.

POLISH, TINS & BOXES ARE ALL MADE AT OUR OWN WORKS IN LIVERPOOL.

By PURCHASING this POLISH you are Supporting BRITISH TRADE.

Should you have any difficulty in obtaining supplies, two **6½d.** Tins will be sent Post Free (with address of nearest Dealer) on receipt of **1/-**

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13/- Cash, or **14/6** on Monthly Payments.

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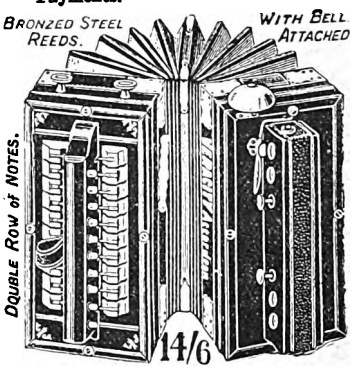
TEN Special Double Keys, best nickel fittings, two Stops, 8-fold Double Bellows, with nickel Corner Protectors, two Bass Keys, sweet-toned Bell, Black Ebonised Case, beautifully finished. Suitable for learner or professional. Size, 10in. by 10½in. by 5in. Safely packed and despatched, post paid, in card box; price **13/-** cash, or **14/6** on our monthly payment system.



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First send 2/6, and **MASTERS' Famous 14/6 ACCORDEON** will be sent you on approval. IF satisfactory, you complete purchase in monthly payments of 3/- each, but our Nett-Cash-with-order price is **13/-** only.

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PUREST OF THE PURE. Sold Everywhere.

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Two dozen No. 1, at **1/-**.
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POST FREE.

May be obtained from all Underclothing Houses and Chemists

"The MENE" SANITARY TOWELS

Are Superior to all makes for Cleanliness, Comfort and Economy.

A FREE SAMPLE

To any lady naming this paper to

MISS HAYNES,

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"A FOE IN THE FAMILY," OUR SPLENDID NEW SERIAL, STARTS TO-DAY.

SHORT STORIES.

No. 719.] Week ending October 11th, 1902. [One Penny.

She did not see that poison was poured into Lord Ilden's flask.

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(An Incident from our Next Serial. See Inside.)

Cures in Ten Minutes
Never Fails!
Nothing "Like It" or "As Good"

KAPUTINE

The Safe Remedy for

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Supplied for use in the Field Hospitals of H.I.M. The King of Greece, the Red Cross Society in the South African War, the Anglo-Chinese Hospitals, &c., &c.

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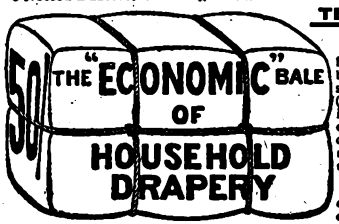

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SEND us your name and address, and you will receive Free on approval a4 of our Silver Aluminium 1903 Novelty Thimbles. Each one is prettily embossed with the inscription "Remember Me," "Forget-me-not." They are lighter and tougher than silver, never tarnish, and will last a lifetime. One million sold already.

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Sell the thimbles at 2d. each, making 4/- altogether, which forward to us, and we will send you at once the Guaranteed Timekeeper or other Presents of High-class Jewellery you have earned, and which you can select from our list sent with the "Sell-at-Sight" Thimbles, and we will also tell you how you can make a regular income of £2 10s. per week. Write to-day and we send to-morrow.

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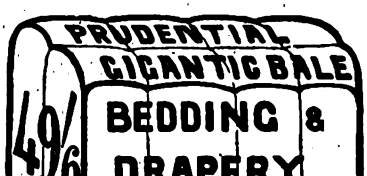
DRUNKENNESS

CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.



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SULPHOLINE LOTION,

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

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ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently by taking TRILENE TABLETS (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: *"Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."*

Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE CO., Sole Proprietor 66 Pinsbury Pavement, London.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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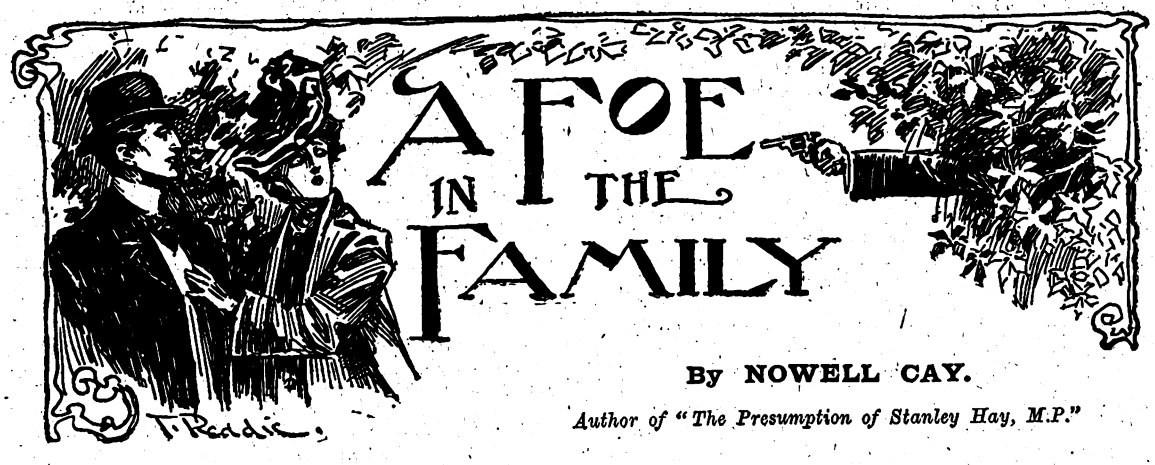
Short Stories.

No. 719. For the Week Ending October 11th, 1902. One Penny.

BELOW IS THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF OUR SPLENDID NEW SERIAL.

SEE THE NEW COMPETITION ON PAGE 461.



By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

CHAPTER I.

The Lady of the Bank Notes.

"You have lost something?" said Lord Ilden, and at the softly-spoken inquiry a pair of violet eyes looked up in startled surprise. Their owner had been wandering along the narrow woodland path with her gaze downcast and her attention so completely absorbed by her search that she had not even noticed the approach of a stranger.

Lord Ilden, coming home in the dusk with his gun on his shoulder, had enjoyed ample opportunity of admiring the gracefulness of the approaching figure. But in spite of his admiration the face turned up to his, surprised him by its soft, delicate beauty, and, although the ladies of his acquaintance were wont to complain that he was the least impressionable of young men, he coloured slightly as the violet eyes met his.

"Perhaps I can help you," he added, "if you will tell me what it is."

She answered without shyness, although her face was a shy one. It seemed to him that her anxiety left no room in her mind for any other emotion.

"I have lost two five-pound notes. I was careless enough to put them in the pocket of my dress, and I am afraid that I must have drawn them out with my handkerchief."

"When did you notice your loss?" he asked.

"About half-an-hour ago just at the end of the path. I have been searching here ever since." Her prettily modulated voice trembled slightly, and Lord Ilden sighed. He was not fond of the society of women, even when they were very young and very pretty, as this forlorn maiden was, and he felt that he had committed himself. Her evident acceptance of his help made it necessary that he should search up and down the coppice with her until her property was found.

"You think that you lost the notes on this path, then?" he asked.

"Yes; I am sure that I did not touch my pocket till I got here, and I had been walking up and down the path for some time when I missed them."

It occurred to him that this was rather a curious proceeding; but he was not an inquisitive man, and the only duty before him was to find her lost property.

"And when did you last notice the bank-notes safe in your pocket?"

"When I left the Rectory. I have been governess to Mrs. Haydon's children, and the ten pounds was my salary for half a year."

"Indeed!" said Ilden, wondering that anybody should work half a year for such a small sum. "Then, of course, it would not do for you to lose the money. Are you sure that you did not drop it in the road?"

"No; I have been back once to the house. If I lost the notes on the highway somebody must have picked them up. But I think they must be here."

Once more her voice trembled.

"If so, they are safe till to-morrow," said Ilden. "It is almost too dark to see now. Would it not be better to resume your search in the morning?"

"I am going away very early. I must find my money this evening."

Ilden sighed resignedly.

"Then we must make the best use of what little light there is. I will walk this way, if you will walk that. How were the notes folded?"

He started towards the road with a full description, so far as she could give it, and in less than ten minutes rejoined her at the point where they had parted, holding something between his fingers.

"I thought that I should manage to find them if they were in the coppice," he said, handing her two crumpled-up bank notes, and her face flushed with radiant relief.

"How shall I ever thank you? It was all the money that I have in the world," she cried impulsively, as she unfolded the crisp sheets.

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Ilden watched her uneasily, glad that the gathering darkness made her scrutiny a merely formal one.

"You must be more careful with your property in future," he said, perfunctorily, and she answered with a pretty little laugh of relief:

"You may be quite sure that I shall. I do not know what I should have done but for your kindness. I thought I had searched the path completely. Where did you find the notes?"

"Oh, quite close to the road," he said, quickly. "Good evening."

The girl held out her hand rather diffidently.

"I should like to know who it is that I am thanking. I shall never forget how much I owe to your kindness."

Ilden glanced at the face, radiant now with gratitude, and felt more than ever uneasy.

"I would rather not tell you, if you don't mind. If you should ever guess the reason, please oblige me by giving my refusal its full significance."

He had accompanied her to the end of the path where it joined the road by way of a kissing-gate, and bid her "good-bye" there. He seemed anxious to cut short her renewed thanks and get away.

But when her graceful figure had disappeared round a curve of the road, he was in no haste to resume his interrupted journey to the house. Instead he began searching the path again, more earnestly than before, stopping first to discover in which direction the wind was blowing, and entering the coppice on the leeward side of the path.

"If she found it out, it would be the best way out of the difficulty," he said to himself.

Among the young firs of the coppice it was too dark for any search to have much chance of success, but Ilden was a believer in his own luck, and a certain cynical doubt in his own mind made him unwilling to postpone the search till morning.

It was not until the rapidly-increasing gloom made his obstinacy ridiculous that he ceased to peer among the fallen pine needles, and he was turning to regain the path when the sight of something white at his feet made him stoop with the idea that success had attended his efforts just at the moment when he was admitting himself beaten.

He was loth to relinquish the idea when the feel of the ball of paper he had picked up suggested disappointment, and he put down his gun to strike a vesta and examine it more closely.

Yes, it was only a torn envelope which somebody had crushed into a ball and thrown away among the firs as they passed through the coppice, and the young man was about to toss it back when he was struck by a coincidence. The name and address upon it were his own.

He wondered how it could have come there when he certainly had no recollection of having thrown it away.

A second examination made him realise that he had never even received it. The writing, a prettily-formed woman's hand, was unfamiliar to him. The postmark showed that it had been posted at Lallerton, a place of which he had never heard.

And yet there was the address written plainly enough: "Lord Ilden, care of Hon. Jasper Ilden, Pennybrook Hall, Yorkshire," and the date on the postmark showed that it had been dispatched only three days ago.

Ilden knitted his brows in perplexity.

"I wonder if the inclosure is here among the firs too," he said to himself, but it was plainly too dark now to think of searching on such a slender chance, and he was putting the mysterious envelope carefully away in his pocket and deciding on a twofold search in the morning, when a sound made him stop abruptly, listening, and peering into the obscurity around him. It seemed to him as if he had heard a stealthy movement among the trees, and the remembrance of two recent incidents that might easily have proved tragic ones, made his attention instantly alert.

But in this case it seemed as if he had allowed fancy to play tricks with his imagination, for tensely as he listened he could hear no repetition of the sound. The coppice in its veil of darkness was as silent as death.

"It was nothing," said Ilden to himself, and he put a cigarette between his lips and struck a vesta to light it, preparatory to shouldering his gun again, and resuming his interrupted tramp to the house beyond the coppice.

But the next moment he had blown out the match hurriedly. For, as if some hidden foe had waited for its light to show his exact position, a bullet had come whizzing past his head to bury itself in the tree behind.

Ilden dropped promptly on one knee, and reaching out for his gun got it ready to fire back if the shot were repeated. The attack had been so unexpected that he had only the vaguest idea of the direction from which it had come, and to fire at random would only be to discover his own position to the hidden enemy.

His face, as he waited, expressed no surprise, only a keen intentness. One would have thought, indeed, from the quickness with which he had accepted the position that the attack on his life had been expected. If it had succeeded, his unseen assailant, whoever it might be, would no doubt have pleaded an accident. A man may fire at a stray bird in a coppice without imagining that a peer of the realm is wandering among the trees to receive the bullet from his gun.

Ilden could easily imagine the excuse, but he was determined that if a mistake was to be made it should be his. His fingers twitched to pull the trigger, and when five minutes had gone by without a sound or movement, he struck another match with his left hand against a tree, and held it at arm's length above him.

But the challenge was not accepted. Either his assailant had gone or feared to fire again after putting him on his guard, and after waiting another five minutes Ilden rose and stretched himself.

As he did so the kissing-gate at the end of the path clicked. Somebody was entering it from the road, and the young man stood to await their arrival. He was far from being a nervous man, but it seemed to him that it would be just as well to have a companion through the coppice.

The footsteps were approaching hastily, and he was able to distinguish now the figure of a lady approaching. He was scarcely surprised to find it to be the lady of the lost bank-notes. From the moment of leaving her he had been haunted by an uneasy fear that she might come back.

"Oh, I am so glad to find you," she exclaimed impulsively, as she recognised his tall figure in the gloom, "I was afraid that you had gone."

Ilden glanced uneasily over his shoulder.

"Let us get out on the road, and you shall tell me why you are so flatteringly eager to see me."

"I have brought you back your bank-notes."

"Mine?" he said, uneasily.

"Yes, you gave them to me. It was very, very kind of you, but——"

"What makes you think that I should have been so very deceitful?" he interrupted hopelessly, and smiled grimly to himself when he found all chance of subterfuge at an end.

"Because mine were never lost," said the governess. "I found them in my room when I got back to the Rectory, although I felt so sure that I had put them in my pocket."

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Ilden laughed, although he was feeling very uncomfortable at the exposure of his artifice.

"Then I am afraid that I cannot attempt to defend myself. But—well, the money seemed so important to you, and it made no difference to me. I happened to have the two notes in my pocket—a tempting coincidence, and, besides, I thought that I should very probably find yours in the morning."

"You are the kindest man that I have ever known," she said, with her heart in her voice, "and you would not tell me your name for fear that I should find out the notes were not mine and return them. I may know it now?"

"If you wish. I am Lord Ilden."

They had reached the gate now, but this time the young man did not turn. The coppice had become dangerous, and he had already determined to take the longer way by the road.

"Lord Ilden," she repeated, and the note of interest made him ask a question.

"You have heard my name before?"

"Yes, my brother used to speak of you a good deal. You were his hero at Rugby. Perhaps you remember Gerald Courthorpe?"

"Poor Courthorpe? Of course I do, and I was very much cut up when I heard of his death. And you are really his sister?"

His languid voice had suddenly become animated. He had been looking forward with resignation to the prospect of bearing her company as far as the Rectory and listening to her disturbing thanks all the way. Now the journey became all too short in his eyes, for he had been fond of Courthorpe, and the fact of his sister being compelled to accept a position as governess, and feel the loss of ten pounds as a tragedy, was dramatic enough to rouse all his interest. Courthorpe, when he knew him, had passed as the son of a very wealthy man, and he was eager, if he could, to ask an explanation of the change.

But Miss Courthorpe was wasting time by talking about himself.

"Your kindness to-night is just what I should have expected from you after all that Gerald told me about you," she said. "All his recollections were of your generosity; a generosity of which he said that you always seemed half ashamed. I remember how impressed I was as a little girl by the story of your expulsion from Rugby. You knew that the fault was another boy's—your cousin's—who had deliberately schemed to throw the blame on you; and yet you would not tell. Gerald and I thought it was noble."

"And I owed it to your brother that the truth was found out, and that I was recalled, while my cousin Percival got his deserts. He was a capital friend, your poor brother; and it is very interesting to meet his sister. Let me see, your name is Florence, is it not? But you said that you were staying at the Rectory here. I hope you have not lost your father as well as your brother?"

He had noticed for the first time that she was wearing mourning, which at this date could not be for her brother.

"He died nine months ago," she said. "I thought you would have seen it in the papers. He lost all his money, and the shock killed him."

"I am very sorry," said Ilden, very sincerely. "I have been abroad and heard nothing. How very sad. You are quite alone in the world, are you not?"

"Yes. Mrs. Haydon, who knew my mother many years ago, very kindly gave me the position of governess; but——" She hesitated. "I am leaving her and going to a fresh situation to-morrow."

Ilden winced at the word "situation." It seemed to him an outrageous one for the lips of a lady whose brother had been his friend. It seemed more outrageous still that he, with so much more money than he wanted, could do nothing to make the trumpery twenty pounds a year for which she worked ridiculous and unneccessary. But what could he do? Plainly nothing, and he remained silent, while Florence ran on, talking with a matter-of-fact simplicity which seemed to him heroic, about the difficulty she had encountered in finding a situation at all.

He was racking his brains to think how he could help her, and had arrived at no solution of the problem when they approached the Rectory gate to find a pompous and fiery-faced little lady on the look out there. Her sharp voice, which was none the less acid when she saw the governess accompanied by a masculine escort, sounded shrilly before they reached her, announcing the lateness of the hour in indignant tones, and the girl bid Ilden good-bye hurriedly to join her. He could hear her employer's voice raised in querulous complaint as they disappeared up the garden path together, and he went on his way feeling more than ever concerned for her.

It was not until he was entering the dark drive which led to Pennybrook Hall that he remembered the attempt which had been made on his life and allowed his thoughts to return to his own affairs which the attempt had made engrossing.

"That makes the third," he said to himself. "The game becomes exciting."

CHAPTER II.

"Three Attempts have been Made on my Life."

Pennybrook Hall where Lord Ilden was staying, was the much mortgaged and encumbered residence of his father's step-brother, the Honourable Jasper Ilden, and was at present the scene of a family reunion. After the death of his father, Ilden had travelled abroad for a couple of years. Now on his return, a round of visits had ended in his stay at his uncle's, where he found himself surrounded by his relatives. For the house party included his other paternal uncle, the Honourable Rupert, with his family. Not that Ilden found much pleasure in their society. His host was a good-natured dipsomaniac, who seemed intent on drinking himself to death as rapidly as possible, and his wife whom he had taken off the stage was a vulgar and violent-tempered woman, who had not the grace to conceal her jealousy of her guest. She seemed to him unable to lose sight of the fact that but for his existence she would herself be Lady Ilden of Ilden Castle, and she discoursed openly on the injustice of the laws of inheritance which passed on a man's property and title to his son instead of his brother.

Rupert, the younger of his father's half-brothers, was a taciturn and reserved man who always seemed to his nephew a little "uncanny." His manner indeed suggested that strain of insanity which had discovered itself in his grandfather's second wife, the mother of Jasper and Rupert, but not, he was glad to think, of his own father. Of the Honourable Rupert's two sons, the eldest was the "Cousin Percival" whose unscrupulousness and cunning had gone so near to ruining Ilden's career at Rugby. A man of Lord Ilden's own age, and bearing no small resemblance to him, Percival Ilden had shown from his boyhood an over-ruling jealousy and dislike of the cousin who possessed all that his own ambition craved. His brother Grant being five years younger had never been Ilden's contemporary at college, and was comparatively a stranger to him. His cousin's only objection to him was that he wore his hair long and wrote poetry.

Between them came a sister who had persistently made love to her cousin, but during his absence abroad had prudently accepted the offer of a baronet. She and her husband, Sir Charles Barton, were included in the house-

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party, and Lady Barton had already told her cousin in confidence that her marriage was a mistake, and that her husband was a bear. The young man had shown himself very sympathetic, and Jane Barton's friendliness did not lessen his distaste for the society of his father's relatives.

Of his mother's relatives, on the contrary, he was very fond, and his stay at Pennybrook Hall would have been less bearable than it was but for the presence among the guests of his maternal aunt Lady Mary Hay and her daughter Catherine. Catherine and he had always been the best of friends, and her friendship had always been the more pleasing to him because, unlike Lady Barton, his Cousin Catherine had always treated him like a brother.

They were all seated with the rest of the guests round the long dining-table when Lord Ilden entered a few minutes late for dinner, and he glanced round at the faces of his father's relatives with a keen interest. Neither of his uncles gave any sign that they noticed his entrance, but it seemed to him that his cousin Percival had been watching the door for him, and noticed his arrival with some emotion either of annoyance or relief.

"This is the first time that I have ever known you unpunctual," he said across the table as Ilden took his seat.

"Yes, I have had an adventure," said his cousin, watching his face closely.

"Indeed? Nothing tragic, I hope?"

Ilden laughed easily.

"Of course not. What makes you think that anything tragic could happen at Pennybrook?" he said, and Percival bit his lip.

"An adventure generally suggests danger to one's life or one's heart, and everybody agrees that your heart is quite invulnerable. But tell us the adventure."

"It took place in the fir coppice," said Ilden, still watching him, "and concerns a damsel in distress and a mysterious discovery, but I don't think that I will tell it."

"That is too bad," put in Catherine Hay, "after raising our curiosity."

His quiet smile promised that her curiosity should be satisfied later, but he had no intention of telling any of the story at table.

His hostess had pricked up her ears at the mention of a young lady in connection with her nephew's unusual want of punctuality. The fear of his marrying was an abiding one with her, which she had not the tact to conceal.

"If George is wise he will fight shy of damsels in distress," she said, "they always turn out designing cats. Is not that so, Jasper?"

Her husband, thus appealed to, gulped down a glass of port.

"Never knew a woman that wasn't."

Jane Barton took up the cudgels on behalf her sex, and so the conversation drifted.

Ilden took no interest in it until Mrs. Jasper made an announcement.

"This is Percival's last meal with us. He has discovered that he must leave us to-night."

"A rather sudden decision, is it not?" he asked, and his cousin seemed to resent the question.

"I told Uncle Jasper more than a week ago that I should probably be leaving to-night," he said shortly.

His uncle did not remember it, and Ilden became thoughtful.

He would have very much liked to know the reason of his cousin's abrupt departure, but he asked no question.

The thoughtfulness had not left his face when, after dinner, he left the table early and made his way to Catherine Hay's side in the drawing-room.

"I want your advice, Cathie, if you can give me ten minutes all to myself."

"Certainly. Is it about the damsel in distress?"

"No. She must wait. It is about myself."

"Which may be the same thing. Shall we walk in the garden? It is quite warm."

Ilden hesitated.

"No, I don't think I will risk the garden to-night. Come into the library."

"That sounds very serious," she said with a laugh, and Ilden answered half humourously:

"Oh, it *is* serious, as you will find out when we have our talk. Prepare your mind for something very startling."

They were crossing the room as he spoke and at the door met Grant Ilden who had followed his cousin from the table only a moment behind. The poet's handsome, byronic face had darkened into a frown as he stood by for them to pass.

"I am afraid that my dear cousin Grant is not fond of me," said Ilden, lightly, "The looks he gives me are not friendly ones."

Catherine only smiled. Her face was a plain one butit was very pleasing, and when she smiled she looked almost pretty.

Ilden noticed the fact as something new. It had not occurred to him before to think of his cousin's looks. To-night he was half-consciously summing up her physical attractions. They were certainly not so great as those of many girls he had met—of Florence Courthorpe, for example, but for all that she was certainly the nicest girl he had ever known intimately.

"Do you consider me a fanciful or imaginative man at all, Cathie?" he asked when they were in the library, and his cousin shook her head.

"Not in the least, George. If you have a fault it is that you are too sensible and matter-of-fact."

"No, I do not think that I am morbidly imaginative, and if I am not—well, somebody is having a very good try to make Uncle Jasper the seventh Baron Ilden."

Catherine opened her eyes.

"What do you mean, George?"

"That three deliberate attempts have been made on my life during the last month. It sounds as though I were joking, doesn't it? Somehow one can never imagine such a thing as possible outside a novel. But the thing is getting very plain, and, after all, I suppose the idea would never get into the novels if it did not occur now and then in real life. It sounds so ridiculous that I have not breathed a word to a soul of what I think; but I should like to know what you make of it. If you'll sit down, I'll tell you exactly what happened."

"It certainly seems incredible!" cried the girl, her sympathetic face as grave and impressed as he could wish. "Who could possibly wish for your death?"

"That is one of the points which I want to discuss with you when I have told you the facts," said Ilden, who was always methodical. "At the beginning of the month I happened to be at Ilden for a few days, preparatory to my visit to Kirby. One day I was riding out alone there, when, in one of the lanes, my horse was frightened by the report of a gun behind the hedge. I was riding with a loose rein, and was lighting a cigarette at the moment, and I was nearly thrown; but it did not occur to me that I had been fired at. I noticed no bullet, and I put it down to the act of some idiot who was frightening birds in the fields. My horse had bolted, and, when I got him under control, I did not think of going back. I should have thought nothing more about it, but for what happened afterwards You know that at Kirby one of the keepers was shot in the arm when we were all out potting at the birds."

"Yes, and nobody could decide whose fault it was. You do not mean to say——"

"That it was not the fault of any of the shooting party, and that the shot was meant for me. Marston, the keeper, and I were at the back behind everybody, and the shot came from behind us. And what is more, if it had not found a billet in Marston's forearm it would have had a very good chance of my heart. He had just stretched out

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his arm to hand me some cartridges, and the fact probably saved my life. But I did not realise that it was a deliberate attempt till afterwards, and I have not suggested it to anybody till now. I imagined that some of the fellows might be straggling behind in the next field. It was after the bullet had been extracted and they found it was of a different pattern from any we were using that the thing became mysterious. At Kirby they have decided that it was fired by some hidden poacher who owed Marston a grudge, and I left the matter undecided in my own mind until this evening. As I was coming home through the fir coppice in the dusk, a shot was fired deliberately at me and missed me by about three inches. Luckily the fellow, whoever he may be, seems a poor shot. I should just like three shots at him under the same conditions. I do not think that he would trouble me again. But if he goes on practising at this rate he will be getting a bull's-eye before long."

His light tone did nothing to lessen her consternation. Her plain little face had turned quite white.

"It is terrible," she cried. "And you have never seen who your foe is?"

"No, that is the nuisance. Each time I have been quite unprepared, and to-night is the first time that I have ever realised that the shot was meant for me at the moment, or thought of looking for the gentleman who fired it. And to-night I had no great chance. You see the fellow had an idea of my position and I had none of his, so I could not go searching around without giving him odds."

"And you cannot guess who it is? You cannot have injured anybody?"

"No, I can't remember that I have ever injured anybody."

"Not even unintentionally while you were abroad, some Corsican or Spaniard, or Hindoo? They are always said to be so vindictive."

Ilden laughed.

"You are thinking of the tales you have read. I ought according to them to have robbed a Hindoo temple, or paid an innocent compliment to a jealous Spaniard's wife. But I am afraid that I have not done a single romantic thing during my travels. No, seriously, I feel quite sure that it cannot be revenge for anything I have done. My conscience is quite clear."

"Then why should anyone possibly want to kill you? What motive can anybody have?"

Ilden's eyes met hers suggestively.

"What do you think?"

"I can't think. How could anybody benefit by your death—except——"

She stopped, staring at him with horror-struck eyes. "You do not think——"

Ilden shrugged his shoulders.

"One has to find some motive. Of course I should not mention my suspicion to anybody else. But I know you can be trusted Cathie to keep it to yourself, and I want to talk it over with an unprejudiced person like yourself. And to speak quite openly, I cannot see any possible motive for these attempts except the inheritance."

"You mean that your death would give your uncle Jasper a title, and relieve him from all his money difficulties."

"That is certainly true, but I do not think uncle Jasper has anything to do with it himself. He would not take the trouble. But, unfortunately, Uncle Jasper is far from being the only person who would benefit by my disappearance from the scene. Somebody told me jocularly at Kirby that all the Jews would be glad to see my name in the obituary column."

"The Jews?"

"The money-lenders. They have not much chance of getting back all they have advanced to Uncle Jasper unless he comes into the estate. As a little chap I was very delicate, and all my brothers died in their infancy. So his expectations were worth something. I have defrauded his creditors by growing up strong and healthy."

"And you think that they would try to take your life?" she asked anxiously, and Ilden shrugged his shoulders again.

"Who knows? They are supposed to do anything for money, and they are taking very little risk. And at the rate he is going on our host is likely to kill himself in less than a year, so one can understand their being impatient. Well?"

Catherine had uttered an exclamation.

"I was thinking of something I overheard a few nights ago," she said hesitatingly. "There can be no harm in repeating it when your life is in so much danger. I was passing Mr. Jasper's room and heard his wife evidently in a temper. She does not care who hears her when she is angry, and I could not avoid catching these words as I passed: 'You don't care. But I do, for if you die before him I shall be plain Mrs. Ilden all my life.' I imagined at the time that she was remonstrating with him on the way in which he lives, and the indifference he shows to his health."

"As she probably was, I scarcely think that even Mrs. Jasper would plot against my life at the top of her voice, although she is not noted for her prudence. Still, it shows that she is another person who has calculated the benefits which would accrue from my death. Let us tot them up before we consider which of them is likely to let the wish affect their affection. We have Uncle Jasper, his wife, and creditors, the last an indefinite army. Then, of course, Uncle Rupert could look forward very confidently to succeeding his brother before long if I were out of the way, and both Percival and Grant would benefit by the change."

"Not Grant," she objected, quickly.

"He would have an increased allowance and be 'the Honourable.' I do not know whether he has any desire for the distinction, but Jane tells me that he is always grumbling about his position, and the fact that he can never afford to marry."

"You have dropped something?" inquired Lord Ilden. "Yes, I have lost two five-pound notes," she answered, in a tone of suppressed anxiety.

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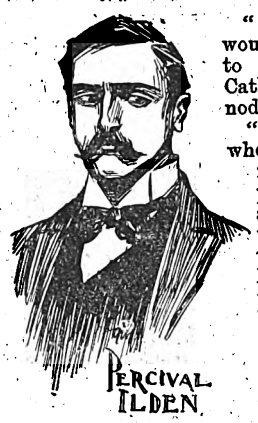

"But I am quite sure that he would not think of injuring anybody to improve his position," said Catherine warmly, and her cousin nodded.

"I do not suppose that he would, when he would benefit his brother more than himself. It is not a pleasant thing to imagine that any of one's relatives are contemplating murder, but one has to put sentiment on one side and look facts in the face. And the worst of it is that, to tell the brutal truth, one could believe it of any of them. Uncle Jasper would not exert himself to win a crown, but he has allowed himself to sink into such a state that anybody could influence him. His wife has done very little to inspire me with a high opinion of her scrupulousness. Uncle Rupert might do anything for all that I know. I do not understand him, and I can never make out whether he does not care a toss for anything, or feels very deeply and keeps all his emotions to himself. At any rate, I have never known him show a single human one. Then Percival—well, I won't talk about Percival because he has done so much to prejudice me against him. You see that without the money-lenders there are plenty of people to suspect, and while I am investigating I stand a very good chance of being shot, probably by somebody that I have never thought of."

"You ought to leave England," said Catherine, impressed. "It is impossible for you to guard yourself here, when you are so completely in the dark as to your enemy."

Ilden laughed with a touch of bitterness.

"I might be inclined to do so if I had the slightest idea when they would allow me to come back. I don't want to spend my life abroad."

"Of course not. You will want to marry and settle down."

"I have not been conscious of any particular desire to marry until to-night," said Ilden, and Catherine's eyes brightened. There had been some vague talk about a "damsel in distress," forgotten till now in the tragic interest of what her cousin had told her.

"And to-night you met somebody whom you can imagine yourself wishing to marry?" she asked.

Ilden smiled.

"No, I have never met the lady for whom I can imagine myself caring more than I care for you, Cousin Cathie."

"Then why did you think of marrying?"

"Because it would be the best check I could give to the intrigue against me. It must be a matter of the inheritance, and the man, whoever it is, who is trying to kill me, must be excited by the thought that it is only a single life—or at the most, my life and that of two elderly gentlemen—which stands between him and his ambition. If I provide myself with an heir the whole case is altered. The most resolute of villains—and this one acts like a timid coward—would not care to undertake the murder of myself and a family. With every son I have I make my own life of less importance to them."

"I see," she said thoughtfully. "You would checkmate them without even finding out who it is that threatens your life. But—whom can you marry?"

Ilden rose and extended his hands.

"Yourself, of course, dear cousin, if you will do me the honour of accepting me."

Catherine laughed, reddening slightly.

"Do not joke, George. The position is far too serious."

"And I am as serious as the position. I know that it is rather impertinent of me to ask anybody to be my wife, when they have such a good chance of being widowed before the wedding day or, under certain circumstances, of finding even their own life in danger, but I know you would do a good deal to help me."

"I would do anything—except marry you."

"And why not *that*?" he said, his tone made more earnest by the decisiveness of hers. "We have always been very fond of one another, Cathie."

"Fond of one another? Yes. But you know that you are not in love with me, George—any more than I am with you."

"And you are not fond enough of me to take the risk?"

"The risk is the only thing that could make me think of marrying you. To help you out of your precarious position I believe I would have been your wife, George, if it was only that we weren't exactly in love with each other. But it is not the only thing. So you must think of somebody else."

Ilden was both surprised and piqued, although he was very properly ashamed to have to admit the fact to himself.

Although it had been an understood thing that his cousin and he were only "good friends," he had expected her to be quite ready to change the relationship to something more intimate, and he paid now for his egotism in chagrin.

"No, thanks," he said rather stiffly. "there is no other woman that I should think of asking to be my wife."

Catherine looked concerned.

"You are not in love with me, are you, George?" she asked anxiously.

"More so than with anybody else."

"Oh! that is nothing. I declare that you made me quite frightened. And if you can't checkmate your enemy by marrying, let us think what else you ought to do."

"I am afraid that you cannot help me in any other way. If I had known I should not have bothered you with the business. It will only make you anxious."

To his surprise, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Don't be angry, George dear. I am really very sorry, but I can't help it. And you must not say that you are sorry you treated me like a friend. Because we are friends, and always shall be, and I for one shan't have a moment's peace until we find out who your enemy is. If you can think of any way in which I can help you to find out, you will let me know, won't you."

He promised, feeling ashamed of his momentary ill-temper, and, leaving her, strolled back to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Jasper met him with the announcement that Percival had been looking for him to bid him "good-bye," and had been obliged to start without doing so to catch his train.

"Who drove him?" asked Ilden, nervously kicking his heel, and before he went to bed that night he walked round to the stables for a chat with the groom who had seen Percival Ilden off.

He felt more at ease in his mind when he was convinced that his cousin had really been seen to depart in the express.

"I think I shall be safe enough here for the present," he said to himself.

CHAPTER III.

The Poison in the Flask.

It was not till he woke in the morning that Ilden remembered again the envelope addressed to himself which he had picked up in the fir coppice, and, as soon as he had dressed, he went in search of the butler.

"Who opens the post-bag in the morning, Wardle?" he asked, and, as he expected, found that the old man reserved the duty for himself.

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"And does nobody see the letters before you do?" asked Ilden.

"Not as a rule, my lord."

"And when is the rule broken?" asked the young man.

"Well, while Mr. Percival has been here, he has been impatient to get his letters, and has generally looked through the bag for them before I sorted them out, my lord."

Ilden pulled out his envelope.

"I suppose you cannot remember what day it was that I received this?"

The butler examined it thoughtfully.

"No, my lord. I do not remember seeing it at all."

It was all that Ilden wanted to know from him, and he put on his cap for a stroll in the fir coppice before breakfast. It was scarcely to be expected that the inclosure had been thrown away in the same place as the envelope; but George was inclined, as usual, to rely on his luck, and he was curious to examine the scene of his adventure in the daylight.

"Now, if this were only in a tale," he said to himself, as he approached the spot where the shot had been fired, "the fellow would have left some trace behind him by which I could identify him."

But, as usual, actual fact showed itself less kind to detective enterprise than in the story books, and his search produced no more trace of his unknown assailant than of the stolen letter.

The bullet alone remained as evidence of the evening's adventure imbedded in the bark of the tree where it had buried itself. He found it after a considerable amount of searching, and cut it out with his pocket knife to compare at some time or other with another bullet preserved by his friends at Kirby.

He returned to breakfast, wondering whether the stolen letter could have any connection with the plot against his life. If so, it was probable that he had an unknown friend at Lallerton, wherever that might be, who had wished to warn him, and it was significant that, so far as appearances went, it was Percival Ilden who had found it worth while to intercept the warning. It might be as well to spend a few days at Lallerton and give his unknown lady correspondent a chance of giving him her warning by word of mouth.

He was concocting an excuse for leaving Pennybrook a little earlier than he had intended when he reached the Hall, to find his man, Jardine, looking out for him anxiously.

"Something rather strange has happened, my lord, which I thought I ought to let you know at once," he said, and produced from his pocket a glass-cloth burnt and stained as if by some corrosive acid.

"What is that?" said Ilden.

"That is what I can't make out, my lord. But it seems to me very queer, and I thought that you would like to see it. Last night you told me to wash out your pocket-flask and I did it the first thing this morning. There was certainly nothing in it then, and I am quite sure that I washed it out thoroughly. When I had polished it up, I left it standing upside down for any water I might have left in to drain out, and it remained there for some time while I took up your coffee. I did not go back for it until you had left the house, my lord, and then I found it standing the right way up.

"I wondered who had touched it, and shook it out, over this cloth, as it happened, to see whether any drain of water had been left in it, and out came this coloured stuff, my lord. I thought it must be a stupid joke on the part of some of the servants, as one of the maids was reading in the room all the time I was away—although I don't know who would dare to take such a liberty, when they can see whose flask it is—but when I saw that it had eaten a hole into the cloth, I did not know what to think, my lord. If I had not happened to shake it out again before filling it up, you might have been poisoned."

"That is very probable," said Ilden, examining the cloth, "and perhaps I owe my life to your carefulness, Jardine. Where did this happen? In the butler's pantry?"

"In the kitchen, my lord. I stood the flask near the window."

"Was the window open?"

"Yes, my lord. My own idea was that it was done by somebody outside, but the kitchen wasn't left empty at all, I find, while I was away."

"And you are quite sure that the flask was quite clear when you left it?"

"Quite sure, my lord."

Ilden looked thoughtful.

"Either I owe my dear Cousin Percival an apology for my thoughts or he has left an ally behind him at Pennybrook," he said to himself.

"You have not talked about this, I suppose, Jardine?" he asked aloud, and was prepared to find that his valet had shown his usual discretion. He had questioned the servants to ascertain, so far as their assertions went, that not one had touched the flask, but none of them knew what had occurred to make him ask the question.

His master nodded approvingly.

"And have you washed out the flask again?"

"Yes, my lord, I am sorry to say that I cleaned it completely again before I noticed that the cloth was burnt or imagined it anything more than a stupid practical joke."

"That is a pity," said Ilden. "A chemist might have told us what it contained, but perhaps he will be able to judge from the cloth. I will keep that to submit to an analyst. And meanwhile you can pack up my things to catch the ten o'clock train."

"For the Castle, my lord?"

"Yes," said Ilden, although he had not the least intention of returning to Ilden Castle himself for the present.

He was far from being a nervous man, but, except in moments of impulse, he was not foolhardy, and it seemed to him that by remaining at Pennybrook, while he was so completely at sea as to the source of danger which threatened him, he would be making the odds too heavy against himself. If he knew or even suspected who his opponent was, out of the many who would gain by his death, he would have dared him by remaining where he was and trusting to his wit to protect him from any attacks; but to be dogged by an unknown foe while he was making his investigations was too disturbing. He wanted to feel at least a momentary security while he thought over the position and arranged a plan of action.

Against a revolver one may take precautions, but poison is an insidious thing, the danger of which gets on a man's nerves, and he felt no scruple in announcing his immediate departure to Mrs. Jasper, although she made a grievance of it, as he expected. Jealous as she was of the ruling Lord Ilden, it was some satisfaction to her to be able to keep him in her sight.

"I suppose there is a lady in the case," she said, with animosity in her tone, and Ilden smiled in the sphinx-like way that irritated her.

"To some slight extent," he answered, thinking of the unknown correspondent whom he was to try and find at Lallerton.

"And may we know her name?"

"Unfortunately I do not know it myself," he said, amused by her real anxiety; but the smile left his face when she answered:

"Then I think that I can give you the information you want. It is Florence Courthorpe. I hear more than you think.

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you see," she went on cheerfully, as she noticed the change in his expression; "but I warn you that you will find her a designing minx. She is being sent away from the Rectory because she made a dead set at young Haydon. The impertinence of it—a girl without a penny."

Her nephew was inclined to champion the girl, but thought better of it. The fact that Mrs. Ilden had evidently heard of his meeting with her might be significant.

"I suppose that Percival saw us?" he hazarded, with assumed indifference; but the ex-actress was glad of her chance to be mysterious. It was her turn now.

"Ah! that is my secret," she said, and turned away to spread the news that Ilden was following his cousin's example and leaving them at a moment's notice.

Her husband grumbled good-naturedly, but perfunctorily. The Honourable Rupert, however, surprised his nephew by emerging from his usual taciturn reserve to emphasise his regret. He was a handsome, moody-looking man, whose face, worn by ill-health, expressed an unchanging melancholy. His expression, indeed, never seemed to show any change; but, as if to atone for the fact, his hands were always moving with a restless nervousness which suggested an actual mental disturbance under his appearance of emotionless calm.

His fingers twitched more noticeably than usual, as he took his nephew apart to express his regret at his departure.

"It has been a great pleasure to me to see you again, my boy," he said, in his timid and hesitating manner. "And to see you growing every year more like your dead mother. I don't know whether your father ever told you that we were rivals for her hand as we were rivals for so many other things in our youth."

"No, sir," said Ilden, feeling more and more surprised by this unexpected show of feeling.

"She was the only woman I ever really loved," his uncle went on, his fingers twitching, "and I see her again in you. Perhaps that is why I am fonder of you than of my own sons. But Percival does nothing but disgrace me, and Grant—well, Grant never seems like an Ilden to me with his long hair and his scribbling."

"Cousin Grant's verses are very much admired, and have gained him a considerable reputation," said Ilden, rather perfunctorily, but the poet's father only shrugged his shoulders.

"I was hoping that you would come and stay with us at Mordenhall when you finished your visit here," he said. "I hope this business of yours which is taking you away will not interfere with that."

A few minutes earlier Ilden had been very determined to avoid Mordenhall as studiously as he was going to avoid the home of his other uncle, but Rupert Ilden's unusual and unexpected confidence had touched him, and when he left him it was with a provisional promise to visit him at his home before the end of the year. It was not till they went in to breakfast, and his uncle resumed his usual air of morose taciturnity in the presence of the others, that a suspicion returned to his mind, and he asked himself whether the confidence had not been deliberately intended to win the promise.

It was a relief to talk to Catherine, although he was still feeling not a little piqued at her refusal to marry him. She had come down late to breakfast and hurried through her meal to be able to accompany him to the station.

"I shall not breathe freely until you are out of the place," she said earnestly. "I have been awake all night thinking of your danger. I am sure that you are doing right to leave here at once. You will go abroad, will you not?"

"I do not think it is necessary, and besides I can't simply remain out of the way without doing something to discover who my enemy is. Just at present I shall lie low in some little country place where I know nobody. If anyone of my acquaintances follows, it will give me *prima facie* evidence against him. If a stranger appears I shall at least be on my guard against him. Here at the Hall there is no chance of telling foes from friends."

"But you will let *me* know where you are, George," she urged. "I shall be in constant suspense about you, and if I don't hear, shall imagine the worst."

"Then I will drop you a line when I settle anywhere. The first thing at present is to cover my tracks."

He broke into a little laugh as he spoke.

"How ridiculous it all sounds somehow."

"Ridiculous? It is terrible."

"I wish I could think it so. I might enjoy the excitement of this hide-and-seek business then. But somehow I can't help believing that somebody is having a try at my life, and yet directly I think of acting on the suspicion, I feel as though I were pretending to play melodrama."

"But you cannot think too seriously of your danger or take too great precautions after what has passed," she cried, rendered more anxious than ever by his indifference, "although I do not think that it can be one of your relatives who is threatening you. I have been thinking it over all night, and I think it must be a money-lender as you suggest."

"And if you met the money-lenders, you would be quite sure that it was not one of them," said Ilden smiling. "The truth of the matter is that it is impossible to believe nowadays that anybody you know can possibly contemplate murder. Is seems altogether out of date."

They were talking in the breakfast-room where Catherine was finishing her meal alone, and Ilden rose abruptly to walk to the folding French windows and throw them open.

Despite his genuine inability to realise the absolute seriousness of his position, his attention had been keenly on the alert since the discovery of the poison, and it seemed to him that he had heard stealthy footsteps on the gravel path outside.

He was half ashamed of his precipitancy when he found that it was only Grant.

The poet's dark, dreamy face had reddened slightly.

"I was just coming to warn you that you will be losing your train if you do not start now," he said. "I will drive down to the station with you and see you off if I may."

Ilden hesitated.

"Catherine has kindly offered to see me off."

"Well, there is plenty of room in the wagonette unless you want to talk secrets," said Grant, and Catherine answered before her cousin could do so.

"That is just what we are going to do. So you must bid George good-bye while I run and put on my hat. I had no idea it was so late."

Grant's face darkened, and as the girl left them alone together he made scarcely a pretence of friendliness.

Catherine was back in a few moments, and found the two standing in the hall uncomfortably silent.

"My relatives seem very fond of me now that I am going," said Ilden, as he took his seat beside her in the wagonette. "Uncle Rupert has been pressing me most warmly to visit Mordenhall, and Grant seems quite cross at not being permitted to see me off."

There was a touch of irony in his tone, and Catherine reddened.

"You will learn to like Grant when you know him

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better," she said. "He is quite different from his brother —and sister."

"I hope so," said Ilden. "It is not nice to feel so indifferent to one's own people."

In his own mind he was wondering whether his cousin had really been about to enter the breakfast-room when he threw open the window. His appearance had been rather that of an eavesdropper taken unawares. And why had he wanted to see him off? It was certainly well, he told himself, for him to get away from Pennybrook, when he found himself looking at everybody with suspicious eyes.

As they neared the station Catherine touched his arm.

"I wonder who this man is," she whispered. "I have never seen him before, and I believe I know everybody in Pennybrook by sight now. I have determined to be on the look-out for strangers."

They were overtaking a tall, well-dressed man of about thirty, who was sauntering along the path with hands clasped behind him and eyes downcast, in the attitude of a man deep in thought.

He looked up sharply as the wagonette passed, and Catherine drew involuntarily nearer to her companion as if to shield him.

"I am sure that he recognised you," she said when they were safely past, and she drew a deep sigh of relief. "I really thought that he was going to draw out a revolver and shoot you."

Ilden laughed.

"That is the worst of telling you girls anything. You imagine so much. Of course the fellow stared when he found us both looking at him so closely. I have never seen him before."

"I am sure that he has seen you before, and I did not like the look in his eyes. Should you know him if you saw him again?"

"Certainly. His face was rather striking with its hooked features and wild-looking eyes."

"He did not look like a money-lender," said Cathie, thoughtfully.

"Nor a paid assassin," laughed Ilden. "However, you are right in paying attention to strangers. You might try and find out who he is when I am gone. Although, if I really have anything to fear from him, he is not likely to remain here. It must have been quite apparent to him that I am leaving."

"And he will follow to the station to try and find out where you are going. Do you know, George, I feel horribly nervous about him. You must not give him any chance of shooting you at the station or in the train."

Ilden laughed at her tragic tone.

"I believe he has turned back," he said.

A turn in the road had taken them out of sight of the stranger almost as soon as they passed him, and they had both been looking back expecting him to appear in sight again round the curve. It seemed as though they would look in vain.

"Unless he has taken the short cut to the station across the fields," said Catherine, with undiminished nervousness. "If he does that you will know that it is on your account, George, because he certainly was not hurrying to catch the train when we caught sight of him."

"That is true. You ought to be a detective, Cathie. With you to assist me, we could baffle our enemies. Are you sure that you won't change your mind and marry me?"

"Quite sure, thank you. The man is not in sight yet. He must certainly have turned back, or taken the short cut to the station."

Her desire to change the subject was more marked than he could have wished, and he lapsed into silence until the buildings came in sight.

Catherine uttered an exclamation.

"I was right—he is at the station."

The tall figure which they had seen on the road was just disappearing into the booking-office.

"He must have run all the way through the fields," the girl went on excitedly. "I am sure that we have found your enemy."

"If I thought that," said Ilden, doubtfully, "I should make a point of following the fellow and finding out who he is. I might get at the object of the plot then."

"There will be no need. He is sure to follow you."

"Then I will save him trouble by travelling in the same compartment."

Catherine looked frightened.

"George, you must take care of yourself. It is serious."

"And I am treating it seriously. The man cannot be so dangerous if I keep him in view."

"He may carry a revolver, and try to shoot you in the train."

Ilden tapped his pocket.

"I carry a revolver too, and if he should turn out to be the gentleman with whose shooting I am acquainted, I flatter myself that I am the better shot."

They had reached the station now, and entered the booking-office to find that the stranger had already left it.

"We shall no doubt find him on the platform," said Ilden, leading the way, but it seemed as if the unknown had been anxious to avoid observation. The platform was empty except for the railway officials. The train was standing ready to start. It was waiting indeed only for his lordship and his luggage to be taken aboard and Ilden turned to bid his cousin a hurried "good-bye."

"If I find our friend in the train," he said, "I shall give myself the pleasure of travelling with him, and he turned to walk up the platform.

There were tears in Catherine's eyes. Now that the moment of parting had come she was overcome by the thought of the danger which threatened him. Her eyes followed him as if she were seeing him for the last time, and the picture of his tall handsome figure was blurred and indistinct to her as he made his way by the side of the waiting train glancing with apparent indifference into each compartment as he passed.

Yes, the stranger who was acting so suspiciously had certainly taken his place in a third-class compartment of the train, and Ilden was stretching out his hand to open the door when the movement arrested itself.

For seated opposite to the suspect, and engaged apparently in animated conversation with him, was Florence Courthorpe, 'the lady of the bank-notes,' as he had called her to himself.

(A further long instalment of "A Foe in the Family" will appear in next Tuesday's issue.)

MISS TELLIT: "Do you know I heard to-day that Flossie Fusseigh's engagement ring is paste." Miss Gabbeigh: "Oh, how perfectly lovely and appropriate. You know her *fiancé* is a bill poster."

CHAPPIE: "I say, Miss Highsail, don't you think my parents made a horrible mistake in calling me Geawge?" Miss Highsail: "Dear me, yes. I think Lucy would have been much more appropriate."

MISS OLIVE: "The gentleman you just recognised is an artist, isn't he?" Miss Claire: "Yes. You divined his profession from his artistic carriage, I presume." "No, I didn't see anything of his carriage. I smelt the turpentine on his clothes."

MRS. NEBB: "I am going to an observation party this afternoon, dear." Husband: "An observation party? What sort of a party is that?" Mrs. Nebb: "Mrs. Quizzer's next door neighbour is moving, and Mrs. Quizzer has invited a few friends to watch through the windows and see what they have."

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THE OLD, OLD GAME OF HEARTS.

Telling of an Engagement, a Parting, and a Reunion.

If ever a young woman was guiltily distressed and distractedly happy at the same time, that young woman was Marion Towne, when, after being engaged for four contented months to one man, she met another and fell the victim of an immediate infatuation.

She had believed herself to be honestly and unchangeably in love with Ferguson, the first man. The suddenness, the unexpectedness, of this new experience startled, shamed, and overwhelmed her. The fact that her affections could be so easily transferred was an unwelcome revelation. Marion had always insisted that a woman could love but once.

True, she and Ferguson had at the start made a compact—after the manner of would-be sensible lovers—the which provided for such a contingency as this.

"Genuine love is never arbitrary, never selfish," he had said. "Mine for you is so strong, so high, that should you chance, before our engagement terminates, to find another who more nearly fills your heart, I will give you up to him readily, ignoring my own suffering. Your happiness is my first consideration."

Marion had agreed with him that this was the highest love. In fact, she had gone so far as to promise that she would confide in him unhesitatingly should such a change in her heart occur. He had made her a similar promise.

Perhaps the reason for this wonderful unselfishness was the fact that neither one really believed such a change possible. Both felt secure in the certainty of their affinity for each other.

Consequently it was with a palpitating sense of guilt and distress that Marion awoke to the knowledge of the new attraction.

Dick Hollingsworth, the second man, was that type of masculinity which invariably captivates even the women who theoretically despise it.

Marion knew at once that Hollingsworth did not possess Ferguson's fine characteristics—that there was something unstable and unreliable about him. The very fact that he said things to her in the face of her engagement to another was proof of this.

Yet her clear reason was no safeguard against the magic of his fascinating personality.

Marion remembered her promise to Ferguson, but instead of a desire to confide in him she felt only shame and wretchedness at the thought.

It was while she wavered on the brink of a confession one day that he came to her rescue.

"You need not tell me," he interrupted her gently. "I have seen everything—I understand."

How wonderfully magnanimous he was! How tender, how brave, how noble through it all!

Marion, reflecting on it afterwards, could not but marvel. No other man would have done it.

So she was free! Free to let Hollingsworth say things in that daring way of his which had taken her heart by storm. She could meet those magnetic eyes without feeling guilt because of her heart's rushing response.

That very evening she accepted his invitation to the theatre.

Her happiness was not without its mixture of remorse. Her thoughts would revert to Ferguson. Poor boy! How he must suffer! And she—was she heartless, after all?

But no. It would have been worse still to continue the engagement when her love belonged to the other man.

Her meditations were interrupted by an almost audible murmur in her immediate vicinity. The orchestra was playing the overture and people had not yet ceased arriving.

"What a lovely girl!" "Isn't she superb?" "Exquisite."

Marion caught these whispered remarks and indulged her curiosity as much as good breeding would permit. By turning her head very slightly over her left shoulder she had an excellent view of the really beautiful young woman who was just taking a seat in the row behind. Her escort, settling himself beside her, glanced fully into Marion's face.

After the first startled look of unbelief, the girl withdrew her eyes, turned her face towards the stage and stared unseeingly at the rising curtain.

She scarcely knew when or how the first act began. Everything revolved dizzily. Even her thoughts turned round and round and would not steady themselves.

Howard Ferguson was the escort of that beautiful woman! This much flared before her, vividly, indisputable.

Then the rest of the riddle gradually became plain.

No wonder he had been so ready to give her her freedom. No wonder he had been kind, magnanimous, outwardly resigned!

The taste of that freedom was growing strangely bitter. Even the magnetism of Hollingsworth's wonderful eyes failed to compensate. Somehow he seemed trifling and disappointing to-night. More than once she caught him using his orbs for the benefit of fair women who sat within range of their powers. Disgusting! How could she have thought him so fascinating? He could really say little that amounted to anything. His depth was soon sounded. He could grow tiresome.

And Howard? He looked wonderfully handsome this evening. He and that woman made an unusually striking pair. Yes, there was no use denying it. How happy they both seemed!

Marion bit her lip and reflected upon the folly of human beings since time immemorial.

She had occasion to reflect still further when, a week later, Dick Hollingsworth's attentions began to wane. Another pretty face had attracted him.

Occasionally she met Ferguson alone and chatted with him in an effort to be cordial and friendly. They had agreed to remain friends, of course, in spite of changed conditions.

His engagement to the beautiful woman was beginning to be surmised by interested ones. Marion had no doubt of it. She congratulated Ferguson with the privilege of an old acquaintance.

"We are not engaged," he answered quietly; "nor have we any intention of becoming so."

"I—I thought," stammered Marion—"of course she is so very beautiful it would be only natural to imagine that——"

She paused, confused and trying to conceal her gladness at his reply.

"Some one else is beautiful, too," said Ferguson softly. After a moment's hesitation Marion ventured to meet his eyes. They were warm and sweet with the old love.

"Didn't you understand, dear?" he asked. It was easy for him to explain after that.

In short, they made it all up and became re-engaged.

Marion declares now that she loves him better for the experience.

"Because," she sagely remarks, "I know the difference between the genuine and the false. The counterfeit can never appeal to me again."

Angela Morgan.

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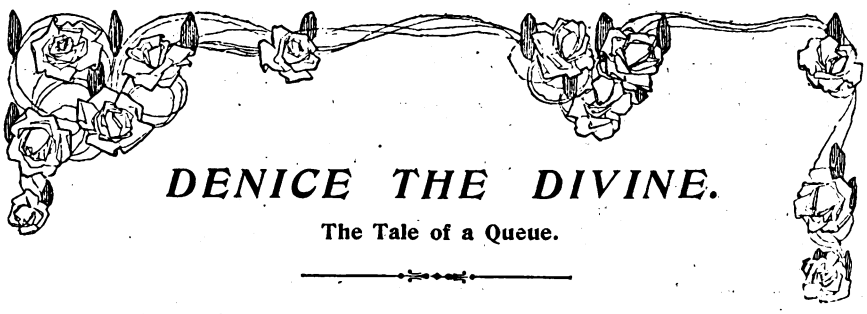

DENICE THE DIVINE.

The Tale of a Queue.

"I DON'T know what we shall do if she doesn't turn up!"

"Oh, it'll be all right; there's plenty of time for a rehearsal, even if she shouldn't come till the afternoon."

"Look here, Marston — this confounded 'fit-up'—which I've been running at a loss these six months for your special benefit as 'leading-man'—is just on the point of ruining me. Denice Hope is my last chance. If she fails me, I'm done!"

"Known her long?"

"From a child; and it's because she remembers that I taught her all she knows in the way of stage-craft, that she is throwing up a first-class touring 'lead' to help me through."

"She must be a paragon, then."

"A better hearted girl never breathed."

"And rattlingly clever, too, if her 'notices' are worth anything."

"Clever!—she's a genius, man!—her Lady Teazle is a dream!—her Lady Betty Noel in 'Clancarty' a triumph!"

"Yes, but she isn't going to play 'high comedy' in our show."

"Of course not!—but being what she is, she can play anything she is cast for; and is going to play 'lead' in our melodrama till things improve with us."

"What does the Meade say about it?"

"Oh! Cora Meade quite understands that matters couldn't go on like they've been going lately; that, in fact, it was absolutely impossible that I should continue to suffer by her wretched incompetence."

"What's she going to do?"

"She's done it!—left two hours ago for London; so that you see, should Denice not arrive in time, I haven't even the second-rate article to fall back upon."

The two men—Peyton Edwards, proprietor and manager of the 'fit-up,' and Sidney Marston, his 'leading man'—were standing on the small improvised stage of the little hall, which generally did duty for a theatre in Newton-Tanfield.

The best of 'fit ups' is only a makeshift; but the enterprise engineered by manager Edwards, was, if anything, more of a makeshift than ordinary. The scenery—what there was of it—was deplorably old, and altogether unsuitable to the production, a touring melodrama of the ultra sensational sort. The properties were in the same condition as the scenery; the "company"—with the exception of Sidney Marston—of the more than usually "scratch" order; so that the provincial public were to be pardoned for not assembling in their thousands to enjoy and to applaud.

"Don't you think it a bit of a shame," said Marston presently, "to bring this clever young creature into *this?* (sweeping his right arm round the dingy place); and all just to bolster up a show which will never run as long as the world lasts."

"I confess you're right, Sid; but the dear girl was so ready to come, and do me this good turn, that, in spite of my conviction, I'm afraid I've deceived myself into looking at things from her point of view."

"And what is that, if I may ask?"

Both men started—they had been standing with their backs to the auditorium—and, turning round, encountered the merriest pair of eyes, set in the sweetest face, that Sidney Marston, for one, had ever seen.

"Is this the way you receive me, Daddy Edwards, after my journey half across England to see you? Why you are dumb!—and I—I am *so* tired——"

"My dear Denice!—forgive me!—you've improved so out of all knowledge that, as you say, I am literally struck dumb."

"Thanks, most reverend Daddy! your professional offspring dutifully appreciates the compliment."

Then the dainty little lady cast a furtively inquisitive glance at Marston. The manager intercepted it, and forthwith introduced the 'leading man' to the new-comer.

"Marston—this is Denice Hope; our only hope now, if she will not mind my making a bad joke. This, Denice, is Sidney Marston, my 'leading man,' and my friend."

"Mr. Marston—to be Daddy's friend—I have called him 'Daddy' ever since I could speak almost—is the very best recommendation to my good opinion. It may not be worth much, but such as it is, it is entirely at your service."

This was said with a mock curtesy, old-fashioned—sweeping.

As for Sidney Marston, it altogether subjugated him, and he was, from that moment Denice Hope's most devoted slave.

Poor Edwards' spirits, lately so low, were now at exhilaration point.

"Where are you stopping, child?" he said to Denice.

"At the Royal Hotel."

It was the crack inn in Newton-Tanfield; very exclusive, and very expensive.

"Ah! yes!—of course you wouldn't stop anywhere else. Well, you must go and get some lunch at once, and be back here for a rehearsal by three o'clock. I sent you the 'script' of the play, as well as your 'part,' so you'll have a fair idea of *A Woman of the World* by this time."

"My dear Daddy!—I've got it all at my finger's ends."

"Good!—then we'll see you to the Royal, and leave you to a couple of hours rest and refreshment."

In the street, opposite the side door, a station fly was waiting.

Signing to the driver, Denice was in the act of accepting Sidney's assistance into the carriage, when, turning her head, she saw a well-dressed young fellow; dark featured, and saturnine of expression, watching her a few paces off."

"Good gracious!" she whispered to Marston, "that man has followed me from Newcastle!—he must have come by the same train!"

"Who is he?" asked Sidney and Edwards, in the same breath.

"I don't know! He calls himself Lionel Trevelyan, but I have an idea that it is not his proper name."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth, when the man came up to the carriage door and addressed the actress.

"Miss Hope," he said, in a low voice, and raising his hat, "may I ask if you have a reply for me?"

"If you mean to your letter, sir—certainly not. What do you mean by following me about in this manner! This gentleman (indicating Edwards) is my manager, and any communication you may have to make, let it be to him. Mr. Marston, tell the driver, the Royal, please."

But the intruder would not be so easily baulked of his intention to interview Denice Hope.

"I *must* have your answer, here, and now!" he excitedly exclaimed, pressing up to the vehicle, and putting both hands upon it.

"Don't you see, sir," said Sidney Marston, angrily, "that the lady declines to listen to you?"

"I do not know you, sir—and my business is with Miss Hope—not with you."

"Mr. Trevelyan—I have nothing to say to you, now, or at any future time."

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"Is that so?"

"You hear what the lady says," said Marston. "You are annoying her, and if you persist, I shall call a policeman."

It so happened that one of the few constables in the town strolled up at this point.

A word or two of explanation from Edwards, and Lionel Trevelyan was politely but firmly requested by the law's representative to fall back and allow the carriage to proceed.

On the way to the hotel, Denice explained that for months this man, who, both by word of mouth, when opportunity offered, and by a ceaseless succession of letters, made fierce love to her; asking her, indeed, to marry him at almost a moment's notice.

It had become a veritable persecution, and she had hoped that her present destination had been kept so secret that he would not be able to follow her.

Most young actresses have their outside admirers, but this was getting serious, inasmuch as it was getting on her nerves.

The rehearsal at three o'clock passed off without any further trouble in this direction, Sidney Marston taking upon himself, at the manager's request, to safely see Denice back to her hotel.

Neither of them saw a dark-browed, evil-expressioned man shadowing them from a safe distance.

Although Sidney Marston was undeniably smitten with the charms of the fair Denice, called in every big town on the northern circuit, "Denice, the Divine," the conversation of the actor and the actress was of the most commonplace and conventional character.

The shadower, however, evidently thought otherwise, for he spasmodically clenched his hands, and muttered unintelligibly.

Sidney parted from his companion at the hotel entrance, and turned immediately to retrace his steps.

This, in a dozen yards or so, brought him face to face with Trevelyan.

Whether it was his new-born interest in Denice that prompted him; or whether it was just an idea with him, that the stranger was taking an unwarrantable liberty in forcing his unwelcome attentions upon the actress, Marston peremptorily stayed him, and gave him a bit of his mind.

"Look here, Mr. Trevelyan—if that is your name—I don't want to threaten you; but if *I* catch you molesting or annoying Miss Hope in any way, I promise you it will not be good for you. Good morning."

Big and stalwart, Sidney Marston looked down upon the slighter figure of the other, and contemptuously sought to impress his meaning, by an emphatic marking time with his forefinger on the breast of Trevelyan's coat.

Beyond, a still more scorching gleam in the latter's eyes, he made no sign—did not speak a word.

His object gained, Marston passed on up the street; Trevelyan, his head turned, looking after him, the same evil expression in his eyes.

The first night of Denice Hope's appearance, though the audience was small, the enthusiasm was great. The next evening the house could have been filled three times over.

Edwards was jubilant, and saw that the end of the week would, if the good business continued, put him well upon his financial feet.

At curtain-fall on the third night Marston remained on the stage a minute or two, talking to Denice.

"There is a lovely place, about three miles out of the town, I should like to show you, if I may, to-morrow. What do you say; if it's fine, will you walk as far with me?"

She would; her ready acquiescence sending a thrill through him, as he thought and wondered whether it meant mere liking, or something of a warmer nature.

Actors, by very reason of their calling, are, as a class, given to self-consciousness; but Sidney Marston was a peculiar exception to this rule. In the three days during which he had known Denice, he could not disguise from himself that he loved her, but that she had a similar feeling for himself he did not dare to imagine. Put the matter to the test, he felt he soon must, even at the risk of an adverse result.

To his friend Edwards he said not a word; he feared discouragement in that quarter, and determined to act entirely upon his own initiative, and keep his own counsel.

As luck would have it, he was the last to leave the building that night. He was in no particular hurry, and dressed himself in leisurely fashion.

It was a very dark night, and as he stood for a moment in the doorway, the glow of his cigar lighted up his features in a weird way, suggestive of the fiend in *Faust*.

Half past eleven chimed from the clock in the market-place.

There was not a soul to be seen in the street; everything was silent as the grave.

Suddenly a report rang out from a doorway on the other side of the street, and Sidney Marston fell on his face on to the pavement, with a revolver bullet in his right breast.

* * * * *

Two and a half years later, a big crowd was assembled outside a certain fashionable theatre in the West End of London.

Away from the pit doors the "queue" extended, three deep, down a side street, till the head of it could scarcely see the tail.

Taken altogether, it was an orderly "queue," only one individual providing a discordant note.

This was a man who, a late comer, contrived to elude the vigilance of the police who kept the line, and to insinuate himself gradually towards the head of the string of waiting people.

Some resented the unfair action, others, women mostly, mildly protested, but ultimately gave way.

By this means, the man had got to within a dozen rows of the door, when unable to advance any further forward, he remained.

He was a dark-featured man, of middle height, spare, and restless of manner.

The stage-door of this particular house was situated at the point where the man stood; the crowd being broken to allow of the passage of the players.

The play was *Romeo and Juliet*, with Denice Hope, and Sidney Marston in the title *rôles*.

For a month after the attempt on his life, Sidney Marston lay very near to death; then, the bullet extracted, he took a turn for the better, and rapidly recovered.

Without his 'leading man,' Edwards was again helpless, and in despair disbanded his company, and threw up the sponge.

Denice Hope, however, remained in Newton-Tanfield until the crisis was past with Sidney. The result may be imagined.

One day, with the doctor, appeared a vision, who, vision-like, would not speak, but smiled at the patient, so that, when she had vanished, he declared himself to be nearly well.

It certainly helped the consummation on wonderfully, as in another six weeks he was ready for work again.

In the *Era* he saw that "juvenile lead" was required in the touring company in which he knew that Denice Hope was principal lady.

To write in and apply for the vacancy was the work of five minutes, and when, three days after he was requested to join at Bradford, he could have shouted for very gladness.

The rest of it is in a nutshell.

The two brought together in such tragic fashion (for both were convinced that it was Trevelyan's hand that had fired the shot) soon came to a perfect understanding, the inevitable result being, later on, one of the prettiest of theatrical weddings in Manchester Cathedral.

By leaps and bounds, the actress came to the front, bearing her mate with her, until, at the time, she was enthralling Londoners with the magic of her genius.

It was with the greatest difficulty that the police could keep the space in front of the stage-door clear.

More than once the intrusively pushing man had been officially given to understand, that if he did not keep in his place he would be removed.

For a time he was quiet. Then, a carriage drove up, out of which a gentleman handed a lady.

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SERIAL STORY COMPETITION.

ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO WIN ONE OF THE TEN HANDSOME GRAMOPHONES OFFERED.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

The picture on this page illustrates a certain sentence in this week's instalment of our powerful new serial "A Foe in the Family." All you have to do is to read the instalment carefully, and to write under the picture the sentence which you think is illustrated by the sketch. Ten splendid Gramophones will be awarded to readers whose correct solutions are posted to us soonest after the publication of this number of *Short Stories*.

Sentence:	*Page* .....
.....	*Column* .....
.....	*Line* .....

In order that all our readers shall have an equal chance of winning these handsome prizes, we have decided to distribute the Gramophones over the British Isles thus:

Two Gramophones will be won by readers living in the London postal district whose correct solutions are posted first.

Two Gramophones will be awarded to readers living within 100 miles of London.

Two to those English readers living over 100 miles from London.

Two to Scottish readers sending in correct solutions and two to those living in Ireland.

When you have found the sentence write it down in the space below the picture, together with the number of the page, the column, and the line. Then put your name and address in the space provided, cut out this page and post it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark your envelope in the *top left corner* with the name of your postal town, and the time of posting, thus: MANCHESTER. 2.45 p.m. Then post it *at once*.

Name..... Address.....

Quickly she passed through the swing doors, her companion, after a few words to the coachman, making to follow her.

Shaking himself free of those who would have held him back, the dark-featured man, his eyes alight with an insane glitter, moved out and stood in the doorway, barring the way to the actor.

"Trevelyan!" exclaimed the latter.

"Yes, coward!—Trevelyan!" almost shrieked the unfortunate man.

The words were scarcely out of his lips, when two constables seized him and bore him away; Sidney Marston, whispering to the officers that, as soon as his duty was done, he would visit the station.

At midnight he was there informed that the man had been removed to a hospital whither, early the next morning, he went.

Trevelyan was then near the end, but quite sane.

His voice was wonderfully distinct as he asked Sidney, who bent over him, to let him see the face of "Denice the Divine," just once more.

"Who am I that I should deny him?" said Sidney to himself.

A telegram dispatched to Sloane Street brought the actress to the hospital in less than an hour.

When she arrived, Trevelyan was speechless, but the light in his eyes was no longer evil, as, taking the hand she extended to him between his own two wasted ones, he kissed it reverently, smiled, as if he were quite satisfied, and fell back dead.

"Poor fellow!" said Denice to her husband as they drove home, "I suppose, in his own way, he loved me."

"I suppose so," Sidney answered her.

Ralph Enderby.

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THE TWO PARMENTERS.

The Tale of Two Thefts.

Down the long gravel path, noting the progress of her beloved flowers, sauntered Lady Mayland, smiling as she went.

Everything was bright and fresh and genial. A refreshing summer shower had come and gone, and old Sol, already far on his way to the west, was merrily chasing away the clouds that they might not stay to veil the glory of his reflection on the gentle moon.

Lady Mayland was very happy. Every afternoon, when she heard the grandfather's clock in the hall strike six, there was a gentle flutter at her heart. For any time after six her boy might come back from town. She was foolishly fond of her two big sons—the elder a busy solicitor in London, the other separated by three thousand miles of land and three thousand miles of sea, farming fruits in the Far West.

The Cedars, although in a suburb of London, was a fine old house, standing back from the busy road. Behind were several acres of lawns and flowers and shrubberies, and an old-fashioned orchard that might have been lifted from the side of some Devonshire lane and dropped by mistake within six miles of the Metropolis.

To a little summer-house, nestling away in the further corner of the grounds, Lady Mayland turned her steps, stopping to gather a flower for her boy, and getting her white hands soaked for her pains, for on flower and leaf and stem the raindrops were still quivering like quicksilver in the evening light.

Tea was already laid in the pretty arbour, with its thatch of scented briar and honeysuckle, and the silver teapot murmured softly to itself, like an old hen, surrounded by its brood of cups and saucers.

Cyril was only ten minutes later than usual, but Lady Mayland was quite anxious by the time she heard the joyous bark of Hector as he welcomed his master home, and, after a moment, a hurried step coming up the path.

She drew the tray a little nearer, making a gentle fuss over the spoons, and a moment later a tall young man walked gaily in, swinging an evening paper. He placed his hands caressingly on her shoulder, and stooped to kiss each cheek.

"Why, mother," he said, looking down into her eyes with a loving stare, "you look unusually happy, even for you. Have some more of your chickens hatched?"

Lady Mayland laughed softly.

"Something better than that, Cyril!" she answered gaily, and then, with a touch of reproof, "do you think your mother's only delight is in her chickens?"

"Oh, it's to do with the garden, is it?" asked Cyril provokingly. "Has another chrysanthemum cutting begun to sprout?"

"What a tease you are, you naughty boy!" said Lady Mayland. "No, my news is even better than that. Charlie is coming home."

Tears of joy quivered in her eyes, but Cyril jumped up and kissed them away before they had time to overflow.

"Oh, I am so glad—the villain! It's years and years and years since we have seen him!"

"He is bringing a friend with him," Lady Mayland continued, as her son released her again. "Some man who first saved his life when he had that cruel fever, and afterwards was stricken down with it himself."

"How romantic!" remarked Cyril, devouring sardine sandwiches. "And then Charlie nursed him back to life, and they both owe one another the biggest debt in this world that mankind can incur."

"Charlie is the more deeply involved of the two," answered Lady Mayland, smiling; "it was for his sake the other man incurred his debt."

"That's so, mother mine," Cyril assented. "We must do all we can to free Charlie by devoting ourselves to his friend. I wonder what he will be like?"

Lady Mayland brought out a letter written in a big, boyish scrawl, and read it aloud in her sweet voice, dwelling fondly on some short, ungrammatical passages, so characteristic of the writer, while Cyril finished off the good things spread before him.

"So you see," she said, as she carefully refolded the letter, "they will come by the next boat. They would have arrived in England to-day, but for that tiresome business keeping Charlie in New York."

"Arthur Parmenter, what a curious name!" mused Cyril. "Don't we know someone of that name, mother?"

"No, my dear, I think not," answered his mother; and then they got up and went towards the house.

Dinner over, Cyril followed his mother at once into the drawing-room.

"By the way," he said, wheeling his chair up to his mother's and opening the old-fashioned backgammon-board, "tell me about the burglary at the Rimmels' last night."

"At the Rimmels'!" cried Lady Mayland, with a little start. "You don't mean to say that they have been robbed?"

"That's just like London!" answered Cyril, shaking the dice. "Here you are separated from your next-door neighbour by a low, oak fence, and you don't even know when they're burgled. Here have I been up in town all day, and yet I know more than you. I brought you the *Globe* home to show you the account, but your exciting news made me forget all about it. It was three o'clock this morning, and they took plate and jewellery altogether worth three or four thousand pounds."

"My dear Cyril, how very terrible!" Lady Mayland cried; but she did not finish her sentence, for at that moment the door opened noiselessly, and the old butler, steeped to the roots of his snowy hair in respectability, entered the room.

In his hand he held a silver tray, and on it a card and a letter.

"'Arthur Parmenter'!" she cried, looking at the card. "Heavens, can anything have happened to Charlie?"

She tore open the envelope, Cyril looking over her shoulder, but immediately her fears proved groundless. It was a letter, dictated in some typewriting office, and signed hastily with the initials "C. M."

It was to say that a New York doctor had said Arthur Parmenter must not stay in that city another day, and so had shipped him off by the *City of Paris*, and he didn't know whether he would arrive before his letter or afterwards. "Receive my forerunner as if he were your own son," the letter ended, "and remember I am just on the track, and that it it had not been for him I should not be alive now. He is a dear, good fellow. 'C. M.'"

"Is Mr. Parmenter here now?" Lady Mayland asked.

"Yes, mum."

"Then show him in at once, and take his things up to the spare bedroom."

Lady Mayland rose, and sailed towards the door with a motherly greeting on her trembling lips, for her son's saviour was very dear to her.

Cyril shut up the backgammon-board, and followed her into the hall.

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The first greetings over, Lady Mayland immediately asked :

"And how is Charlie ? You must tell me all about him !"

Parmenter smiled.

"It's strictly against orders, and I dare not disobey," he answered. "Charlie made me vow I would not spoil his coming home by telling all the news. He's bursting with interesting information."

"And he's quite well ?" asked Lady Mayland rather anxiously.

Parmenter soon satisfied her on this point. Charlie had never looked so well all the time he had known him, as when he saw him off on the *City of Paris*.

And so the evening passed, all three in the highest spirits. Arthur had indeed made a most favourable impression.

"I can quite understand Charlie's love for him !" whispered Lady Mayland to Cyril as they said good-night on the landing. "He's a dear boy !"

Three days passed very happily and quietly. There was a flutter of suppressed excitement about the whole house. There was Charlie's room to be got ready, his books to be put out, and he had asked for some clothes to be ordered from his tailor.

"I'm going about in my pyjamas and the top of a dressing gown with the ends cut off for a jacket," he wrote. "I am afraid even Denmark Hill might be shocked to see me dressed like that ; but they don't mind out here."

It was Thursday, and on Monday he would arrive.

"This is the day of Lady Greenfell's ball," remarked Cyril at breakfast, as he opened his letters. "Are you going to chaperon your son, mother ?"

Lady Mayland looked round the great silver urn. "I'm getting too old for such dissipation," she replied, knowing how well he would immediately contradict her.

"That's right !" Cyril said a moment later, the inevitable assent obtained. Then, turning to Parmenter.

"Won't you come, too ? They are always glad to get men, even in London, and it would be a charge for you after a Californian hop."

Arthur Parmenter smiled. He was very handsome, and knew it. "It's against orders," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I'm afraid I mustn't. I'll stop at home and look after the house."

Cyril was obviously disappointed. "What a pity ! I'd like you to see the mater in her war-paint," he said, looking towards his mother with much pardonable pride. "She's ripping in her diamonds. You've no idea. You hear men saying, 'Hullo, who's that girl ? I don't think I know her !' And——"

"Cyril, Cyril !" said Lady Mayland, intreatingly, while the tiniest blush coloured her cheeks. "You must forgive him, Mr. Parmenter," turning to her guest. "We are very fond of one another." This with such an apologetic air that they all laughed.

Cyril had exaggerated nothing in saying that his mother looked ripping in her war-paint. At least so Arthur Parmenter thought as he handed her into her carriage. No one could help admiring those diamonds which had been in the family for years, and no one could wear such treasures with better grace than Lady Mayland.

The ball proved a great success. When about half-way through the programme, a strange gentleman, with long, black hair and a dark moustache, touched Cyril on the arm.

"Excuse my introducing myself," he said in a pleasant voice, which seemed familiar to Cyril ; "I believe you have a nephew of mine staying with you, Arthur Parmenter. I heard of his whereabouts by letter to-day. Perhaps you will say you met Colonel Falbrook."

"Certainly !" answered Cyril pleasantly. "Let me introduce you to my mother ; she is sitting over there, and can tell you more about Parmenter than I can. They are great pals."

They crossed the room together, Lady Mayland gladly making room for her friend's uncle on the sofa. There Cyril left them together.

It was not until they were driving home that Lady Mayland suddenly put her hand to her neck with a little cry.

"My diamonds, Cyril, they are gone !"

Cyril bent down on his knees and groped about on the carriage floor, but they certainly were not there.

He did what he could to comfort his mother. They were bound to be all right, and Lady Greenfell would know them at once if they were picked up in the house. Diamonds like that couldn't mysteriously disappear.

And so they arrived at the Cedars. Arthur Parmenter was waiting to let them in. He was very grieved to hear of the loss of the diamonds, but was so confident they would be recovered that Lady Mayland went upstairs comforted.

Cyril, however, was really very worried, for the necklace was an old family relic and of enormous value. Next morning, after breakfast, he took his friend's arm and strolled out into the garden discussing the lost diamonds.

"I believe even ladies sometimes stoop to that kind of theft," said Parmenter, lighting his cigar. "And if some dowager duchess has taken the stones, there will be little chance of recovering them again."

Cyril moodily assented. Then he said suddenly :

"By the way, it was a great pity you did not come last night in spite of your doctor. I met an uncle of yours, who asked to be remembered to you—Colonel Falbrook by name."

"Oh, yes," Parmenter answered, without much warmth. "I don't know much of him. I wonder how in the world he knew I was here ?"

Then he suddenly paused.

"Are you sure you have not got hold of the wrong name ?" he asked.

"Quite," Cyril answered. He laughed, but felt uneasy, but did not know why.

"Well, Uncle Falbrook is in Paris to-night. There is an extraordinary meeting of the company of which he is a director. I saw it in the evening paper. I say, what was your friend like ?"

"Poetical, long hair, dark moustache, and lisped," answered Cyril sententiously, and smiling again at the other's eagerness.

"Yes, and Uncle Falbrook is bald," answered Parmenter, a peculiar expression overcoming his face. "I tell you what—that's your burglar ! How those rascals get to know things Heaven only knows !"

There could be no doubt about it.

"Don't say anything to the mater about your suspicions," said Cyril, as they parted.

The next day being Friday, Parmenter went up to town with Cyril, both talking confidently about recovering the lost diamonds, and setting Lady Mayland's mind entirely at rest.

Lady Mayland found the day pass very slowly until her son returned, looking very tired and worried, without Parmenter and without any news of the stolen jewels.

"I lost sight of Charlie's friend in Regent Street," he said lightly, although he already had his suspicions. "He will be here by the later train." But he was not surprised to find he was mistaken.

Three days later Charlie turned up and brought with him Mr. Parmenter. But he was a very different Mr. Parmenter from the gentleman who had been entertained for a week at the Cedars.

This was the secret of the thing. Caxton, the great jewel-robber, the "detective's fiend," as he was called in the profession, on account of his astuteness, had hidden himself in Lady Mayland's garden after clearing out the Rimmel's. While hiding there he heard her ladyship reading her son's letter in the arbour, and then the bold idea of personating the invalid friend entered his ever-ready head. He had some cards printed at a cheap lithographers, and then presented himself at the front door with a type-written letter of introduction.

There was no doubt the whole thing was superlatively clever and plucky, especially the way in which he had removed all possible suspicion from himself until he was well out of reach, by robbing Lady Mayland out of her own house and under the disguise of Colonel Falbrook. But he confessed afterwards it was all he could do to get back first, and to leave and re-enter the Cedars without disturbing the servants. **L. Payne.**

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

NEW READERS START HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, where Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, during which Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds, and that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis-Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably. Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived. He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell. Doctors pronounced it to be a paralytic seizure.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. When alone she was accused by Pettigrew, who swore to condemn her before the whole world. She secured his silence by managing to be found in his embrace by Lord Chesterton.

My cousin at this time met a Hungarian *attaché*, and fell violently in love with him. One day Lord Kinross called, and Frankie was nowhere to be found. Fearing she contemplated eloping with the *attaché*, Lady Gaveston determined to find her.

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VON ESSLER MEETS HIS MATCH.

I did not dare to question Lady Gaveston as to where we were going, but leant back in the corner of the carriage, miserable as could be. Her ladyship sat bolt upright, her mouth shut so tight that it reminded me of a steel trap. I had not heard the directions she had given the coachman; but, as we drove up Piccadilly and neared St. James' Street, I realised that our destination was Von Essler's flat.

I shivered with apprehension as the carriage stopped, following milady up the stairs with a sinking heart. There was going to be a terrible struggle between Frankie and her chaperon; and though, for my cousin's sake, I hoped Lady Gaveston would get her own way, still I felt sorry. Suppose, after all, Frankie declined to give up the Hungarian and persisted in marrying him in defiance of Kinross, the Gaveston and conventionality? I caught my breath at the bare idea.

Her ladyship gave a sharp, short, severe knock at the door. There was quite a long interval before anyone opened it. Just as milady was about to pull the bell, however, Von Essler's valet appeared.

"His master was engaged; he was, in fact, about to start for the Continent. Any message or——"

Lady Gaveston brushed both the man and his protestations aside, and calmly walked unannounced into the dining-room. I followed close behind.

Frankie and Von Essler were finishing dinner. Hat boxes and wraps were scattered round the room, the usual impedimenta of travelling. My cousin wore a dark tweed gown, and her cloak, lined with sable, hung over a chair.

I grew pale as I noted these things—signs and portents of a journey.

"Lady Gaveston," said my cousin, rising as we entered—"and Cynthia! I *am* glad to see you, dear, and you, too," and she smiled at milady.

The descendant of the Scotch Covenanters, however, was not to be softened by sweet words or smiles. She had come to give battle, and went straight to the point. Ignoring Von Essler's outstretched hand, she motioned to the clock.

"Do you see the time?" she said. "It's a quarter to eleven."

"I did not know it was so late," said Frankie. "We must make haste, Reichardt, or we shall be late. You see, dear"—it was Lady Gaveston she addressed in this surprised fashion—"Von Essler and I are leaving for the Continent to-night. We're running away to get married. I know I ought to have told you; it's too bad to have kept you and little Cynthia in ignorance. But," she laid her hand on milady's shoulder and gazed appealingly in her eyes, "it is *so* hard to explain," she said. "Won't you take things for granted, Lady Gaveston? Scold me if you like, but let me go quietly and in peace."

Her ladyship remained immovable, staring her down with cold, stern eyes.

"I have arranged for you to receive a letter and inclosure from me in the morning," Frankie added. "My banker has received instructions to that effect. As for Cynthia, I thought perhaps she'd stay in Pont Street till I send for her. I—I——" She paused. There was something almost terrifying in Lady Gaveston's silence. "I don't think there's anything else to say," she went on hurriedly, "except to thank you for the kindness, and perhaps I should add, forbearance, you have shown me during the last six months."

She paused. Milady gave a peculiar rasping kind of cough. Then:

"Have you said all you wish me to hear, Frances?" she asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"Then I must trouble you to listen to me. Will you explain how it is that you, who are engaged to marry Lord Kinross in a matter of six weeks' time, how it is, I say, that you are here in this man's rooms"—she pointed contemptuously at the Hungarian—"at eleven o'clock at night?"

Von Essler sprang forward to answer her, but Frankie quickly interposed.

"I have already told you that Reichardt and I are going to get married. We prefer to have the ceremony performed quietly in Paris, and so escape the talk, the gossip, that would get about if we were married here!"

"*Married!*" said Milady scornfully. "How do you know he's in a position to take a wife?"

The question seemed to goad the Hungarian to fury. He turned white with rage.

"Do not listen to the croaking of this ill-omened woman!" he said crossing over to my cousin. "She cannot stop you, beloved, you are mine, you are pledged to come with me, and you are coming. Why remain to hear her insults and her gibes? Come"—he threw open the door—"let us leave her in possession of the field. We must hurry, you and I, or we shall be too late."

He spoke rapidly, but his voice was unsteady. He glanced vindictively yet apprehensively at Lady Gaveston. He seemed half fearful of what she might be going to say.

"Come!" he placed his arm protectingly about my cousin's shoulders, and moved her through the door.

"Reichardt!" said Frankie appealingly. Then: "Well, if it must be, I will go!" She kissed her hand to me, linking her arm in his. Together they crossed the threshold, a moment later and the door would have closed—closed behind them—when Lady Gaveston lifted her voice in recall.

"Go but a step further," she said, "and I will summon those that will enforce your return. Aye," as Reichardt faced her with a sneer, "I mean it—the ill-omened woman has still some influence in high places. The widow of Travers Gaveston is not lightly to be set aside. Listen to me here, or," she pointed an accusing finger, "I go now this minute to the Austrian Embassy. They will hear with patience what I shall have to tell them."

Von Essler hesitated. He grew even paler, and caught his underlip between his strong white teeth.

"We had better hear her, dearest," he said, "or she may make a scene. Lady Gaveston," he turned abruptly, "I will listen to you for five minutes, at the end of that time——" he shrugged significantly, and took out his watch. "Time presses, I must ask you to make haste."

Milady turned to Frankie.

"You prefer to go away with this stranger rather than remain and be respectably married to an English gentleman?"

Frankie nodded.

"Yes," she said softly, "it sounds foolish for me to say so, Lady Gaveston, but I'm ready to give up everything for Reichardt."

"Has he told you that marriage with you would necessitate his giving up his career in the diplomatic service, your rank not being equal to his?"

"Yes," Frankie sighed; "but he won't mind that!" and she smiled radiantly.

"Has he told you," milady asked again, "that his father will not only disinherit him if he marries you, but cut off his allowance?"

"I gathered as much," Frankie said softly.

"Has he told you," the relentless questioner went on, "he is entirely dependent on that allowance, and that without it he will be *penniless?*"

Frankie darted an eager look at Von Essler.

"You should have told me, dear," she said. "I did not know you were giving up so much as that. But," she turned to milady, "Reichart has friends and influence; he will soon get an appointment. And I——" She paused, a touch dismayed.

"And you imagine, I suppose," her ladyship sneered, "that you are the sort of woman who could patiently endure poverty, provided it was seasoned with love! You, whose extravagant whims are a bye-word even among your thriftless companions. You have lost your senses, Frances!"

"Not quite, Lady Gaveston. What I have in the bank, together with my jewels, comes to about £10,000. Reichardt has nearly as much. We can make a tolerable show on £20,000 for a year if we live abroad. At the end of that

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TURN TO THE FIRST PAGE FOR OUR NEW SERIAL, "A FOE IN THE FAMILY."

time"—she smiled and threw out her hands—"Von Essler's father will have relented, or a beneficent government will have found Reichardt a lucrative position. For the present I can only see a year ahead—a year!" She turned to Reichardt with a look of trust, of confidence, of love such as I had never before seen on Frankie's face.

"And now, I think," she went on gently, "the five minutes must be up. You have seen for yourself that Reichardt has not deceived me, he has told me exactly how matters will stand between him and his family if he marries me. But he is content to take the risk, and I——"

"You will never be Von Essler's wife, Frances," said her Ladyship firmly, "*never*."

"Why?" My cousin looked startled and came close to Lady Gaveston.

Milady paused.

"You're a vain and worldly, and I fear a godless woman, Frances," she said at last. "I make no doubt the Lord will chasten you in his own good time. But I'm loth to forestall Providence, therefore I would refrain from answering your question."

"But you *must* answer it. No," as Reichardt strove to interfere, "there's something behind all this, something I will, I must understand. What do you mean? Answer me? I will be told."

Lady Gaveston's grim face softened, and her figure, rigid and upright, relaxed.

"My dear," she said—it was the only time she ever called my cousin "dear"—"I am sorry for you. But if you will know I cannot refuse to answer. You cannot marry Von Essler because he already has a wife!"

Frankie put out her hands and clutched the table; her face lost all its colour, it seemed to turn quite grey."

"No," she said, "not that. Reichardt——"

"Do you suppose," Lady Gaveston went on coldly, contemptuously, "that a man like Von Essler would give up place, position, wealth, the obligations that society imposes on a man like him, for the sake of what you're pleased to term 'love'? You were not a child, Frances, to believe such nonsense."

"But this is *true*. Reichardt, tell her it's true. Say you are not married, that it's a mistake, that you have no wife, *Reichardt!*"

He came at her call, soothing her by word and gesture. But when he put his arms about her, to draw her trembling to his side, my cousin put him from her.

"No," she said, "no. Not till you've told me if what Lady Gaveston said is true. Have you a wife?"

Von Essler flushed. "I have," he said between his teeth.

"When did you marry her?"

The Hungarian hesitated. "Is it needful to go into further details?" he said quietly, almost humbly.

"I insist on knowing," was the answer. "When did you marry her?"

"Some two years back. She is very wealthy, the match was arranged by our respective families. Neither of us had much voice in the matter. But you—I love you passionately, adoringly."

For a moment my cousin stood irresolute. Then as the meaning of all that he had said came home to her, as she realised the baseness, the selfishness of the man for whom she had been ready to sacrifice so much, she started forward and tightly clasped him by the arms.

"Before Heaven," she said hoarsely, "you have no conscience; you're hard, hard, callous, and cruel. You vowed you loved me. You left me no peace, no rest, until I'd sworn to throw over home, friends, the man I'd promised to marry, for your sake. And all the time you were playing a part. You, who vowed I should never regret the step you persuaded me to take. You, who vowed you would love me for ever—for ever. My God"—she threw out her hands in an agony of suffering. "To think I should have believed so base, so mean a thing as you. To think I should have sorrowed I was not more worthy of your love. To think I should have been so blind, so infatuated as not to realise what you were. *Love!* You don't know the meaning of the word. Self, self, and self again is all you think of, is all you understand. Oh, I am punished indeed for having put aside my worldly wisdom. Think of it, I"—she gave a scornful, bitter laugh—"I to imagine the world well lost for love! What have *I* to do with love?" Her face changed, she fell back, and for a moment there was silence in the room, silence save for her quick, distressful breathing.

Leaning against the sideboard, her face ashen, her lips white, she stared before her with eyes wide with a helpless, a hopeless despair.

Von Essler, thinking the storm was over, and that the calm that had ensued signified peace, perhaps forgiveness, came towards my cousin.

"Dearest," he said softly, "my love for you is my excuse." He touched her lightly on the arm, and gazed at her beseechingly.

The touch of his fingers seemed to rouse her. With a swift and sudden gesture she leant towards the table, reaching past him. I saw the blade of a knife flash through the air, then without cry or call she threw herself upon him and plunged the weapon in his side.

"She's killed me," he cried in a hoarse, strangled voice, and, with a crash, fell back across the table—horribly still.

I can see the scene before me now. The room blazing with light, furnished with the luxury that wealth and taste command, the table spread with glittering plate, rich wines and hot-house fruits—and in the midst of all the luxury, the wealth, that figure silent, still, thrown back upon the table. The Venetian glass lay shivered in fragments upon the floor, the snowy napery was stained, stained with a thin stream of crimson blood which trickled from his side, dripping with a horrible monotony on the carpet at his feet.

I could not bear the sight, terror seized hold of me.

"Help, help!" I screamed; I fell upon my knees paralysed with fear.

I heard Lady Gaveston lock the door, and was dimly conscious that she had thrust Frankie into an adjoining room. Then I felt a dash of water thrown briskly in my face.

"Get up," said milady brusquely, "unless you want to ruin Frances. Get up and help me move Von Essler. Don't pay any attention to *that*"—the valet was knocking furiously at the door. "Do as I tell you, but remember you must be quiet; no tears or anything of that sort." Swiftly she drew the lounge up to the table, and with silent, sinewy strength—and some slight assistance from me—placed Reichardt upon it.

Then she unlocked the door and called the valet.

"Your master has hurt himself," she said laconically. "Go for a doctor, the nearest. Then take a cab to the Austrian Embassy with this note," and she hastily scribbled a few lines on her card.

The valet, with a terrified glance at his master, seemed about to expostulate. Milady, however, gave him no time to question. "Do as I tell you at once," she said. "If you chatter about what you see here"—she motioned to the lounge—"you will lose your place. I will see to that. Go!" And fearful of her wrath the man departed.

It seemed an age before the doctor, a quiet, self-possessed man, whose very presence inspired confidence, made his appearance. Close on his heels came an emissary from the Embassy. He was, I have reason to believe, a person of considerable importance. He waited gravely till the doctor, his examination completed, gave his verdict.

"The wound is deep, but it is not likely to prove fatal." The man of science rapidly dressed and bound up the wound as he spoke.

Lady Gaveston nodded approval.

"I suggest the patient is removed at once to a private ward in a hospital," she said. "This gentleman, when I have spoken to him, will, I am sure, agree with me," and her ladyship

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beckoned the Emissary to follow her. Together they went out.

No sooner had they gone than the door of the inner room in which Frankie was concealed commenced to open inch by inch.

The doctor saw it move, and walked towards it.

In a moment I had flung myself before him. Whatever happened, he must not know who was concealed there. Somehow or other I felt convinced Lady Gaveston would arrange things so as to avoid a scandal about Frankie. The Austrian person, I was sure, would second her endeavours, so would Von Essler. But if this man, this meddling doctor, caught sight of my cousin, it would be far more difficult to hush the matter up.

"You can't go in," I gasped, and set my back against the door.

"Nonsense," he said, lightly brushing me aside, "nonsense!"

If only Frankie would lock the door! If she kept her presence of mind all would yet be well.

Alas! there was no key in the lock! The doctor turned the handle, opened the door—my cousin swept into the room.

"Is your patient better?" she said calmly, for all the world as though the situation was an ordinary, everyday sort of affair.

"About the same," returned the doctor, in as composed a fashion. "He will not recover consciousness just yet." As he spoke his quick eyes ran over her tall figure, noted the tweed travelling dress, spied out the crimson stain upon her skirt—I doubt not he drew his own conclusions from them all.

Then—"Mrs. Norton, I think?" he said pointedly.

Before Frankie had time to answer Lady Gaveston and the Austrian *attaché* reappeared.

"I've telephoned to the Charing Cross Hospital," said the latter. "They are willing to receive my friend at once. Will it injure him to be taken in a carriage, or shall we have an ambulance?"

"A carriage will do," said the doctor dubiously.

"Then, with your permission, we will remove him immediately. There are four of us—you, myself, and the two servants. We can easily carry him downstairs."

The doctor nodded and bent over his patient. Lady Gaveston, taking advantage of his preoccupation, passed unnoticed into the inner room, Frankie and I behind her.

For the next fifteen minutes we listened with painful, strained attention to what was happening at the other side of the door. Once Reichardt moaned, and Frankie winced at the sound. For the most part, however, only the doctor's softly spoken directions, and the measured tread of the men as they carried Von Essler down the stairs, came to our ears.

When the door of the flat finally closed behind them, milady gave a sigh of relief and returned to the dining-room.

"Thank God!" she said reverently, "that things are no worse! Frances, take this." She poured out some brandy and handed it to my cousin, who obediently drank it up. Her ladyship forced a similar dose on me, and then, grave and dignified as ever, ushered us down the stairs, out into the street, where our carriage was still waiting.

"Home," she said laconically to the coachman. Our adventures for that night were over.

The next day and the day after Frankie remained in her room. She only saw Lady Gaveston. I learnt from the latter, however, that my cousin was fairly well. As for Von Essler, not a hint had got abroad concerning the events of that dreadful night. It was currently reported that he had gone to Paris for a change. No one, not even the smartest of smart society papers, knew that he was lying in hospital, much less that he had been wounded, and by whom.

Lady Gaveston interviewed Lord Kinross, and convinced that gentleman that Frankie's indisposition would not allow her to receive him.

"She wants a change, Lady Gaveston," he said anxiously. "She'll be better once she's out of London. We were to go to Cowes on Saturday, you know, and to-day is Thursday. Will she be able to travel by then?"

"I think so. I return to Scotland to-morrow, Lord Kinross."

"Are you not going to Cowes with Frankie?"

"No, my arrangements will not permit of it."

"At any rate, I may hope to see you at our wedding?"

"Thank you, I fear not. But if I can arrange it I will come."

"You've been very good to Frankie, Lady Gaveston. I have much to thank you for."

He spoke earnestly, and with evident sincerity. I wondered if by any chance he could have heard a rumour as to what had happened at Von Essler's.

"I've done my duty, no more," said milady. Then, as if urged by a sudden thought, "I hope you will find happiness in your marriage," she said slowly, "and that Frankie will make you a good wife."

"I'm sure of that," he answered.

Milady made a salutation and gracefully retired; not, however, without a faint sniff, significant that whatever Kinross felt about the future she still had her doubts.

The next day, clad in the same homespun skirt and identical deer-stalker hat in which she had made her first appearance at Pont Street, Lady Gaveston departed.

She had a long talk with Frankie before she left. I fancy she gave my cousin good advice for her future while strongly reprobating her past. What was more to the point, she helped my cousin to disentangle her accounts, and I believe reduced the chaos of unpaid bills to something like order.

"Frances will go to Kinross with a fairly clean sheet if she does as I tell her," her ladyship remarked.

Frankie accompanied her ladyship downstairs, and put her carefully into a cab—she had insisted on chartering a growler. For a moment they stood together on the pavement, the beautiful young woman and the dour Scotch widow.

"Good-bye, and thank you," said my cousin.

Lady Gaveston wrung her hand.

"I would hope for your happiness, Frances," she said, "but the Lord has a long memory!"

And then the cab drove off, and we knew the "testifier" no more.

"That's over," said Frankie, "and thank goodness for it." Slipping her arm round my waist, she took me upstairs.

Not a word did she say of Von Essler, nor indeed did she mention any of the events of the past six months. Her talk was all of the future.

"I'm going to make Hartland a real good wife," she said. "It isn't difficult to be good on thousands a year. I've sold my goods and chattels for just on three thousand pounds. "Moreover, I'm going to settle my debts—as many as I can. I shall have very little left. Two or three hundred, no more. Still, Clairette will let me have my trousseau on credit. Imagine, Cynthia, this time to-morrow we shall have left Pont Street, never to return."

We had a nice dinner together, and Kinross sent a beautiful basket of lilies with a loving message. Frankie announced her intention of going first thing in the morning to pay her bills.

"And then," she said, "another page in my life will have ended. I declare I will drink to forgetfulness," she said, and poured out a glass of champagne. Still smiling, she rose to her feet. "Here's to forgetting Sir John, Toby, Pettigrew, Reichardt"—even as the toast was on her lips there came a ring at the front door. My cousin waited, glass in hand, until the servant entered.

"Dr. Musgrave," he announced, "to see you on important business." Musgrave was the man who had attended Von Essler!

My cousin set down her glass and gave a little shudder.

The page was not ended yet! From the past there stretched a threatening hand. A hand that threatened ruin.

Dr. Musgrave had got Frankie firmly in his toils—and she knew it.

(Another adventure is recorded next week.)

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THE TALE OF A CLOCK.

Chubb's clock got out of order recently, and began to strike wrong.

That was the cause of the fearful excitement at his house a short time since.

They were all in bed sound asleep at midnight, when the clock suddenly struck *five*.

The new servant girl, happening to wake just as it began, heard it and bounced out of bed under the impression that morning had come; and, as it is as dark at 5 a.m. in winter as it is at midnight, she did not perceive her mistake, but went down into the kitchen and began to get breakfast.

While she was bustling about in a pretty lively manner Chubb happened to wake, and he heard the noise.

He opened his door cautiously and crept softly to the head of the stairs to listen.

He could distinctly hear someone moving about the room, and apparently packing up the china.

Accordingly he went back to his room and woke Mrs. Chubb, and gave her orders to blow a police whistle out of the front window the moment she heard his gun go off.

Then Chubb seized an old fowling-piece which hung on the wall, and, going down to the dining-room door, where the burglars were at work, he loaded the gun, aimed it, pushed the door open with the muzzle, and fired.

Mrs. Chubb instantly blew the whistle both loud and shrill, and, before Chubb could pick up the fainting girl, the front door was burst open by two policemen, who came into the dining-room.

Seeing Chubb with a gun, and an insensible woman on the floor, they imagined that murder had been committed, and one of them trotted Chubb off to the police-station, while the other remained to investigate things.

Just then the clock struck six.

An explanation ensued from the girl, who fortunately was more frightened than hurt, and the policemen left to bring Chubb home.

He arrived at about three o'clock in the morning, just as the clock was striking eight.

When the situation was unfolded to him, his first action was to jam the butt of his gun through that clock, whereupon it immediately struck two hundred and forty-three, and then Chubb pitched the remains into the dust-hole.

Mr. Chubb has a new clock now, and things are working better.

T. L

Hetty: "Looking over the dictionary again! Evidently you find it intensely interesting." Bertha: "No, not interesting, but amusing. It spells words so differently from the way I spell them, you know."

First Young Lady: "Do you always buy two kinds of paper?" Second Young Lady: "Always. You see, when I write to Charlie I use red paper; that means love. When I answer Jim's letters I use blue paper, which means 'faithful unto death.' See?"

Mrs. Tasker: "Mrs. Subbubs is too mean for anything." Tasker: "Why do you say so?" "I hinted and hinted for a month that she should let us have her baby chair, which her boy has outgrown, and she didn't notice; but as soon as I went and bought one, she said: 'Why, you might have had mine.'"

Pretty Servant-girl (who has been taken half a mile beyond her destination): "It's really too bad; I told you when I first got in where I wished to be set down." 'Bus Conductor: "Well, miss, I let you get out as soon as ever I could find it in my 'art to part with you."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

October 7. — Those whose birthdays fall to-day will have an unsettled year. Not a time to speculate. Will be inclined to voyage.

Girls will need some caution in love affairs; attentions from married men.

The day is good for dealing with military men, but have a care against being deceived, and avoid promising things.

A child born to-day will be unsettled, and if born near noon it will go abroad. Will be active and daring.

October 8.—An unfortunate birthday; trouble in business and home affairs. Better for clerks and those who live by salary.

Girls will meet with anxiety in love matters, and quarrels may break off any engagement, or third parties interfere.

The day is not good for marriage, travel, or entering new premises. Guard against mishap.

A child born here will be careless, lack energy and enterprise. Will be cunning and headstrong.

October 9.—Much anxiety in business and general affairs. Those in employ will be in danger of losing it.

Girls born near six and ten p.m. will be perplexed over love affairs.

The day is not good for asking favours, commencing new undertakings, but rather good for buying and selling.

A child born to-day will be subject to many crosses in life, will be inventive, and generous, but the health will not be good.

October 10.—Business and health will require some extra care during the next twelve months. A heavy, dragging time generally.

Young girls will meet with disappointment in love matters; engagements may be broken.

An evil day for most things; go quietly and let others make the first move.

A child born here will be moody and over cautious. If a girl, unhappiness in marriage.

October 11.—A prosperous year for business and domestic affairs. Some bother over letters and young people.

Girls will have attentions, and become engaged, or marry.

The day is good for pleasure seeking, marriage, visiting, buying and selling. Be careful over signing papers.

A child born to-day will be fortunate in life; the mind will be frank, cheerful, and artistic. Will be fond of things uncommon.

October 12.—Not a very fortunate time; unsettled, and some danger of law. Keep control of passion and speech.

Girls will quarrel, and much worry arise in love affairs. Place little confidence in opposite sex.

A child born here will be successful, but obstinate and rash. Will be subject to accidents; mischief through false friends.

October 13.—Business and domestic matters go well; some care with health should be observed.

A good year for girls to marry; seek introductions, and mix with friends.

The day is good for marriage, letter-writing, buying and selling, dealing with shipping agents, and professional men.

A child born here will be lucky in most things. The disposition will be affectionate, generous, and active.

Asturel.

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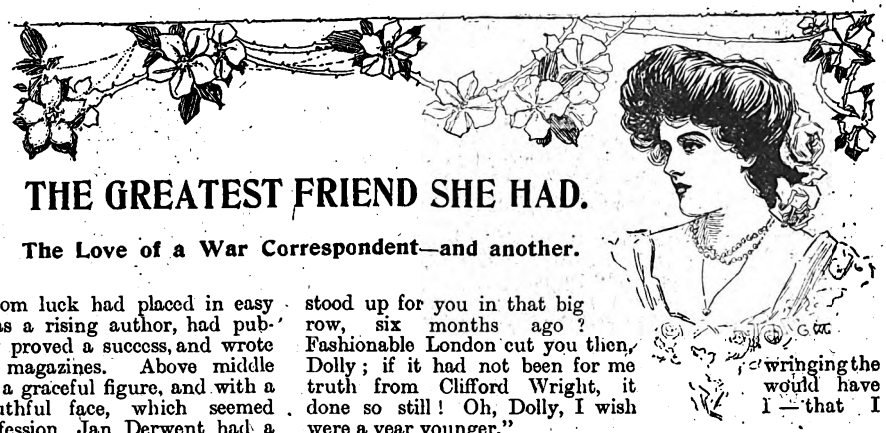

THE GREATEST FRIEND SHE HAD.

The Love of a War Correspondent—and another.

Doris Beversley led the way to the verandah, seating herself nervously beside her partner on a divan.

From within the house came the faint, alluring strains of the Blue Danube waltz. Without, the faint summer breeze soughed gently through the trees, tenderly stirring the soft, wavy hair of the girl, who sat silent, staring ahead with unseeing eyes. Her partner, Jan Derwent, was a journalist whom luck had placed in easy circumstances. In fact, he was a rising author, had published a book which fortunately proved a success, and wrote for the majority of the leading magazines. Above middle height, dark, the possessor of a graceful figure, and with a mild freshness about his youthful face, which seemed peculiarly unsuited to his profession, Jan Derwent had a year previously caught the fickle fancy of Doris Beversley, who straightway commenced an ardent flirtation.

Eminently a flirt Jan Derwent had ably seconded her endeavours to weave a love romance, and all went well for a year. Then Doris Beversley cooled off, leaving the young journalist to realise to his chagrin, that what he had deemed mere flirting was in reality the outcome of love.

For once in his life he felt that further existence was not necessary to him. Maturer reflection, however, conceived the desire to be revenged on Captain Anstruther, who has supplanted him in Doris Beversley's affections, till this too was lost to thought in a wild longing to regain the ephemeral love which he had lost.

"Jan."

Doris Beversley was the first to break the tense silence which reigned.

"Yes, Dolly."

"I'm awfully sorry that you should be so down in the dumps about me!" she said tremulously, holding her fan in a tense yet nervous grip which bade fair to snap its slender supports. "I—I'm not worth it."

"I down in the dumps?" replied Derwent, with well simulated levity. "My dear Doris, our flirtation has come to an end, so I am getting up a new one with Minnie Raynor. That's all. It is not as if I had really been in love with you."

A dull flush mounted to Doriss temples, as her eyes fell before his glance. She did not notice the pallor of his face, grown strangely drawn within the last few moments.

"Nice girl Minnie Raynor!" he murmured reflectively.

"Do you like her?"

She felt piqued at his apparent unconcern.

"Rather! She is the nicest girl I have ever met."

"Thank you, Jan!"

"Oh, of course I except you, Dolly, present company is always excepted.

"Our—our flirtation was very pleasant whilst it lasted, was it not, Jan?" She raised her violet eyes to his in the soft glow of the Chinese lanterns; she appeared supremely happy.

"Yes—too pleasant!" he answered, with a sigh. "It was too pleasant for my peace of mind."

She toyed with her fan thoughtfully for a few moments, then said wistfully:

"I am sorry that our little romance is over."

"It is your fault, Dolly, that such is the case," he said, bitterly. "A year ago to-day we entered into a secret engagement. You were then twenty. How I loved you at twenty, Dolly! How I——"

"Hate me at twenty-one, I suppose." The violet eyes hardened momentarily.

"One can never hate where one has once loved," replied Jan tensely. "I love you, Dolly—God help me, I always shall—but that does not prevent me saying that you have been cruel—wantonly cruel to me!"

"I never thought that you cared for me."

"If I had not cared for you, do you think I should have stood up for you in that big row, six months ago? Fashionable London cut you then, Dolly; if it had not been for me wringing the truth from Clifford Wright, it would have done so still! Oh, Dolly, I wish I—that I were a year younger."

"Why, Jan?"

"That I might once again live over the happy time of our—our flirtation," he answered, slowly.

"So do I!" The answer came unexpectedly.

"Anstruther might object to the arrangement."

"I fail to see what Captain Anstruther has to say to any arrangement which I may choose to make," replied Doris, coldly. "I am not in love with him."

"No?" Derwent gazed at her wonderingly.

"I am in love with no one—at least whom I could marry."

"No more am I—now!" answered Derwent, sadly.

"Besides, he has no money!" continued Doris, reflectively.

"If Anstruther had money—would you marry him?" The question was posed tentatively.

"I might!" She shrugged her shoulders, then laying her slim white hand on his arm, said gently: "Don't be cross, Jan. After all, dear, you are a mere boy and he—well, he is a man."

Jan Derwent coloured.

"He is thirty," he muttered, "I am only twenty-two! I suppose age does make a difference with a girl?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know!" she said, half petulantly. "But enough of reminiscences! Tell me about yourself. What are you doing now?"

"For the moment magazine scrawling," he answered, dully. "Next week, however, I leave for the Indian frontier as War Correspondent for the *Daily Wire*.

The smile died from her lips as the lovely features grew set.

"War correspondents get shot sometimes, do they not, Jan?"

"Sometimes!" He laughed lightly. "There is but little chance of that happening to me though."

"I wish that I were a man—I would come with you."

"Would you?" He smiled. "I am afraid the life would be too rough a one for you."

Her reply was stifled by the coming of Captain Anstruther on to the verandah.

"Your dance, is it not, Miss Beversley?"

"I think it is! You will come and see me before you go, won't you, Jan?"

"I will not fail." Derwent rose and bowed, as Doris slipped her arm through that of Anstruther.

Six days elapsed before Doris saw Jan Derwent again.

"I'm off in two days' time, Dolly," he said, by way of greeting, as he was ushered into her presence. "When you read the news in the *Daily Wire*, think of me, won't you? I hear Anstruther is ordered out. If he does anything noteworthy, the 'boy,'" he smiled wistfully, "will puff the 'man' up, for your sake."

Slie squeezed his hand gratefully.

"I don't know why you should be so good to me," she said slowly.

"Am I not your friend?"

"I have been a very poor one to you. Jan, must you go?"

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"Rather!" He laughed lightly. "My dear Dolly, there is a fellow named Harrison up at the office who is simply dying for me to throw up my position so that he can jump into my shoes."

"Can you forgive my horridness?"

"You have not been horrid, Dolly dear," said he, gently. "It is I who have been foolish! You never loved me. I—I mistook friendship for a deeper sentiment."

"I—I don't think that I love anyone, Jan; but I do like you!"

"As a friend, eh, Dolly? You won't refuse to be my friend?"

"To be your friend? No, of course I should not, Jan. People told me that you were playing with my love. I almost begin to think that you really did care for me."

"Perhaps in a little while I may be able to prove to you the extent of my love," he said moodily. "Good-bye, Doll."

The hand he placed on hers was icy cold. The touch chilled her.

"What made you become a war correspondent?" she asked.

He blushed awkwardly.

"Well, Jan—why?"

"So that I might be able to forget that such a person as Doris Beversley ever existed!" he said, after a pause.

She hesitated a moment, but did not withdraw her hand.

"Jan"—her voice faltered—"does your sister know the reason?"

"No; I am alone in the world, so to speak. A unit anent the fate of which none would trouble. If I died in India there is not a soul to care."

"I should, Jan," she replied gently. "Do you not believe me?"

"Would you? You are kind!" He paused, then said: "Good-bye, dear."

"Jan!" A wave of colour suffused her face.

"What, dear?"

"You said that a man named Harrison would only be too pleased to jump into your shoes if——"

"Captain Anstruther!"

The servant's voice froze the words which surged to her lips before she had time to utter them. Grasping his hand, she whispered—

"Good-bye, dear. Come to-morrow, I have something which I must tell you before you go! Don't fail to come, Jan!"

The next moment Anstruther was ushered into the room, and as Doris turned to greet him with smarting eyes and a dry, strained feeling in her throat, Derwent passed out of her sight into the street to hail a hansom.

"For me there must be no to-morrow!" he muttered hoarsely to himself as he sank back in the cab. "I'm not iron, and I would sooner die than go through what I did to-day. It would unman me! I will write instead."

Thus it came about that Doris waited in vain for the advent of Jan, to make the confession he would have given his right hand to have heard.

* * * * *

Six weeks elapsed before war news, "By our special correspondent," appeared in the *Daily Wire*, which Dolly read with almost feverish anxiety and avidity.

Meanwhile out in India a fierce fight was raging on the frontier. The Afridis had surprised a reconnoitring party.

By a strange coincidence Captain Anstruther and Jan Derwent were members of that ill-fated little band, which, despite a heroic resistance, were routed by the fierce tribesmen.

The rout was followed by flight, Captain Anstruther and Derwent bringing up the rear.

The gallant little band, but fourteen all told, tore along the narrow gorge, a hundred semi-maddened Afridis thundering in pursuit, flinging their spears at the retreating soldiers as they ran.

One of the flying weapons struck Captain Anstruther as they neared a bend where the gorge was narrowest. Luckily it was a spent one, yet it ripped his shoulder, making him reel as he staggered forward, with ever slackening speed.

"By gad, I think that I am done this journey, Derwent!" gasped Anstruther. "The pace is killing, I can't hold out at this speed."

"Then make what haste you can," retorted Derwent, his face hardening.

"Run on, I'll keep these beggars at bay."

"Rot, man!"

"Paddle on," interrupted Derwent, peremptorily. "It's for Dolly's sake. She loves you. She told me so. So long!"

He held out his hand, which the other gripped.

"I can never marry her," cried Anstruther. "I'm stony broke."

"You'll find that all right when you get to England. So long."

"But man, you love her as much as I do!"

"That's a lie!" cried Derwent hoarsely. "I hate her—run, man!"

He gave Anstruther a shove.

"I'll bring up the reserves if they are not already on the road," cried the Captain, a consciousness of his cowardice creeping over him. "The place is narrow; keep them at bay, and I'll rescue you. Any message to her, in case I arrive too late?"

"Yes," replied Derwent, briefly. "Give her my love—my dearest love, old man, and tell her—the 'boy' died game! Run, man, for God's sake, run! Here they come."

Then, alone with a revolver in one hand and his sword in the other, he awaited the rush of the shrieking tribesmen.

Two days later Doris Beversley started from her chair with a cry of horror. It was some time before she could fully realise that the Special Correspondent of the *Daily Wire*, whom the paper had lauded to the skies, and dubbed hero in an obituary notice, and Jan Derwent were one and the same. When the awful significance of the words burnt their way into her fevered brain, a dull moan burst from between her half parted lips.

"Dead!" she cried, dully. "Oh, it must be some hideous mistake. Charlie cannot have left Jan to die in order that he might cover his own retreat. It can't be! It can't be. Yet there is no mistake! The pitiful coward to leave him to his fate!" she exclaimed wildly, crunching the paper passionately between her trembling fingers, "the pitiful coward!"

For a few moments she stood silent, her hands pressed to her throbbing temples, till pent up Nature asserting itself, she sank on to a sofa, and burying her face in its cushions sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Dead, dead!" she sobbed. "If he had only come before he sailed; and he died thinking I loved another man, when it was only him—him, I loved! Oh, God! how cruel—how cruel it all is, when I loved him so."

Two months elapsed, then a letter came from Jan Derwent's solicitors, inclosing another in his handwriting, addressed to—

MISS DORIS BEVERSLEY.

To be forwarded in the event of my decease.

She stared at the superscription, glanced mechanically at the solicitor's letter, surprise stamped on every feature; then tearing open Derwent's letter, read as follows—

> DEAREST DOLLY,—As my solicitors have informed you, I nominate you my heir. As you know, I had but one relation in the world—my sister. She has married well, and needs for nothing; besides, we quarrelled six years ago. On what subject does not much signify; let it suffice that we quarrelled, so you need have no compunction in accepting the bequest. As you know, I am not a rich man, still my four hundred and fifty pounds per annum may aid you to marry Anstruther. There is besides about sixty pounds owing to me from the magazines, as well as my little account from the *Daily Wire*.—Your affectionate friend, JAN DERWENT.

She stared with parched eyes at the missive, then a great sob shook her frame as she almost reverently kissed the signature

The solicitor's letter was brief and to the point.

MADAM,—We have the honour to inform you that you are the sole legatee of the estate of our late client, Mr. Jan Derwent. We should be pleased if you would favour us with a call at an early date, to arrange for the disposal of same.—Faithfully yours,

GREY, RAINHAM, GREY, AND SON.

"I only thought that such natures existed in novels," she whispered, her lips quivering ominously. "I have made a mistake, Jan, a mistake that will ruin my whole life. All women make one in their lives, so I am not unique. I, however, have lost a lover to be proud of. I have lost my best and truest friend."

Her reverie was cut short by the ushering in of Captain Anstruther. Doris Beversley's greeting was not extraordinarily effusive.

"I am the bearer of a message to you," he said, after a pause.

"From Jan?" the question was asked haltingly.

"Yes; he sent you his love, and told me to tell you that the 'boy' died game'!"

"To save a man who ran away!" she answered wearily.

Captain Anstruther flushed hotly beneath his tan.

"He insisted on it, dear."

"You ran away and left him to die!" she repeated. Her voice quavered ominously.

"And I was wounded, Dolly, badly!"

"But you ran away! You should have had the Victoria Cross for your bravery," she harped mercilessly. The indignant flash of her eyes was dimmed by the tears which trembled on her lashes.

"He made me!" replied Captain Anstruther hotly. "Besides I went for a rescue party. Met them coming to rescue me, in fact. I took the men to his rescue at the double! I was only five minutes absent from his side, but that five minutes proved to be too long."

A sob was her only answer.

He drew her closely to him and kissed her.

"Derwent said that you loved me!" he said tenderly. "To this——"

She wrenched herself free from his retaining clasp.

"Love you?" she cried, with quivering lips. "I *hate* you! Despise you! How dare you come here with a tale of your own cowardice on your lips and almost in the same breath tell me of your love! I might have cared for you if—if—. Oh, I think I must be going mad when I reflect of what might have been and what now is." The tears were falling fast now. "If only—I had a memento—of him." She was coherent at last, and understandable to the amazed Captain Anstruther.

"I thought that you might like one perhaps," he said, a deep, gnawing anguish at his heart. "Therefore I brought you something which the poor lad treasured, and which I thought you might care for too!"

"Yes—it—is?" she whispered tremulously, biting her nether lip to stay the tears which trembled on her lashes, from falling.

Captain Anstruther took a little lace bedecked square of cambric from his breast, and gave it to her, saying simply as he did so—

"He was holding that tightly when we found him."

She recognised it as a handkerchief which he had stolen from her in their "flirtation" days. It was crumpled and torn now, with the embroidered lettering of her name sullied by a dark, sinister stain.

"You are right," she answered tremblingly. "I shall indeed treasure it as being my most precious possession. The monument of a true man's honest love. Captain Anstruther, do you mind—leaving me, I—I——"

"Good-bye, then, Dolly." He said sadly, as, not noticing her outstretched hand, he walked slowly to the door. "Good-bye. I understand, for I never had any luck—in all my life."

The door closed behind him, and as his footsteps died away on the landing, Doris Beversley raised the torn and smoke-begrimed cambric to her lips and kissed the sinister stain.

H. Morton Baird.

Your Editor Chats.

It is not to be wondered at that since the publication of Cynthia's experiences in *Short Stories* I have been inundated with letters from girls and women who are anxious to follow in this young woman's footsteps.

I never let a chance go by of securing good things for my readers, and I have therefore not only personally interviewed at least a dozen of my correspondents on the subject of the confessions they are willing to make, but have actually read no fewer than eight series of articles written by them.

As may be expected, practically all of the would-be contributors to *Short Stories* have very little of interest to say. What seemed to them most wonderful experiences and most startling adventures were really quite ordinary every-day occurrences, and proved very tame reading indeed. Two of the girls I found to be professional journalists who were willing to write a series of confessions out of their own imaginations! As I explained to them, the articles may have read very well, but the fact of them being fiction would brand them as absurd, and would kill all interest in them.

Only one lady really interested me. She was very cautious in the way she approached me, concealing her real name and address, until she had satisfied herself that I was willing to continue negotiations with her.

And her caution is not to be wondered at. She is very well-known, not only in London Society, but in Society circles abroad. Unhappily, her reputation, so far as money matters is concerned, is not above reproach. Although she has never actually committed a crime, she has accepted money from people for carrying out work she alone could do—work which necessitated a certain amount of underhand business.

She was on four occasions paid money by ambitious parents to get their daughters married to a title. In each of three cases she succeeded within six months, but in the fourth and last case the young girl whom she chaperoned was as wilful as she was lovely. Having conceived an affection for a poor, untitled young man, for many months she absolutely refused to listen to anyone else.

She was quite ignorant of the fact that her parents had promised a big sum to her chaperon if she "went off" well, and the latter was forbidden to tell her.

Whether the chaperon ultimately succeeded in securing for her charge a good "catch" will be told in her experiences. They travelled in good society all over Europe—visiting Paris, Nice, Monte Carlo, Rome, and every centre of gaiety on the Continent. At each place the lovely heiress was besieged by counts, dukes, and barons, and her adventures with some of them are dramatic.

The writer of these articles is now living in poor circumstances in Chelsea, and only the fact that money had to be got somehow has led her to place her experiences on paper.

I have carefully read them, and have cross-examined the writer on certain points. She has produced letters for my private perusal, and cuttings from French and Italian local papers, giving her name and that of her charge as guests at the various hotels at which they stopped.

In a fortnight these articles will begin.

Next week I will tell you more about them.

Your Editor.

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Quite Simple.

He: "This sea bathing makes one's hair an awful job to dry, even for a man. I wonder what on earth your friend here, Miss Longtresses, does with hers?" She: "Oh, leaves it in the machine."

The Tale of a Kiss.

They sat within the parlour dim, and fretfully she said to him: "I wish, dear John, that you'd behave; if not, I wish that you would shave."

Sweet Seventeen.

"I don't believe in the custom of giving engagement rings, do you?" "No; I would a good deal rather have the money spent in sweets and theatre tickets. You can't be expected to give them back, you know."

Things are Altered.

Wife (drearily): "Ah, me! the days of chivalry are past." Husband: "What's the matter now?" Wife: "Sir Walter Raleigh laid his cloak on the ground for Queen Elizabeth to walk over, but you get cross simply because poor, dear mother sat down on your hat."

Killing Two Birds with One Stone.

Robinson: "Just send me up a dozen of oysters, Scaley, will you? Mrs. Robinson's not very well, and the doctor's ordered her oysters. Mind you pick out fine ones. You see, she can't swallow more than a couple at the outside, and I'm obliged to eat the rest myself."

Her Version of it.

Doctor: "I would advise you, dear madam, to take frequent baths, plenty of fresh air, and dress in cool gowns." Husband (an hour later): "What did the doctor say?" Wife: "He said I ought to go to a South Coast watering-place, and afterwards to North Wales, and get some new light gowns at once."

Real Romance.

Young Author: "Would you call my novel realism or romance?" Friend: "What does the heroine say when she accepts the hero?" Young Author: "Oh, she says, 'Yes, dear George, we will tread life's path together, one in heart and purpose, bearing each other's burdens, sharing each other's grief, doubling each——'" Friend: "Oh, that's romance of the first water. A real girl would no more think of making a speech on such an occasion than of singing a song, or dancing the Highland fling."

What Her Heart Said.

Miss Mabella St. Percy: "Mamma, dearest, I have something to tell you." Mamma (anxiously): "Yes, darling?" "Yes, mamma. Mr. Moneybags proposed to me last night." "And what did my little girl say?" "I didn't give him a definite answer, mamma. I wanted to talk to you about it first." "And what does your heart say, dear?" "Oh, mamma, it says—it says—— Oh, mamma, is it really true that Mr. Moneybags will have £10,000 a year at his father's death?" "Quite true, my child, and—and—the old gentleman is very feeble. And now, what does my dear child's heart say?" "Oh, mamma, it says—'yes'!" "My own dear child! I have always wanted to see you married to the man of your choice, to the man you loved and honoured. Bless you, my darling, and may you be as happy as you deserve."

Had Finished Growing.

He: "Do you think you could grow to love me?" She: "I'm afraid not. You see, I've done growing."

A Much Blessed Hash.

Mrs. Jackson (at dinner): "Richard, will you ask a blessing?" Richard (examining hash): "We've blessed everything here before, dear."

Firmly Declined.

Cholly: "And now that you've finished school, Miss Daisy, I suppose you can conjugate love in several languages?" Miss Daisy: "No, but I can decline 'you' in English."

A Great Mistake.

Her mother said the little creature lived on love, but one month after marriage, when the grocery bill came in, he saw that he had made the greatest mistake of his life by not ascertaining what that particular love was for.

Baby Couldn't Tell.

Dr. Mansfield: "My dear Mrs. Jenkins, how could you bring that young baby out on such a cold day—with a strong east wind blowing?" Mrs. Jenkins: "Ah, doctor, you will have your little joke. How can a child of this one's age possibly know what wind it is?"

Not what He Expected.

"Why am I like a pin?" asked Mr. Jones triumphantly of his wife. He expected she was going to say, "Because you are so sharp," and he was simply paralysed when she responded: "Because if you should get lost it wouldn't be worth while to spend time looking for you."

Warned in Time.

"Is this the place," she asked, as she wandered down on the barren sands, "where a young lady—a beautiful young lady—fell in the water last season and was rescued by a gallant young man, whom she afterwards married?" He looked at her carefully, estimated her at a square forty-seven, with false teeth, and said emphatically: "Yes, ma'am, but I don't know how to swim."

Why He Left it There.

Johnnie had been out in the yard playing with his ball, and suddenly came in and sat down to read. His father looked up, and seeing that Johnnie had his Sunday-school book in his hand, thought it time to question him. "What did you do with the ball?" "It went over the wall into Mr. Brown's yard:" "Did you go after it?" "No, pa." "Why not?" "Because it went through the window."

Infant Fishes.

To a third party it is sometimes surprising how much pride a large man can take in catching a small fish. Two or three young men were exhibiting, with great satisfaction, the results of a day's fishing, whereupon a young woman remarked, very demurely: "Fish go in schools, do they not?" "I believe they do; but why do you ask?" "Oh, nothing, only I was just thinking that you must have broken up an infant class."

Rather a Jar.

"George," said the beautiful girl as she nestled close to him, "the last time you called you proposed." "I did, sweet one." "And I accepted you." "You did, love." "I presume, George," she went on in her most fascinating manner, "that you look upon me as merely a foolish, thoughtless girl, but—but——" "How can you think so, pet?" he interrupted. "But," she went on in a more business-like way, "I have something of the business instinct of the new woman in me, and—and—I shall have to ask you to repeat the proposal again to-night. The last time you called it was Sunday, and contracts made on that day, I learn, are not legally binding."

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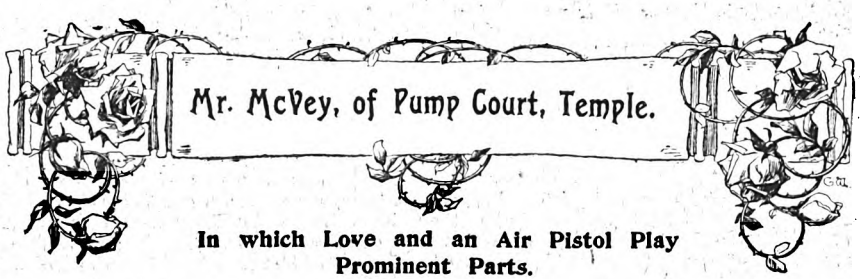

Mr. McVey, of Pump Court, Temple.

In which Love and an Air Pistol Play Prominent Parts.

"So you want to marry my girl, Leyland? I'm sorry, but it is out of the question."

"Mr. McVey!"

"Oh, yes, I know. Of course Marcia loves you; you love her to distraction, and both of you will break your hearts if I withhold my consent. My dear Leyland! hearts are not so easily broken; while as for the love, she, at any rate, would be heart-whole in a month if she didn't see you."

"If you think this," said Alec Leyland hotly, "why, Mr. McVey, did you tacitly encourage my affection for your daughter? You must have seen how matters stood between us; why did you not say before that you would not allow her to marry me?"

"What is your present financial position, and—what are your prospects?" asked John McVey, utterly ignoring the other's question.

"I am not rich, I——"

"That is just it—you are not rich; and Marcia must marry a rich man."

"You would sell your daughter, sir?"

"Certainly not. But you will excuse me, Mr. Leyland, my family affairs are not a subject for discussion with strangers."

"Then all I have to say about it is!" burst out the young fellow with uncontrollable indignation, "that your daughter's happiness is as nothing to you, and that you would brutally give her into the keeping of a man whose only recommendation is, that he has money enough to buy her!"

"That is my business, sir! Yours, I venture to suggest, has nothing in common with those living in my house. I have no more to say. Good night!"

When Alec Leyland had gone down to Richmond that afternoon, it was with the one object of getting John McVey's consent to Marcia's engagement to himself. That the barrister would allow financial considerations to influence his determination, was the very last thought Alec had in his mind. Certainly, McVey had not much practice, his chambers in Pump Court being frequented principally by well-dressed young fellows from the West End, to whom money, not law, seemed the one thing needful; but his domestic establishment and expenditure certainly indicated a more than ordinarily big income.

Then John McVey had displayed no mercenary qualities; rather had he appeared, especially to Alec Leyland, genial and friendly to a degree. The whole thing was a puzzle, which, added to disappointment, and concern for Marcia's future, served to render Alec's exit from the "shanty" peculiarly troublous.

Half way down the lane leading from Mr. McVey's house there was a door in the wall leading into the kitchen garden. This was ajar and as Leyland passed it on his way from the house it opened and a young servant gave him a note.

Hastily glancing at it he just said to the girl "All right!" and hurried away in the direction of the station.

The note ran:

"Dear,—From my own sitting-room I overheard *everything*. Wait on up platform; I *must* see you before you leave for town. Shall not be a quarter of an hour after you. Now, more than ever your own, Marcia."

She did not keep him waiting more than ten minutes, and in a quiet corner of the waiting-room the two sat down to discuss the situation.

"No, dear!" she said, in reply to a remark of his. "I intend only to consider ourselves in this matter. I know this man my father has in mind, and I hate him! I hate him!"

"Darling," said Alec, "there *is* a way out of the difficulty, but only extremity would justify me in proposing it to you."

"Alec, did you but know Sir Roland Sandys, as I know him, there could not possibly be a situation of greater extremity than this."

"Sir Roland Sandys! Why he is a thriftless, almost bankrupt man about town. He is not a rich man!"

"Not just now, perhaps; but my father knows that he will shortly inherit an enormous property on the death of old Lady Sandys, his mother; and as that event is hourly expected, you can see that the danger is very real."

"Tell me, dear, what you would have me do?"

"Nothing, Alec, until I have seen my father! I will write you the result to-night; and then you can go to him to his chambers, and tell him that his daughter's heart is yours; that you have my promise to be your wife, as soon as you can make me so; and that you *know*, that rather than be disposed of to Sir Roland Sandys—for a consideration, I would wish to remain a single woman to the end of the chapter!"

* * * * *

The house in Pump Court in which were Mr. VcVey's chambers, was, if possible, darker and more dingy than the majority of houses in that historic place.

The outer door stood open, and Alec Leyland entering, saw a door on which "clerks" was painted.

This room was evidently empty, as no one answered to repeated knockings.

Another door in the entrance passage had "J. McVey, Private," upon it. Here also there was no response to a vigorous summons.

After a moment's pause the visitor turned the handle and went in.

In an armchair by the open window, which looked out upon the backs of other and more ancient buildings, sat John McVey, apparently asleep.

A newspaper was upon his knees, and his head, leaning against the side of the chair, was bent forward.

"Mr. McVey," said Alec, slightly raising his voice.

But the sleeper did not awake.

Alec then made a step or two forward, looking more closely at the man in the arm-chair.

Taking hold of his shoulders to shake and rouse him, the horror-stricken young man saw that a thin stream of blood was slowly trickling from a wound in that side of the head nearest to the window.

John McVey was *dead*.

His head and hands were still warm, showing that the crime, if crime it were, must have been recently committed.

There were no signs of a struggle, but lying on the rug beside the chair was a small but powerful air-pistol.

Alec then heard a step in the outer passage, and, turning round, saw a boyish-looking young fellow, whom he at once judged to be the dead man's clerk, standing in the doorway.

"You had better fetch a policeman," said Alec.

The young fellow who seemed bewildered, without a word and bareheaded, rushed down the creaky old stairway, and across the court out into the Strand.

In ten minutes he returned with a constable and a detective.

Alec Leyland gave his version of the story to the law's representatives, who, after mechanically examining the room, intimated to him that he would have to accompany them to the police-station.

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Then, for the first time, the danger of his position forced itself upon the young man.

He knew that a terrible mistake might easily be made, and that he had absolutely no evidence of innocence, should he be charged with the crime.

As he feared, so it happened. He spent that night in the station cells, charged, on suspicion, with the murder of Mr. McVey.

* * * * *

The magistrate, before whom Alec Leyland was brought on the following morning, was obliged to confess that the police evidence was far from being convincing, although he felt bound to admit that it was in a measure circumstantially suspicious.

The accused had entered the barrister's office, no one, except the dead man, being there, and had been found by the clerk, standing by the body, a discharged air-pistol lying on the ground beside Mr. McVey.

That it was a case of suicide was out of the question, as the barrister could not have held his newspaper in one hand, while he shot himself with the other.

Again, the crime could not have been committed by the clerk, inasmuch as he had been out to the bank; and as a letter was found on his desk, with a pencilled slip in deceased's handwriting. "Deliver this letter when you return. No answer."

The note was addressed to A. Leyland, Esq., and was to the following effect:

"Sir,—After the violent language you used towards me last night, you will be surprised, perhaps, at my writing to you now. My object is merely to confirm what I said at that interview, and to so far explain my position, as to tell you that I am not only not a rich man, but a poor one. Any letters addressed by you to my daughter, or to me, will be returned unopened. Yours faithfully,

"John McVey."

This was practically all the incriminating evidence, but the magistrate, while retaining his own opinion, felt bound to commit upon it. Arraigned at the Old Bailey upon the capital charge, Alec Leyland was acquitted after a brief trial.

A loving note from Marcia reached him almost before the formalities, usual upon acquittal, were completed.

She assured him of her undying affection, and bade him communicate with her without delay.

He replied that he would never cease to love her, but that for her sake he would not seek to gratify it by pressing it upon her. He was going abroad, he said, and prayed that the happiness she so deserved might be hers.

The answer to this, from a little village on the South coast was simply this:

"Dear,—Come to me.—Yours now and ever, Marcia."

He could not refuse her, and the next day travelled down to Ryethorpe.

* * * * *

A lady and a gentleman, both young, and both intensely absorbed, the one with the other, were walking along the front at Brighton (where they had been living for a year or more) in the direction of Kemp Town.

"Alec!" said the lady in a low tone. "Did you notice that man who passed us just now?"

"That seedy-looking chap, with the heavy moustache? Yes, I half thought I recognised him; but I suppose I was mistaken."

"I don't think you were," said Marcia Leyland. "It was Sir Roland Sandys."

"Great Heavens! That out-at-elbows creature, Sir Roland Sandys. Impossible!"

"It was he, I am sure, dear. And, look, Alec! He is waiting there by the corner of that building as if he wanted to speak to either you or me."

"I think it had better be me then. You go back, my darling, and I will follow you in half-an-hour."

He watched his wife on her way back to their lodgings, and then went to meet the man, who evidently had sought him out for some purpose of his own.

"Mr. Leyland?"

"Yes, that is my name, and yours, I take it, is Sandys—Sir Roland Sandys?"

"You recognise me then?"

"It was my wife who recognised you, though I had an indefinite idea that I ought to know you."

"Well, Mr. Leyland, where can we talk undisturbed for a while? I have something to say which I think will do much towards easing both your wife's mind—and your own."

They were at that moment passing a certain old-fashioned hotel, into which Alec led his companion.

A private room was soon secured, and Alec, though wondering at the strangeness of the whole affair, prepared himself to listen. It was certainly a most extraordinary story the baronet had to tell. Briefly, it amounted to this:

Sandys, it seemed, at the time when Mr. McVey met his death, shared some chambers in the block of buildings immediately backing on to the South side of Pump Court, with a friend, one Roger Haik.

This Haik was a man always in monetary straits, and deep in the books of the money-lenders.

John McVey, barrister ostensibly, but really usurer, had, in the course of Roger Haik's short career, contributed to suck the latter completely dry; so that with the wild revengefulness of a desperate man, Haik threatened more than once, in Sandys' presence, to "kill the old Shylock."

Sandys not really believing the threat to have any actual meaning, took no notice of it.

On the day of John McVey's death, however, he returned from the West End to find Roger Haik leaning on the window-sill, and looking steadily down at McVey's open window, through which might be seen the figure of the barrister, sitting in his arm-chair.

Sandys might not have thought so much of it but for the presence, in Haik's right hand, of a small air-pistol, purchased, as he knew, a day or so before by the latter.

In a moment the whole thing was clear to him. Not stopping to exchange a word with the man whom he knew to be a murderer, he plucked the weapon out of the other's hand, and rushed round into Pump Court.

McVey's outer door was open. The baronet made no ceremony, but passing rapidly into the private room, saw his fears confirmed, and laid down the pistol on the floor by the chair side, hoping that the barrister's well-known financial difficulties would procure a verdict of suicide. Then, going as he came, he closed the door behind him, and returned to his own chambers.

That night he and Roger Haik, collecting all their available resources, got away to France.

There, three weeks before this Brighton meeting, Haik had succumbed to a knife wound incurred in a street brawl in Paris.

Before he died he so far repented having been the direct means of imperilling Alec Leyland's life, that he begged his old boon-companion, Sandys, to communicate the facts to either John McVey's daughter or to her husband.

Seriously implicated, as an accessory after the fact, Sandys expressed his intention to leave again for parts unknown, begging only that public acknowledgment of Roger Haik's guilt might be delayed until he, Sandys, was beyond seas. He also explained that he had found Leyland and his wife to be in Brighton, through the servants at the "Shanty" which still remained Marcia's property.

* * * * *

"So you see, dear," said Alec, with a smile. "I was innocent after all."

"As if I did not know it," Marcia replied, both hands clasped round one of his arms.

"But, Alec, is there need to publish this poor dead creature's confession? It will be quite enough for *us* to be assured; let the world be satisfied with your acquittal."

"Ever and always the angel of mercy, Marcia! I am content if you are; for I know that your love, dearest, was my true and best justification."

E. Ralph.

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THE BLUE SKIRT.

Jessie Gale was ambitious, immoderately so.

Jack Gale was ambitious, too, but temperately so.

It was because of the varying degrees of their ambition that this story came about.

Jessie could sing. Jack could not. He could only listen with a rare appreciation and adore this particular singer beyond all bounds of her deserts. For Jack was as gifted in the rare art of loving truly as Jessie was in the art of singing. Rather more, I should say.

All this had much to do with the blue skirt, for it was these phsychologic conditions that brought about the incident of the blue skirt.

Jack had always extravagantly admired the gown of which the blue skirt was a component part. He had told her so often, but Jessie had answered rather fretfully that it was "such a simple little affair." Pale blue chambray, made with a blouse effect and trimmed with ruffles edged with narrow torchon. So a woman would have described it, but to sturdy, honest, loving Jack it was a blue cloud flecked with white, from which the black eyes and curling black hair, the red lips and creamy skin of his wife gleamed forth brilliantly.

Jack never forgot the day she tossed it aside.

"I'll never wear that old thing again," she said. "I do hate to wear things when they've grown shabby."

There was a little tremor of sensitiveness in Jack's face as the words struck cruelly upon his ear, but he made a manful effort to conquer it. His income was small, but he was doing his best to increase it, and the increase was sure to come if it was a bit slow. He had told Jessie so often and had explained that there was some disposition to keep the young engineers down.

"The older fellows naturally want to keep the best positions," he said. "Try to be patient, Jessie. I am doing my best, dear."

And Jessie was silent. She had the introspective nature that matches heavy-lidded eyes, habitually cast down. And the habits of silence and introspection were growing.

It was on the evening of the day that Jessie said she had thrown away "the old blue dress" that the great change came.

Jessie heard that a theatrical manager was reorganising a company for a season of comic opera. A neighbour had told her he needed girls for the company—"girls with looks, and with voices if possible, but looks anyway." And Jessie had gone to town and been engaged and had come back and told Jack.

She was a little frightened by his strange silence.

"I did it to help you along—because the money will help us both," she said in defence. Then she burst out into a storm against the manner of their life.

"I hate the solitude here," she said. "Sometimes I feel afraid of the hills. It seems as though they will fall over me and crush me. And the silence here is awful. I want to hear human voices. I want to hear people laugh and sing. I want colour and movement and sound instead of these walls of green making a living tomb for us."

Jack had talked with her very gently and she had answered every argument with bitter protest. He answered her sadly then.

"You are young, dear. I might have known that love would not fill your life now. When you are as old as I am you will know that it is all that really matters, besides working and doing one's duty. I will give my consent to your going, for all I live for is to make you happy."

And Jessie went on her way, singing a small part in a pretty, uncultivated voice. She dressed with half a dozen other girls who smoked and used slang, and in the guise of friendliness "made her up" to distort the beauty of her dark, brooding face. She learnt the disciplinary value of the stage, and she learnt the real hideousness of selfishness. But she told Jack none of this.

One season passed—two—she was soon to begin her third. She was getting on, but slowly. One evening she was moved by one of those impulses that seem to come from without rather than within to run home and pay Jack a visit. The rehearsals were over. There was no reason why she should not go home for a week. She would surprise him.

She drove out from town in the early morning. The mist veils were rising from the hill tops, melted by the burning kisses of the sun. The evergreen forests on the hill sides were so cool, the great walls of earth so restful. She wondered why she was not afraid they would topple upon her now. Was it that she was beginning to yearn for what they typified—strength and fidelity, the greatest and best things in life?

The little house had been done up she noticed as she drove up, and Jack had coaxed the rose vines quite to the roof by now.

The door was open. There was no fear of tramps in that region, and she peered right into the house. She crossed the threshold softly. Some one was stirring within but he was too absorbed to note her soft footfalls.

Her old blue skirt hung upon the wall, and her husband, looking older and sadder, but still with that vast strength of patience in his face, stood looking at it.

She wrote the rest to her one friend in the company.

"I walked over quietly and stood beside him. He was still so busy looking at that foolish skirt that he didn't know I was there. But after awhile he turned towards me, and when he saw me the look that came into his eyes made me cry.

"Well, I've resigned. When I saw poor old Jack worshipping that blue skirt of mine that I had thrown away as worthless, I made up my mind that there are only a few things that are really worth living for, and stage life isn't one of them, and the companionship of a staunch, splendid soul like Jack is. And so I've left and I'm going to wait and work with Jack for the better days that I know are coming.

"He is getting on in his profession and the—did I call them better—the other days are nearer. But I wonder if they will be better, the days when Jack and I are rich, and so many people will know us and make demands upon our time, and so separate us after a manner? We were both wondering to-day, but we are going to enjoy the time before that, and meanwhile that old blue skirt still hangs upon the wall. Jack insists upon it. He calls it his 'restorer.'"

Ida Patterson.

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SERIAL STORY.

Out of Great Tribulation.

By Henry Farmer.

Murder Will Out!

But before the news of his freedom reached Alec Scarsdale, much had happened. The daily papers had furnished forth much sensational reading. In the train, on the top of the 'bus, at the street corner, one was pretty nearly certain to hear the names of Revelle, Crump, and Scarsdale, and perhaps the name that was most frequently mentioned was Crump's.

It was no fault of the little man's that he was thus brought into prominence; but he was undoubtedly the hero of the hour. Sensationalism seemed to have attained its climax when it was made known that Seaton Revelle of The Firs, Warham, a member of several exclusive clubs, and well-known in society, had been arrested; but a yet greater sensation was in store for the British public.

Those present in the police-court when Revelle, livid-faced and looking an old man, appeared before the magistrate, would not forget what happened for many a day. A cheer was suppressed when Crump's name was called out, and a little man, very much bandaged and with only one eye visible, stepped into the witness-box. Crump's successes, in the days of his active service, had in great measure been assisted by the fact that he had kept his personality in the background whenever possible. He had been a name rather than a person.

So this little, grey-headed man was the famous Crump! Those in court saw the livid-faced prisoner lean forward over the edge of the dock, and glare, as though his eyes were playing him false, at the little man in the box.

"Penworthy!" he hissed, half-aloud.

For all his bandages Seaton Revelle had recognised in Crump the landscape gardener and horticultural specialist.

Then the Crown Prosecutor called upon Mr. Crump to tell his story in his own way.

The court listened to him in breathless silence as he gave his evidence, with that modesty so characteristic of him. His evidence commenced with Alec Scarsdale's trial at the Old Bailey, and ended with the arrest of Seaton Revelle.

Then came the great sensation.

Crump had ceased speaking. Again a cheer was suppressed. The little man had won every heart in court. He had unmasked a scoundrel; but he had done more than that. He had proved the innocence of a terribly wronged man.

The spectators watched him, expecting him to leave the box; but he did not stir. The Crown Prosecutor was on his feet again.

"Your Worship," he said, addressing the magistrate, "the principal charge at present against the prisoner in the dock is one of manslaughter. I'm going to ask for an adjournment, after Mr. Crump has given certain evidence, in order that the indictment may be altered, and the prisoner charged with the more terrible crime of murder!"

There was a moment of deathlike silence.

Revelle clutched the dock with both his hands as if to save himself from falling. He had yet hoped to save his neck. Benny Beard had drawn a revolver on him. He had struck him down in self-defence. It had been manslaughter, the counsel for the defence had pleaded, not wilful murder. But now?

The Crown Prosecutor was speaking again.

"A foul murder in no way connected with crimes with which he is now charged, the murder of Alice Balder, known also as Alice Vance and Alice Vince, the prisoner's late wife!"

It was as if a bomb had fallen in the court.

Revelle had reeled back. The constables on either side of him were supporting him now. His bloodless lips were flecked with foam. He was past acting now!

"Now, Mr. Crump," said the Crown Prosecutor, "if you will proceed with your evidence."

Crump beckoned to some constables. Three of them advanced, each bearing a bag of sand ballast.

Then the little man opened the hand-bag that he had with him, and took out a pencilled map, and some fragments of dark, serge-like looking material, and a letter, and a rolled-up scroll that proved to be a small picture poster representing Signor Balderini in the act of making a parachute descent, and a copy of a marriage certificate testifying to a marriage between James Balder and Alice Vince.

"Your Worship," he said, "before giving my evidence I should like to state that there is a witness in court prepared to identify the prisoner as James Balder, *alias* Signor Balderini, the parachutist, and there is another witness who is not at this moment present in court, owing to certain formalities—he is undergoing a brief spell of imprisonment—one Rumbey, a vagrant, who was in Rushford wood on the night that Alice Vance met her death; but he will be forthcoming later. In the meantime I venture to presume that I am in a position to make out a *prima facie* case that will justify an adjournment and a fresh indictment."

Then the little man gave his evidence, stating how his suspicions had been aroused by the position of the poor woman's body in the water, a position that could be only explained by the fact that she must have been dropped into the water; then followed the evidence of the sand-bags, the broken gorse, the fragment of dress, the second fragment found clinging to the fluke of the anchor; then the map with its crosses, and pencilled notes and compass points, was handed up to the magistrate.

And the excited audience whispered among themselves that the homely little man had put a rope round the neck of the death-hued scoundrel who stood in the dock, supported on every side.

But it was so; Rumbey, the vagrant proved the last conclusive link in the evidence when taken in conjunction with Crump's.

He had been in the wood that night of the balloon ascent. He had curled himself up in a hollow tree near the bank when something, seeming to come from the clouds, something dark, fell with a plunge into the water.

The vagrant, knowing of the balloon ascent, had imagined at first that it must have been a bag of ballast. He had wandered away before the discovery of the body, and a bout of drunkenness had followed. Only when he heard of the woman's death had his vague suspicions been aroused, and then perhaps, but for Tom Jackson, he would never have come forward.

After the adjournment of the court, a great crowd waited outside; but the little man for whom they waited, whom in their enthusiasm they would have borne away shoulder

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high, had contrived to effect an escape by a side-exit, and, crouching back in a cab—his expression, what there was visible of it, rather suggestive of a criminal flying from justice—was on his way to the Hotel Royal.

At Last!

How the light sparkled from her dark eyes, how the colour ebbed and flowed on Esther's cheeks as she stood alone in the drawing-room of The Woodlands waiting.

"He is coming, he is coming!"

The birds outside seemed to be singing the words; the very clock—the seconds seemed hours!—was ticking out the words, though the hands must be standing still.

Her fevered, pulsing heart throbbed out the same joyous refrain.

He was coming, he was coming. Her love, her life.

She had never doubted him, never wavered; through the blackness of those awful days, her love, her faith in him, had been the rock to which she had clung, and from which all the storm, all the tempest had not torn her!

She hears the rattle of wheels, the slamming of doors, voices in the hall, her father's voice, the voice of the little man who has been a second father to her; then another voice—his voice!

She is white as death now, white with a great joy, an inexpressible anticipation.

A dimness veils her eyes. She hears the door open, sees something shadowy move towards her; but she feels the strong, trembling arms that encircle her; the mad throbbing of the heart pressed close to hers; the burning lips that shower kisses upon her; and she hears him whisper:

"Oh, God! I thank thee!"

And as the blinding tears—the dew of joy and love—flow down her cheeks, she also whispers:

"Oh, God! I thank thee!"

And love will blot out the memories of the injustice, the cell, and the agony; and love will fill those two hearts again with light and sunshine, soothing and healing and pervading their lives as the sweet perfume of fragrant flowers.

They have passed from out the darkness of their great tribulation. The sky is cloudless now!

They lose all count of time. The greyness of dusk steals into the room. He is only conscious of her presence; she of his.

They do not see the two figures dimly outlined on the threshold of the room—two old men, one, a little man, whose face is no longer bandaged.

"Come!" whispers Crump, in a very shaky voice. "We have seen enough, Mr. Mansfield. This is no place for either of us."

When they have passed away, the little man holds out his hand.

The father wrings it. There are tears in both men's eyes.

"At last!" chokes out Crump. "Thank God!"

* * * * *

The scene has changed!

"Guilty!"

He is standing in the felon's dock, Seaton Revelle, in the very dock in which, not two years back, Alec Scarsdale was standing.

The Judge dons the black cap.

The awful words of doom are spoken.

In all that crowded court, not one look of pity! There is a scream. Revelle, frothing at the mouth, falls to the ground in a fit.

Even in the cell he tries to escape the sentence passed upon him; but the warders are too watchful, and one grey, grim morning, to the gloomy tolling of the prison bell, a half-fainting, livid wretch, supported on either side, is led out to the scaffold.

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When the black flag flutters out, the crowd outside Newgate knows that James Balder, *alias* Seaton Revelle, *alias* the Marquis, thief, murderer, and coward, has paid the penalty of his crimes.

* * * * *

They sent Tomlinson, *alias* Railton, to penal servitude for five years, on the strength of certain evidence produced by Crump in the shape of designs of Lord Normanhurst's place, The Towers. And Mr. Lewis Masters, turf accountant and receiver of stolen goods, thanks also to Crump, received a similar sentence.

The little man's hope that he would "bag" the lot of them was realised.

An End, and a Beginning.

"Lor', Mr. Penworthy," ejaculated Mrs. Cobb, "I've never seen you look so smart before in my life! Mr. Penworthy you are to me, Mr. Crump, and Mr. Penworthy you will always be. 'Pon my word, you look a perfect picture!"

The little man, his kindly face one big smile, was arrayed in a frock coat, shepherd's plaid trousers, and patent leather boots.

A mighty buttonhole adorned the lappel of his coat. He was struggling into a lavender kid glove.

"Mrs. Cobb," he chuckled, "I am glad that you think the clothes are effective. I am not a dressy person; but to-day—and he chuckled again, and the little eyes twinkled like stars—"but to-day is a great and joyous day! Mrs. Cobb, shake hands!"

And as he was shaking the old lady's hand, the distant jangling of joyous bells fell upon their ears.

"Do you hear them, Mrs. Cobb? Wedding bells, wedding bells! Come, Mrs. Cobb, where's Pollie? We must be getting to the church!"

It was Esther Mansfield's and Alec Scarsdale's wedding-day! They had begged Crump to stay at the Woodlands; but the little man had insisted that he would be in the way, and that at Woodbine Cottage he would be very close.

"Ah, here's Pollie!"

And a few moments later, Mr. Crump, Pollie on one arm, and Mrs. Cobb on the other, was making his way down to the church. And what a crowd there was! All Warham was there, and many more beside.

"There he is, bless him!" said Tom Jackson, nudging Fred Wilton's arm as the little man entered the church.

Then presently all eyes were turned on the man who had appeared at the altar rails, a young man with grey hair—Alec Scarsdale, the one-time convict 35. And men and women were conscious of a strange thrill. The well-groomed young gentleman, the best man, was Gerald Phipps.

Then the organ was pealing out.

Esther, on her father's arm, was passing down the aisle.

"But you mustn't!" whispered Pollie to the little man beside her. "You mustn't cry, Mr. Penworthy!"

For the famous detective, the one-time terror of the criminal fraternity, the man who had fought the notorious Smasher on the housetops, who had clung on to James Balder with a grip of steel, was crying like a child.

And when it was all over, and the bride and bridegroom had passed into the vestry, Mr. Crump would have crept quietly from the church; but it was not to be. He was seized upon by Gerald Phipps, and carried off into the vestry.

And after that, Crump himself was only absolutely certain about one thing that happened—it was so bewildering, owing to the fact that everybody seemed to be wringing his hands at one and the same time, and thanking him, and blessing him—but of this he was and is absolutely certain, that the bride put her arms round his neck, and not only kissed him, but hugged him!

They took the horses from the carriage, and dragged Alec Scarsdale and his bride, cheering all the way, to the Woodlands.

And this time Crump did not escape.

They bore him shoulder-high, cheering all the way, to the Woodlands!

And here—Mr. Crump is absolutely certain of this—he was again kissed by the bride, and his hand ached for days afterwards from the bridegroom's grip!

At the reception he was called upon to make a speech. He himself has no recollection of what he said; but, according to those present, it was a speech which one felt the better for having heard.

* * * * *

Twilight!

The rice has been thrown; bride and bridegroom are gone. Two grey-haired men are standing in the grounds of the Woodlands.

"God bless you, Crump!" says John Mansfield.

"Let us thank God for this day!" whispers the little man reverently.

He is silent for a few moments. The afterglow illumines the sky, and his kindly, gentle face.

"A very happy ending," he whispers presently; "no, not an ending, but a beginning, the beginning of a new life!"

THE END.

[And so the curtain falls on this drama. I hope you have enjoyed it. I hope still more that you will enjoy the new serial story, "A Foe in the Family," which starts on the front page of *Short Stories* this week. At any rate, you will read the first instalment, won't you? It will not take you long, and you can judge then whether you will continue it or not. I have no doubt as to what your decision will be. —Ed.]

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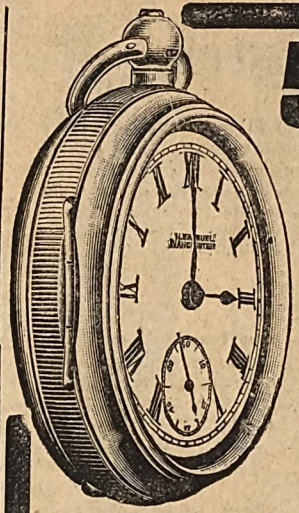

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, of points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Cold Beauty.

"Ezra" is in love with a very beautiful girl. But whenever he makes any advances he finds she treats him as rather a bore, though all the time she has professed to return his affection. Is it a trait of very pretty girls to expect all the love-making to be done by the other side, or do I interpret the reason to be that "Ezra" is being deceived by her?

* * * * *

Judge the girl's conduct with others, particularly men, If you find she makes herself peculiarly attractive all round, rest assured that she is probably a flirt who likes you as long as you afford her sufficient sport. After this, it is usual for pretty flirts to allow the man to go where he pleases. On the other hand, if she appears to be generally cold towards others, and reserve is one of her characteristics, continue your campaign, resting assured that you are as favourably regarded as anyone else, and that the odds are in favour of her being really fond of you.

Fair, Fat, and—Sixteen!

"Could you tell me of a cure for fatness?" writes "K. L. L. L." "I am thirty-six inches across the chest, forty round the hips, five feet one inch tall, and am only sixteen years old. I do a great deal of cycling, and have everything I require. As my friends constantly jeer at me for my size, I should be obliged if you could give me a cure."

* * * * *

I observe that "K. L. L. L." has everything he (or she) wants. Perhaps this accounts for his (or her) abnormal size—a too luxurious and adequate diet. Let "K. L. L. L." consistently eat less, avoid all sweetening substances, such as sugar in tea or coffee, confectionery, jam, and the like, also take butter in great moderation, and also be sparing towards such a vegetable as the potato. By the elimination of such things from the diet one can at any rate guard against putting on weight. "K. L. L. L." should continue cycling, and should also go in for walking and active pastimes generally. If such a course does not reduce the annoying bulkiness, "K. L. L. L." had really better see a doctor, for at sixteen certainly such dimensions are not normal.

There Are Worse Things than Ignorance.

"Nancy" is in love with a gentleman who seems to care nothing at all about her. He is a scholar, and in speaking to him, "Nancy" always is conscious of her ignorance. Can I tell her some way to make herself pleasing to him?

* * * * *

If you know that you are inferior to the man in knowledge, by all means avoid trying to appear his equal. There is nothing he would sooner see through than an affectation of knowledge. Just be as natural and agreeable as you can. He will probably like you all the more for your lack of intellectual gifts. Clever men usually seek their sweethearts among any but clever women.

"Eric's" Trouble Settled.

I am very glad to hear from correspondents as to the results of their following any advice I am able to give them in regard to their love affairs. It is a great pleasure for me to hear that my recent advice to "Eric's" sweetheart, who hesitated to marry because of a disablement, has prevailed with her, and that the young couple will soon be united without hindrance.

"Veilchen's" Mysterious Admirer.

"Veilchen."—Thank you for your sympathy in my accident. Do you not think it would be better to try and forget all about the man whose attitude suggests that he has feelings towards you, but who, apparently, has not the courage or resource to try and become acquainted with you? I know it would be very difficult, seeing that you evidently return in some measure his feelings; but, as you say, there might be great disappointment in store for you if you actually got to know him, and the fact that he is much beneath you in social position would much complicate matters. Write to me fully, giving me a description of the man's appearance, probable occupation, and the nature of his conduct when he has seen you; also where you encounter him, and I will try and assist you by some practical suggestion. At present, of course, it is only possible to give you general advice.

Those Changeable Girls.

I have had two letters from correspondents whose troubles seem to be identical, and invite the same solution. Both have been acquainted with girls, whom they had reason to believe were fond of them. Recently, however, they have altered their behaviour for no clear reason. In the case of "Perplexed," the girl now fails to recognise him, and when he taxed her with the fact she replied evasively. He adds that she was at the seaside about two weeks ago. My other correspondent "G. F. C.," complains of almost identical treatment.

* * * *

Now, there appears to be one very probable solution of the matter. In the case of "Perplexed," evidently the girl has decided, perhaps as the result of her seaside visit, that she is no longer fond of him. Probably she met someone else on her holiday who has stolen her heart. "Perplexed" should return her treatment of him in her own coin, and not show himself in any way disturbed by her conduct. If men treated in this way showed a little more pride they would not find women so ready to throw them over at fancy. It is because they show so little power of retaliation that many girls trifle with their affections in this manner. Both "Perplexed" and "G. F. C." should take an independent line. If the girls do not want their society, they should not thrust it on them. No man should make himself a nuisance to any girl. It is neither kind to her nor dignified for himself.

That Over-Rated Question.

"Agnes" wears an engagement ring placed on her finger by "Thomas," and is constantly with him on terms of the greatest intimacy. It has however, just dawned upon her that he has never proposed to her. Can a girl be engaged to a man who has never actually "popped the question"?

* * * *

"Popping the question," "Agnes," is a process to which those who have never been in love attach too much importance. Young people who have taken a fancy to each other from the first, and whose meetings have been those of lovers almost at the outset, scarcely think it necessary to make any formal proposal of marriage. It is taken for granted that at the earliest opportunity the ceremony will take place. No doubt this is how the matter stands between you and your sweetheart. You know you are to be married, just as you know you will get up to-morrow morning. Why then bother about that formal question, which, after all, is only held in such esteem by people not in love?

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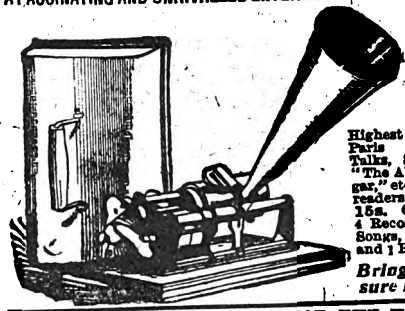

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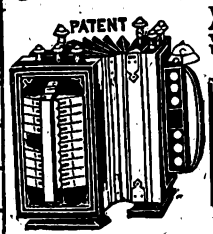

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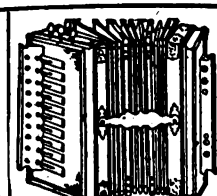

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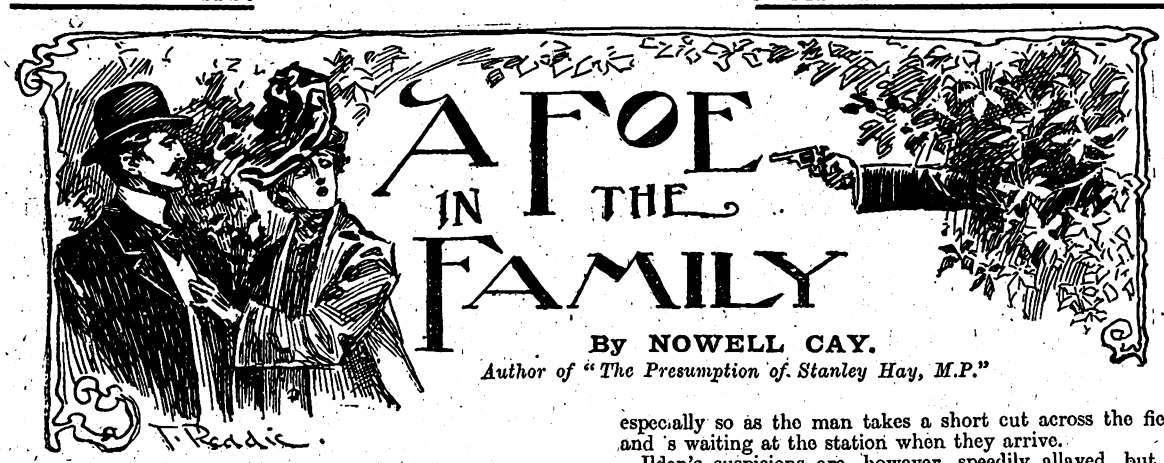

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

The Lady of the Bank Notes.

WHILE returning one evening to Pennybrook Hall, the residence of his uncle Jasper, Lord Ilden discovers a young girl in great distress at having lost two five pound notes, the whole of her wages for six months as a country governess. Together they search for the missing money; but as it is getting dusk, and Lord Ilden wants to get rid of his pretty companion, who turns out to be the sister of one of his old college chums, he manages to substitute two of his own notes and return them to her. She goes away overflowing with gratitude.

When she has disappeared, however, Lord Ilden continues the search. He fails to find the money, but instead discovers an envelope addressed to himself, the contents of which he has never seen. The envelope is addressed in a girl's handwriting, and is postmarked "Lallerton." Pocketing his find, Lord Ilden is lighting a cigarette, when the report of a rifle suddenly breaks the stillness of the evening, and a bullet whizzes just past him and buries itself in a tree behind.

"That," mutters Lord Ilden, "is the third attempt which has been made on my life during my stay at Pennybrook Hall."

On his return to his uncle's, he tells his cousin, Catherine Hay, of his adventure, and, feeling assured that the attempts are being made by some member of the family, many of whom would profit considerably by his death, proposes marriage to her as a means of reducing the value of his own death to his enemies. Whilst very anxious about his safety, and only too willing to help him as much as she can, Cathie, however, explains her inability to marry him.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden has discovered that it is his cousin Percival who opened the post-bag and extracted the letter addressed to himself, the envelope of which he found in the coppice.

That same evening Lord Ilden's butler discovers a large quantity of poison in his master's flask. This makes the fourth attempt.

Upon receiving the news, Lord Ilden considers it wisest to leave Pennybrook Hall at once. He is driving to the station with Cathie when they overtake a man who appears to take a great interest in them. Ilden's suspicions are instantly aroused, especially so as the man takes a short cut across the fields, and is waiting at the station when they arrive.

Ilden's suspicions are, however, speedily allayed, but his curiosity considerably excited when he discovers this gentleman in one of the carriages in the train he is about to enter in animated conversation with Florence Courthorpe, the lady of the bank notes.

(The above is a short summary of the opening chapters.)

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CHAPTER IV.
Who Would Benefit.

As Lord Ilden glanced into the railway compartment, Florence Courthorpe's eyes had met his and brightened with a shy smile of recognition. He raised his hat and passed on to where Jardine was holding open for him the door of a first-class carriage.

"You have taken tickets for Ilden Market?"

"Yes, my lord."

"That is right. Give me mine and put the small Gladstone in here with me. You will go on to the Castle with the rest of the luggage, and remain there till you hear from me. I shall not change at Rickerby, but go on with the train."

The well-trained valet's face expressed no shade of surprise at the announcement.

"Yes, my lord."

"If anybody inquires about me, they may as well imagine that I am remaining at Pennybrook. You can give any explanation you like of your own return."

"Yes, my lord. I understand."

Catherine hurried up as he disappeared.

"Is he not in the train?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes, but he is with a young lady, and I do not care to interrupt their *tête-à-tête*. I think that we have been exciting ourselves about him without cause, Cathie. He was no doubt waiting for her when we overtook him, and the sight of the wagonette galloping to the station, reminded him that the train was due and that she must be in advance of him."

His cousin was not willing to dismiss her suspicions so abruptly.

"Perhaps the woman is an accomplice who has been watching the station," she said, and Ilden smiled his sphinx-like smile.

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"I do not think so, because she told me yesterday evening that she was leaving Pennybrook this morning."

"You know her then?"

"As a lady above suspicion," said Ilden, and as he spoke the train started, leaving his cousin, if possible, more anxious about him than ever. The case as it stood had been disturbing enough without the introduction of a woman into it.

Coming away through the booking-office she dried her eyes hastily at the sight of Grant Ilden, who was just handing his bicycle over to the charge of a porter.

A tinge of colour came into Cathie's cheeks as she saw him.

"I did not know you were so anxious to see Cousin George off," she said. "What a pity! You are just too late."

"I can survive the misfortune," he said distantly. "I at least can contemplate 'my lord's' departure without profound sorrow. Now that he is gone there will perhaps be some chance for a mere ordinary person to enjoy a little of your society."

"Not if the mere ordinary person is going to be objectionable. I cannot understand why you 'scorched' down to the station if you care so little for George."

"I thought that you might not care to return alone, but, of course, if you want to think over the secrets you have been exchanging I do not wish to interrupt you."

"Now that is considerate of you," she said with teasing irony. "But as you are here, I suppose we may as well walk together. That is, if you don't mind walking. I told the wagonette not to wait. As for the secrets Cousin George has been telling me, I want to think over them very seriously indeed. But I don't think you will interfere with my thoughts. In fact you may help them. Do you know by sight any of the men who have lent your Uncle Jasper money."

Grant's handsome, melancholy face flushed angrily.

"You are playing with me," he said. "Ilden was not talking to you about Uncle Jasper's debts, and if he was, it was not *that* that made you cry."

Catherine drew herself up.

"I did not know that you were trying to discover what Cousin George and I talked about."

The accusation was near enough to the truth to make him apologetic.

Cathie received his disclaimers with becoming severity.

"And now suppose that you answer my question," she said, when he had finished. "Do you know your uncle's creditors by sight?"

They had left the station behind them now, and were turning into the "short cut" across the fields, which had enabled the "unknown" to catch his train.

The poet's melancholy was disappearing under the influence of Catherine's society, and the knowledge that he had her all to himself, with Lord Ilden well out of the way.

"Uncle Jay's creditors!" he repeated. "That is rather a large order. He owes *me* half-a-crown."

"But the money lenders?" she said, very seriously. "The men to whom he owes large sums? Do you know any of them by sight?"

"I have met Isaacs. Percival tried to get an advance out of him on the strength of his expectations—which are worth nothing—and nearly got into trouble over it. Percy is such a reckless fool. Isaacs said that he led him to believe that he was Lord Ilden himself, and the Pater had to pay a good deal to hush it up. That is how the money goes. If Percy were content with his allowance, I might not be a pauper."

He spoke very bitterly, and Cathie, who knew that he suffered enough from his brother's complete selfishness to excuse the absence of any fraternal sympathy or championship, felt very sorry for him; but she was too intent on her investigations to say so.

"And what sort of a man is this Isaacs to look at?" she asked.

"He is the picture of a Jewish patriarch. At heart he is a skinflint, and looks like a beaming philanthropist."

"An old man?"

"He looks eighty."

Catherine lost interest in Mr. Isaacs.

"Have you noticed, in Pennybrook or anywhere," she asked, a tall, thin man, with hooked features and strange, fierce-looking, dark eyes, who walks with his hands behind his back? You recognise the description?"

Grant had started.

"Yes, if he dresses in black and wears a black slouch hat. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing except that he went off by this train. I wondered who he could be."

"And you put him down as a money-lender. That is not a bad idea," said Grant thoughtfully, "although I should not think it is Uncle Jay that he came to bother."

"Whom then?"

"Percy. I have been wondering what they had to do with each other."

Cathie turned sick. Was it possible that Percival Ilden, a man who had lived in the same house with her, and with whom she had spoken familiarly, could really be involved in a plot against his cousin's life.

"Tell me all you know about this man," she said excitedly. "Who is he, and what has he had to do with your brother?"

"Oh! I know nothing. I have only seen him once in my life—yesterday evening. Percy and I happened to be coming home from the moors together—wrangling as usual, when in one of the lanes we saw the man you have described walking along slowly before us just as you have described, with his shoulders bent and his hands behind his back.

Percy did not notice him, and I said nothing until looking up I found the fellow had suddenly disappeared from sight. 'Hello! where's that apparition gone to?' I said, for the lane is pretty straight there, and I knew there were no side paths leading out of it. But I really spoke to show Percy that I was not listening. He was 'rowing' me because I had let something out to the Pater, and what I said made him stop at once.

He seemed in an awful funk when I told him what I had seen, and what the man was like, and surprised me by wanting to turn back. I was not going to do that, and have an extra mile's tramp instead of seeing where the man in front had got to. I said so to Percy. 'You can do as you like,' he said, 'but I am going back. If you see the fellow have a good look at him, and tell me what he is like.'

I had been laughing at him for being superstitious, but I saw that it was no superstition. He thought it was some man that he was trying to avoid, and I went on alone. As I half expected, the apparition was waiting in an inlet of the hedge, where it hid him from anybody coming along. It was under the shadow of a tree, and I should have passed him without noticing that there was anybody there at all if I had not been on the look-out. The fact that he seemed deliberately trying to avoid observation made me determined to have a look at him, so I asked him for a light.

He said he had not got one, but I pretended to find one as he spoke in my own vesta case, and stopped talking to him while I lighted up. That is how I saw his face. When Percy got home and I described him he seemed jolly serious about it, and the next I heard was that he was leaving by the next train. My idea is that he went on purpose to avoid that man in the lane."

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Catherine was only bewildered by what she heard. She did not know what to think. Had Percival found his life in danger, as George had done? If so, the plot against the Ilden family must be a widespread one, and the only theory by which her cousin had tried to explain it was disproved. The only person who could gain by Percival's death joined to that of Lord Ilden was Grant himself, and he was plainly above suspicion.

She surprised him by an apparently irrelevant question.

"If George, and both his uncles, and your brother and yourself all died without heirs, who would get the title and property?"

"That is rather a poser," he said with a laugh. "I have never thought. But I suppose Jane and her children, if she has any, would have a 'look in.'"

Cathie felt bewildered by the increasing field of suspicion. She found herself remembering that Lady Barton had always seemed to her a very unprincipled girl, and that her husband, the baronet, had not a pleasant face, and she pulled herself up. Surely she was letting George's line of reasoning carry her too far.

It was better to find some fresh explanation of Percival Ilden's departure. She wondered whether he was in league with the "Unknown," and had been nervous only of the connection between them being discovered.

The governess inclined her head in a graceful farewell, while her new employer glared at him with the most forbidding expression.

"Do you know where your brother has gone?" she asked, and felt confirmed in her new suspicion when she found that, unlike George, he had made no secret of his whereabouts.

"He has gone to Paris," said Grant, "because the Washington Smiths are there. I suppose we shall hear that he is engaged to the heiress, if he is lucky."

"You think that Percival is in love with her?" asked Catherine, and the poet shrugged his shoulders.

"He is in love with her money. The old American is anxious, though, to get a title for his daughter. Percy would be all right if he had a real chance of the succession. Not that he cares a toss for the girl. Of course he will have to marry money if he marries at all, but it is a thing I could not do."

"Of course not—simply for money," said Cathie, her voice very matter-of-fact. "But if you happened to care for somebody who happened to have money, there could be no reason then why you should not ask her to marry you, could there?"

"There'd be every reason in the world while I remain a pauper," he said hotly and bitterly. "Even if I had Percival's allowance it might be different, but to know that I could not even keep myself without my wife's assistance! No, I could not do it. I could never respect myself."

Cathie's gentle voice was still studiously matter-of-fact.

"Not even if she cared for you and would not marry anybody else?"

Grant glanced at her quickly with a strange light in his handsome, melancholy eyes, but found the plain, sympathetic little face particularly indifferent and unexpressive.

"Thank Heaven, I should never know that she cared for me," he said.

Catherine laughed rather nervously.

"Unless she told you. What should you do then?"

The poet sighed.

"I should beg her to forget me."

Catherine cast down her eyes.

"I think that would be rather cruel," she said, and was half relieved and half sorry when she saw her mother coming to meet her, and realised that the rather embarrassing *tête-à-tête* was at an end.

Mr. Ray at the Black Bull.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden was continuing his journey, feeling more than ever conscious of the ridiculously romantic nature of his flight. He had allowed his cousin's nervous suspicion of the stranger on the road to affect him to a certain extent, and make him imagine the most sinister motives for his actions. And then the fact that he knew and was travelling with Florence Courthorpe had rendered the "Unknown" abruptly an ordinary person, and made Ilden ashamed of the tether he had given to his imagination

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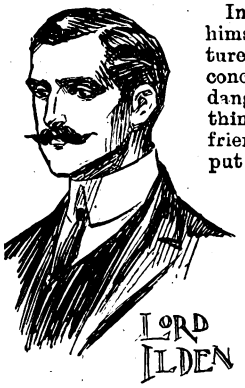

In place of his suspicion he allowed himself to entertain some slight feature of jealousy against him. The concentration of his mind on his own danger had left him little leisure for thinking about the sister of his dead friend; he had more or less consciously put her affairs on one side to be considered when his mind was free. For the present she had obtained a situation, and he could no doubt obtain her address from the Rector of Pennybrook whenever he wished. But he had taken it as a matter of course that he must do something to help her. It seemed preposterous that Gerald Courthorpe's sister should be giving her services to middle-class people and sacrificing her independence for twenty pounds a year. If he interested his mother's sister, the Marchioness of Dalmenay, in her, something better at least than governess work might be found for her. The thought of helping a girl who had been so readily grateful had not been without its pleasurableness, but something of the pleasure had been due to the idea she had given him that help could come to her from no other source.

The possibility of her having another champion was not altogether welcome. He busied himself wondering again from a different point of view, but with scarcely less curiosity, who the stranger could be who had hurried to the station to accompany Florence Courthorpe on her journey.

It was only by an effort of will that he recalled his mind to the thought of his own adventure, and reminded himself that, leaving Florence Courthorpe's friend out of consideration, he had started with the expectation of being followed and avoiding pursuit.

The false suspicion had prevented him giving a thought to any of his other fellow passengers when he entered the train, and he set his mind on the alert to repair the omission as the train neared the little junction of Rickerby.

It was here that he would change trains if he were really returning to the Castle. If anybody were following him from Pennybrook they were likely to take some interest in the movements of his luggage and his valet. Remaining in the train he would have a good opportunity of keeping a counter watch upon them, and Ilden ensconced himself at a little distance from the window of his compartment to see without being seen as the train slackened speed and drew up at the platform.

The train for Ilden Market was already standing at the other side, ready to start. That from Pennybrook was, as usual, some minutes behind time, and there was bustle and excitement in moving the luggage from one train to the other.

Ilden kept his attention directed on his own trunks, which Jardine was seeing out of the van. For a moment or two they were almost obscured by the little crowd of passengers moving from one train to the other. Then as these took their seats and the platform was left comparatively clear, Ilden was interested to see that Florence Courthorpe's friend was leaving her. He was not travelling with her to her destination, it seemed, and for a moment this was the only thought in the mind of the man watching him. Then involuntarily he recalled Catherine's original suspicion against him, for the "Unknown" had strolled with apparent purposelessness past the pile of luggage on the platform, glancing furtively at the labelling, and, as if satisfied by the inspection, had taken his place in the train to Ilden Market. At the same moment Ilden's moved on, and he had leisure to think over the man's action, and wonder what it meant. After all he had been a little premature perhaps in thinking that his acquaintance with Miss Courthorpe cleared him entirely from suspicion. It is possible for the best people to have undesirable acquaintances, and if the man was really pursuing him he would naturally presume upon the slightest acquaintance to enter into conversation with Miss Courthorpe by way of disarming suspicion.

George smiled to himself. The incident of Miss Courthorpe's presence in the train might advantage him more than the stranger. If the latter were really pursuing him, as his action suggested, to Ilden Market, he could employ the time by ascertaining who he was.

The spirit of intrigue and adventure, which he had failed to feel very acutely so far, quickened in his mind at the thought. At the next stoppage he would change compartments, and begin investigations by questioning "the lady of the bank-notes." The inception of a plan, however slight, came as a relief. So far he had no object in his journey except to prevent his movements being traced from Pennybrook. Lallerton, he had discovered by a careful perusal of his cycling map, was a village within three miles or so of Shipton Gate, one of the stations he would have passed if he had gone with his luggage to Ilden Market. The fact had dissuaded him from going there at once. If anybody was following him from Pennybrook they would be sure to see him leave the train at Shipton Gate, and in such a little place would find it easy to trace him to his destination. He could feel no security there until he could know that he had first thrown any possible pursuer off the scent.

To-day the whim of the moment should decide where his journey ended. To-morrow he would go on to Lallerton in the hope of solving the mystery of the intercepted letter. And, meanwhile, it would be something to know that he was discovering the name of a possible foe.

When the train slackened speed again he lifted his Gladstone from the rack, preparatory to changing compartments when it stopped. But when he opened the door and stepped out on the platform, it was to find an unexpected interference with his programme.

Miss Courthorpe was stepping out of the train also. This was her destination no doubt, and he must choose between ending his own journey abruptly with her, or leaving his questions unasked for the present.

Miss Courthorpe had already recognised him again with a little start of surprise. No doubt she was imagining him in the other train on his way to Ilden Market, and George imagined that he saw a little disturbed dismay in her face as well as surprise.

He wondered whether it was due to the presence of a grimly sedate-looking matron who had been waiting on the platform and was advancing now to claim the governess.

This was, no doubt, Miss Courthorpe's new "employer," and her presence would make the interview on which he had been counting impossible.

A porter was hurrying up to take his bag, but found his services unnecessary. Ilden was returning to his compartment to continue his journey.

"Can you tell me who that lady is?' he asked with a glance at the matron.

"Yes, sir, that is Mrs. Morgan Wright, the doctor's wife," said the porter.

"And lives here, I suppose," said Ilden, taking a mental note of the name of the station, "Witterby."

"Yes, sir, at Minerva House on the other side of the village."

It was all that Ilden wanted to know. He had, no doubt, obtained the address at which he could write to Miss Courthorpe and make any inquiries he pleased about her companion of the train, and he settled himself to continue his journey.

The governess was standing by her luggage on the platform with her companion as the train moved on, and inclined her graceful head in a timid farewell, while Mrs. Morgan Wright stared at him with a forbidding air of

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disapproval, which quickened his pity for the girl delivered over to the tender mercies of such a severe-looking female.

The departure of the governess had left him again a little bored by his journey. There was no reason why he should continue it, and at the next station he left the train, deposited his bag in the cloak-room under the name of "Mr. Ray"—the first which suggested itself—and paid his fare from Rickerby at the gate.

He had been the only passenger to alight; but a rather spiritless determination to carry out his programme and make pursuit impossible demanded that he should place some miles between himself and the station before he looked out for an inn at which to take up his abode for the day. He started off at random, enjoying the tramp along winding country roads after the inaction of the train, and it was not till an hour's quick walking had given him a healthy appetite for lunch that he drew up at a picturesque little inn which seemed to mark the beginning of a village. Opposite the inn a tall, square house fronted the road without the reserve of a garden front. The two buildings seemed to Ilden like sentinels guarding the straggling street that lay beyond. Afterwards he would explore it. For the present lunch was the great necessity, and, entering the Black Bull through a pleasant, old-fashioned garden, he was ushered into a sweet-smelling room, looking out, as he had hoped, across the garden on the road.

Here was the peaceful spot he wanted in which to consider his position and map out a plan of action, and when his lunch had appeared and shown itself as satisfactory as the place, he settled that for one night at least the Black Bull should be his home, and he engaged a bedroom.

After lunch he lighted a cigar to think. The only plan in his mind at present, that of visiting Lallerton, was rather an apology for a plan, proclaiming his actual dearth of practical intention.

He was depending entirely upon a mere unsupported theory of what the intercepted letter had contained, and when he got there he would have to depend upon chance to render the visit of any use. And he would have to pass there under his own name. Here he had already given himself the protection of a false one.

For the present he had no doubt rendered his existence safe enough, but he could not consent to bury himself like this indefinitely, and at the end feel no safer than at the beginning. It would be different if he were married and with every year was rendering his own life of less importance to the many people interested in the succession.

Once more the idea of marriage recurred as a perfect counter-move to the intrigues which surrounded him. To marry and live in retirement with his wife for a year or two. But, even if he were willing to sacrifice his liberty for the baffling of his enemies, what lady of his acquaintance could he ask to marry him as he would have to marry, quickly, privately, and with the prospect of a long and anxious exile from England after the ceremony. He would not care to propose it to any of the girls whom his aunt, the Marchioness, had catalogued as suitable wives for him.

No, his only course was to discover, in the first place, who his enemy was, and as a first step he called for notepaper and envelopes to write to Miss Courthorpe.

But with the pen in his hand he realised that the writing of the letter was difficult. What reason could he give for addressing her at all or expressing so much curiosity about her travelling companion, let alone for asking her to address her reply to "Mr. Ray."

The writing of letters was not one of Lord Ilden's gifts, and he stared through the white curtained window for inspiration. His gaze wandered idly across the old-fashioned garden and the road to the severe-looking house opposite. There was a name carved over its doorway, and he tried idly to decipher it.

Then he started suddenly to his feet, staring at the lettering with an interest that was no longer idle, for the name carved over the doorway was "Minerva House," and he realised for the first time that the red lamp below it announced it as the home of a doctor. All unconsciously his wanderings had brought him back to Witterby, and he had settled down exactly opposite the new home of Florence Courthorpe.

"Well, it will save the trouble of writing," he said to himself with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I am sure to meet her."

Still Another Attempt.

FLORENCE COURTHORPE sat at the open window of her bedroom and reviewed the events of the day.

It was barely ten o'clock yet, for the doctor's household retired early. Mrs. Morgan Wright had informed her of the fact in an aggressive tone which suggested an inclination on the governess's part to keep late hours, but Florence had received the announcement with relief. The afternoon and evening had seemed intolerably long to her. For already she had realised that her life at Witterby was to be as uncongenial a one as it had been at Pennybrook Rectory. Mrs. Wright was a sharp-voiced woman who had evidently been prejudiced against her by Mrs. Haydon. Here as at Pennybrook she was to be classed as a designing young woman, because the highly-objectionable son of the house there had persecuted her with unwel-

"Where is Lord Ilden?" she asked in excited tones. But the innkeeper could only stare at the fair apparition in mute astonishment.

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come attentions. Mrs. Wright's prejudice had clearly been increased by the presence of Lord Ilden in the train by which her governess arrived and his recognition, and she made no secret of her opinion that a governess ought not to have any acquaintances of the other sex.

"And who may that man be?" she had asked before they were out of the station, and Florence had felt her face redden, she scarcely knew why, as she gave Ilden's name and title.

"He was a great friend of my brother's at Rugby," she added as she noticed the matron's expression of mingled incredulity and disapproval.

"And has this Lord Ilden been travelling with you from Pennybrook?" asked the doctor's wife with acid suspicion.

Florence explained innocently that his lordship had travelled from Pennybrook in the same train, but that they had not met, and she flushed again with involuntary anger this time at the next question.

"I am not to understand, I hope, that the young man is following you?"

This was the woman with whom her lot was to be cast for a future of indefinite length, and her heart sank at the prospect.

The doctor she found to be a meek and silent little man who seemed to live in some fear of his wife. Her two charges, a sharp featured, impertinent little girl who took after her mother in looks, and a dull boy who took after his father, completed the family, and Florence tried in vain to look forward to teaching them with pleasure. A preliminary attempt in the afternoon had shown them both determined not to learn.

But although her new life had opened so unpromisingly, the girl was far from feeling unhappy as she sat by her open window looking out on the moonlight road, and the little inn across it, with here and there a window illuminated. Florence herself sat in a dark room, for Mrs. Wright had spoken emphatically on the subject of candles, and Florence had undressed very quickly to blow out the light before there was any danger of it suggesting extravagance in the morning.

But she knew that it was impossible to sleep. Her mind was too full of thought.

She recalled her first night at Haydon Rectory, the commencement of her life as a paid dependent. She had been received much more kindly there—it was afterwards that Sidney Haydon's infatuation rendered his mother vindictive—but even after a kind reception she had spent the night in tears. She wondered a little at her cheerfulness now. Was it that she had learnt to accept the inevitable philosophically?

"What one cannot change one can always bear," she said to herself. "One need not think about the unpleasant things."

And she did not know herself that she was able to forget the unpleasantness of her surroundings so easily because her mind was so full of a pleasanter subject. She was scarcely conscious of the completeness with which her dead brother's friend filled her thoughts.

He had always stood to her for a hero, chiefly, no doubt, because he was her brother's. Gerald Courthorpe's enthusiasm had made him a model of chivalry and of all the virtues, and her desire to see the modern Bayard had been frustrated on one score and another until her brother's death made her cease remotely to hope for it. And then at the moment when she felt most neglected and friendless, when Mrs. Haydon's unkindness and the uncertainty of the future had driven her out to her favourite walk in the coppice for a good cry, only to increase her distress by the supposed loss of her just paid salary—it was then when her surroundings seemed darkest and her need of a friend most great, that "Bayard" had appeared to lift her out of her grief with a characteristic generosity and chivalry. He had made demands on her admiration and gratitude, and the revelation of his identity had appeared to her the most romantic thing in her life—the life that held so little romance now.

No wonder that the thought of her dead brother's friend conquered her mind to the exclusion of her troubles.

They had mingled with them, and relief at leaving the Rectory had tinged itself with regret that she was losing all chance of seeing Lord Ilden again.

It had seemed quite an event to her when she saw him leaving Pennybrook in the same train as herself. He was returning no doubt to Ilden Castle, and Florence was conscious of a keen disappointment that she had not succeeded in catching another glimpse of him crossing the platform at Rickerby Junction.

The day had been indeed a succession of vague wishes and startlingly unexpected fulfilments. There had been the discovery at Witterby that Lord Ilden had not left the train at the junction after all, and then when it had carried him away and she had finally made up her mind that this glimpse of him was her last, had come the strangest and most startling coincidence of all. The tall, handsome figure which she had seen carried away by the train had appeared in the little inn exactly opposite her new home.

From the windows of the schoolroom she had seen him stroll out and return as she battled with her contumacious charges in the afternoon, and had scarcely been able to believe her eyes. After that her duties had seemed less trying, and her position less friendless. It was easy to determine that her mind should not dwell on the discomforts of her new life when it was employed so busily trying to invent explanations of a wonderful coincidence.

Nor was her excited interest in the position lessened by the knowledge that Lord Ilden's presence at the Black Bull would excite suspicion in the mind of her employer. It had been exasperating at Pennybrook Rectory to incur resentment and lose her situation because an unbearable young man had persecuted her with attentions in spite of her keen dislike for him; but Florence was vaguely conscious that to suffer for the imaginary attentions of her brother's friend would have a certain sweetness.

In an indefinite way it would seem to connect them, and there was an underlying pleasure in the thought which she did not dream of analysing to herself. Mrs. Morgan Wright's impertinent suggestion that he had followed her came back. It was ridiculous, of course, but it no longer made her angry.

And, since the coincidence was so wonderful, and any explanation of it so difficult to find, a little question did insist on asking itself faintly in her mind. When Lord Ilden had shown himself so deeply sympathetic, and so keenly touched by the change in her position, might he not have taken this, the only means, of seeing her and speaking to her again?

She believed that he had intended to speak to her at Witterby station, and would have done so but for Mrs. Wright's presence, and the frightened appeal in her own eyes. He had questioned the railway porter, and the man had jerked his thumb in the direction of her employer. Could it be that Lord Ilden was ascertaining her address?

It was all very improbable, of course; but when is improbability a check to the surmises of nineteen?

The night was a romantic one. The air—very still, after a wonderful October day—made the girl at the window, in her lightly-covered night-dress, welcome the faint breath that stole in to play on her flushed cheeks.

Outside the white road wound its way to the village like a band of silver in the moonlight. The light made beautiful

the irregular red roof of the inn, with its many gables. The rest lay for the most part in intense shadow, through which the light from a window here and there shone out with a pleasant friendliness.

She was wondering whether one of the lighted windows was that of Lord Ilden's room, and, as if in answer to her wish, Ilden himself answered the question by appearing at the oblong of light beneath her and throwing up the sash to stand there enjoying the night air as she was doing.

Involuntarily Florence drew back a little, although she was quite sure that she could not be seen in the darkness. Lord Ilden was looking across now, and the girl's heart beat a little more quickly as their glances seemed to meet across the darkness, although his was an unconscious one.

Then she sighed. The figure had disappeared, and she was left anxiously waiting for an unexplained, but wholly pleasurable excitement to be repeated.

It seemed as though she would have to wait in vain, for twenty minutes went by without any sign of Ilden's reappearance. But Florence had no thought of going to bed. She felt strangely awake to-night and at the end of the twenty minutes her watch was rewarded, though not in the way she had hoped.

Something very strange was happening. The dense shadow which surrounded the lighted oblong of the window below seemed to be moving. Part of it was spreading before the light, and as the girl watched wonderingly it became the dark silhouette of a man—a man wearing a slouch hat and holding something in his hand.

He had raised his head slowly and stealthily from below the line of the window-sill as if to look into the room. Now he had risen boldly and stood surveying the interior, and as he did so a sickening sense of apprehension came to the unseen watcher, for it seemed to her that the thing he held in his hand was a revolver. The light gleamed for a moment on a bright barrel, and Florence held her breath paralysed by dread. Who the man could be she did not try to conjecture, but there could be little doubt that he intended to shoot the man in the room. Even as she looked she was expecting to hear the report and know that Lord Ilden had been treacherously murdered. The fear robbed her of all power of motion.

But the silhouetted figure was moving now. It seemed almost as though it were descending into the earth as it dropped lower and lower until only the black outline of the slouch hat was visible against the light of the open window.

The man had crouched there to wait. A quick feminine intuition showed her the position. Lord Ilden was not in the room, and the man was hiding there ready to shoot him as he entered. And at the thought the girl seemed suddenly to wake to action.

She must warn Lord Ilden before it was too late. Already she had wasted precious moments in futile watching and dread, and she threw on her dressing-gown with trembling fingers.

She was careful to make no sound as she opened the door of her room and crept down the dark and silent stairs; to be stopped would be to waste time answering questions and giving explanations, and a moment lost might mean the loss of a life.

With the same care she drew back the bolts of the hall door, and closing it behind her crept swiftly across the moonlit road.

Her heart was in her mouth now lest the waiting murderer should catch sight of her; but though the fear was there, it did not delay her footsteps for a moment.

She was panting with fear more than her running as she flew up the garden path to the inn-door within a few yards of where she had seen the man hiding, and turned the knob desperately.

The door had not been locked yet, although the inn was closed for the night, and the next moment she was inside, closing and locking the door behind her.

She breathed more freely now. Beyond her, through the dark bar extended a dimly-lighted passage. The wide-open door on the right must be that of Lord Ilden's room, and he could not enter it now without her seeing and stopping him.

She crept forward to it and looked within so far as she could without entering. The thought of the murderer outside made it a place of terror.

But she was satisfied that the room was empty and she stopped at the doorway then, a little in doubt as to what she should do next, and for the first time remembered that she presented a strange figure in her dressing-gown, her bare, slippered feet and widely-flowing hair.

Such she appeared to the worthy innkeeper who had heard the door being bolted and appeared now at the end of the passage to inquire the cause of such an inexplicable sound.

He stood surveying the apparition with widely staring eyes. Nor did Florence's anxious question serve to lessen his sense of bewilderment.

"Where is Lord Ilden?" she asked with anxious directness, and the innkeeper found his tongue with difficulty.

"There ain't no gentleman of that name in this neighbourhood, Miss."

She stared at him incredulously.

"But there is a gentleman staying here?"

"Yes, Miss, a Mr. Ray."

Ilden appeared behind him as he spoke. He had been chatting with his host and hostess in the old-fashioned raftered kitchen, and followed the former in time to hear his name. His well-controlled face expressed no surprise, and little of the admiration with which the unexpected picture inspired him.

"Oh! it is Miss Courthorpe," he said, "will you come into my room?" And he was advancing to the doorway.

But at the movement, all the girl's tragic fear came back to relieve her sudden self-consciousness, and she put out her hands excitedly to stop him.

"No, not in there. A man is waiting at the window to shoot you," she cried, and Ilden's face grew a shade more grave. His fancied security had been fallacious then.

"I am greatly indebted to you then for warning me," he said quietly. "The man is in the garden, I suppose?"

"Yes, I saw him from the window of my room."

His matter-of-fact tone had come as a great relief to her, and put her at her ease. She had been afraid of incredulity.

He turned to the wondering innkeeper.

"You might tell some of your men that this fellow is hiding in the garden. He has made four attempts on my life already, and I will give twenty pounds to anyone who secures him. You must come into the kitchen, Miss Courthorpe, and sit down while we scour the garden. You must not catch cold."

"Yes, come along in, dear," chimed in the innkeeper's wife who had followed into the passage and gathered something of the position more quickly than her husband. But Florence could only think of the danger to Ilden. Her eyes met his in terrified appeal.

"But you will not expose yourself in the garden. It is you he wishes to shoot, and he has a revolver," she cried.

"As I have," said Ilden. "If there is any risk I must take my share. But I am afraid that he will have taken alarm already."

His voice expressed impatience, and forbade her to make any further remonstrance. She was conscious suddenly

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that he must be thinking her in the way, and she followed the landlady into the kitchen silently. The latter was summoning some Noah and Jabez from the premises at the back with news that there was a robber in the garden, and Florence watched with white cheeks and frightened eyes as the party of four passed out through the back, the innkeeper taking an old-fashioned blunderbuss with him.

She held her breath when they were gone, expecting every moment that the sharp report of a revolver would break in on the night silence. She could give no ear to the chatter of her companion, who only ceased in her questioning for periodical visits to the door to try and see what was passing outside. Florence answered her absently in monosyllables.

It seemed to her hours before the men came back with news that they could find no trace of the assassin. The innkeeper almost doubted his existence.

"Don't you think, miss, that you must have imagined it?" he asked, and she was grateful when Ilden answered for her.

"And now that we have frightened the fellow away, I can safely see you back across the road, Miss Courthorpe," he added.

She did not wish him to accompany her. The thought of his danger still oppressed her; but he only smiled at her objections, and they crossed the road together.

"I shall leave this place early in the morning," he said, "so I shall have no opportunity of calling to thank you, as I should wish; but I will write, if I may. I have no doubt that I owe you my life. It was a curious chance, but a very fortunate one for me, which made me take up my quarters so close to you. I came here really to hide for a little while from this unknown enemy, who seems determined to take my life; but it is evident that I have not succeeded, and the quieter a place is the more dangerous it becomes when once my whereabouts are known. To-morrow I must try a fresh move."

She had a hundred questions to ask, but they were already standing before the door of the dark, solemn house, and thoughts of the danger he still ran in the darkness made her impatient for him to return.

She cut short his renewed thanks to bid him good-bye, and he waited until the door of the dark house had closed noiselessly behind her.

Then he recrossed the road, with eyes alert and his hand on the revolver in his pocket. Now, as he crossed the moonlit road and the dark strip of garden, was the moment for his enemy to fire a successful shot if he had anything of courage or enterprise.

But the fellow was evidently a nervous coward, and had been frightened completely away, for the half-expected shot did not come.

"If he had half as much nerve as he has genius for tracking a fellow and arranging his plans, I should have been in the family vault now," he said to himself as he re-entered the inn safely.

Meanwhile Florence had crept into the dark hall of Minerva House feeling involuntarily like a criminal as the oppressive silence reminded her abruptly how necessary it was that she should make no sound. Her heart beat more quickly as she realised how difficult it would be to give her suspicious employer any explanation of her adventure that would sound satisfactory and credible.

The stairs creaked as she reached them, and she crept upwards more timidly. Then her heart seemed to stop beating altogether; for at the top of the stairs had appeared a candle illuminating the severe face of Mrs. Morgan Wright, a picture of virtuous indignation framed in frills.

"And pray what explanation have you to offer of this, Miss Courthorpe?" she asked icily, and Florence knew from the tone that the explanation would never be believed.

(The unhappy consequences of Florence's night adventure will be told in next Tuesday's issue.)

THE LOVE STORY OF A COWARD.

An Act of Heroism which Brought a Wife.

From my earliest childhood I had been burdened by one great misfortune. I was born a coward. When the other small boys climbed the rafters of the old barn, ran across the beams and did their many deeds of boyish daring, I sat uncomfortably on the steps of the corn-bin and begged them tearfully to come down. I was afraid to put my nose outside the door after nightfall, cried myself ill if left alone without a light, and, even in daytime, never walked alone without constantly turning my head in fear of ghosts, and all sorts of things.

More than anything else, dogs terrified me. I would run from the smallest yelping puppy, and shuddered and turned cold if a dog so much as passed by on the other side of the street. The wise old women of the neighbourhood nodded their heads at me and told each other in whispers how my mother had been frightened almost to death by a savage dog before I was born.

When I grew to be a young man, it was no better, although I concealed my fears in some measure. It seemed as bad as could be when I was fancy free, but it became infinitely worse when I fell in love. Alice was the most daring young woman in our town and a born hero-worshipper. She was something of a naturalist and had captured with her own fair hands a collection of snakes that made me faint even to think of. She had faced an angry bull in a field, had tamed unbroken horses, ridden colts without saddle or bridle, and done so many brave things that my heart sank at rehearsing them.

My case was hopeless, of course, but I loved her only the more madly. Whenever I went near her I suffered tortures, for her pet and constant attendant was a horrible, snapping, snarling little dog.

This vicious creature had an especial spite against me. From beginning to end of my calls at Alice's home, he would growl and snap at my legs, my hands and my face. But though he sent me into agonies of terror and the cold perspiration poured from my body in a clammy shower at the end of every visit, I could not bear to give up my chance of seeing her.

It was not long before she knew my story, as everybody in the town made haste to tell it to her. I think she pitied me and regarded my cowardice as not the act of a free moral agent. At any rate, she sent the dog away.

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Freed from the terror of his presence, I mustered courage to ask her the fateful question. She was very gentle with me, but she gave me no hope. Choosing her words as kindly as might be in her sweet womanliness, fearing to wound me and yet stinging the more by her very kindness, she let me know that she could never marry a man whom she did not consider a hero.

I went out from her door in the firm determination to do something heroic and win, perforce, my matchless lady. But before I had reached the gate, that miserable little cur rushed snapping and snarling at my heels, and I forgot even Alice in the vain attempt to keep from showing the fear I felt.

I lay long that night with staring eyes, trying to think of something brave that I could do. I thought of going into the army and mowing down whole companies with my single arm. It would not matter if I were killed if only Alice loved me. But the mere thought of blood turned me faint and I would jump at the sound of a fire-cracker, besides there was no particular war on just then. I turned over plan after plan, to find all alike unavailing.

At last I must have fallen asleep with my eyes wide open, and dreamt horrible dreams. I heard the roar of fire-engines and imagined that the whole world was burning up. From her burning home, Alice was stretching out her hands to me and calling for help. I rose in my dreams—did I say, before, that I am a sleep-walker—dressed, clambered from my window by means of a tree that grew beside it, and started for Alice's pretty home beside the church.

I do not know how much I saw and how much I dreamt. The streets were filled with people but I avoided them with the cunning of a dreamer. To my excited fancy every house seemed bursting with flames. Only the church stood cool and still.

I thought I saw Alice on its roof and I clambered up, holding by the lightning rod, by anything. She was not there, but seemed to be on the steeple. I struggled up it, slipping and sliding. I looked down upon Alice's dwelling wreathed in fire. The roof and upper windows were not yet touched but all the lower part was incircled by flame.

Alice was not on the steeple. She stood at a second-storey window, holding out her hands and calling to me again while the horrible red glow crept nearer and nearer. Someone had rested a long ladder against the side of the church. I lifted it with a strength that was not my own, balanced it with the mysterious power of the sleep-walker, swung it across the fiery chasm till the end reached Alice's window-sill, and ran across the tottering, sloping bridge as firmly as if it had been solid earth. By what seemed a miracle, it held till I reached the window, then fell tottering to the ground.

A puff of flame shot in after me. I seized Alice in my arms, bore her to the other window and crashed through the glass with my fists. The pain in my hands awoke me and——

The dream was true. I stood in Alice's room with the flames incircling the house. In my arms I held, not Alice, but the little, cringing white dog.

In sickening terror I looked down. The flames coloured the world blood-red. A great sea of fiery faces looked up at me. Beneath the window stood four men holding a blanket by the corners.

"Jump! Jump!" cried scores of voices. I flung down the dog. The roaring of flames filled my ears. I dared not jump. I tottered and fell.

A shock and a rebound. I had fallen unhurt upon the blanket. I do not know how I got home. Perhaps I fainted and was carried. My mind is not clear as to anything that happened until the next day, when I got a message from Alice.

I was bruised and burnt, but I must see her. With the help of a stick, I limped slowly to her temporary residence, the home of our nearest neighbour. She received me alone in the parlour. It was one of those parlours with a bright red and green carpet, protected by blue rugs. Across an ancient hair-cloth sofa was thrown a magenta slumbering robe crocheted in a wonderful pattern. Enlarged photographs, which slightly resembled each member of our neighbour's family, decorated the walls, along with pictures of the Royal Family. But, oh, what a Paradise it was with my darling in it, and how like an angel she looked in her white gown as she came forward to welcome me with a gladness that sent my heart fluttering like a bird in May.

I could not say a word. She poured forth thanks, praise and admiration, until I did not know myself. She thought I had dared to walk along the tottering ladder and enter the burning house to save her dog.

How could I tell her! How could I quench the light in her sweet eyes and banish the smile for which, coward as I was, I would have given my life many times? She thought me a hero. She was ready to be my wife.

If she could only believe it always. But she would find out. She would grow to despise me and unhappiness would embitter all her days. Better lose her now than plunge her into future misery.

I tried to speak, but I could not. How could I interrupt her when her words were so dear, so dear! At last I got to my feet.

"Alice," I said—I must have turned white, for she sprang forward as if to help me. "Alice, you are praising me for something I did not do. It was not I who climbed last night. I have a horrible fear of high places. I tremble even to climb the stairs, and I am terribly afraid of dogs. I would not go near one to save my life. It is all a mistake. I am not a hero, though Heaven only knows how I wish I were."

"But you did climb, George, and saved Muffet at the risk of your life?" she answered, bewildered. It was the first time she had ever called me by name.

"No, no," I cried, terror-stricken lest my courage should fail. "I was walking in my sleep. I should never have dared while awake. And I was dreaming that I was rescuing you. I would give the world to be the man you thought me, but I am not. I am a coward."

I staggered weakly for my hat and stick. I could not bear to look upon her face. I would remember it as I had last seen it, filled with love.

Dazed, I laid hold of the knob. My beloved came towards me. "George," she cried, in such a tone that I could not but turn back. She came straight to my side. "I think you are the bravest man I ever knew," she whispered. I dared not speak. I thought I was dreaming again and that a word would break the spell. I must have tottered and almost fallen, for she put her arms round me and led me to the sofa. Then she slipped down and knelt beside me.

Her lips were very near to mine. "Am I dreaming again?" I asked doubtfully. There was no mistake. It was surely a kiss upon my forehead. Then the queenly head went down and her face was hidden in her hands.

"No, no!" she cried, "you are awake—and I love you."

* * * * * *

I have a great fondness for red and green carpets, blue rugs, and magenta draperies. I would like to furnish one room in our house with them, but my wife says that we possess the essence of joy and do not need the visible symbols.

B. E. Bush.

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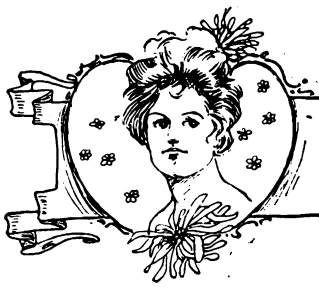

The Story of the Week.

(See Coloured Cover.)

THAT CONSUMMATE VILLAIN.

Three Scenes in a Life.

"You will not listen to me? You will not let my love speak for itself? You refuse to marry me, though I worship the very ground your feet walk upon?"

"I am so sorry, Mr. Dallas, so dreadfully, dreadfully sorry if I hurt you, but, indeed, I cannot marry you. I do not love you."

He caught my hands in a grip that held them like a vice.

"No," he whispered, and to my strangely excited fancy his voice sounded like a hiss, "and shall I tell you why you do not love me? Shall I make it as clear to your heart as it is to mine why I have no chance—no chance with you at all?"

There was such anguish in the tone that I was smitten with compunction. I cannot bear hurting anything or anybody, much less could I bear to hurt my friend as Mr. Dallas had been.

"Shall I tell you?" he repeated.

I nodded my head, I could not speak.

"It is because my scapegrace cousin, Bertram, has wound himself into your heart!" he exclaimed fiercely. "It is because you have let him deceive you into thinking his inward man matches that beautiful face of his which I have heard fools say is like an angel's! Can you deny that Bertram——"

I tore my hands from his and drew myself up haughtily.

"You have no right to say such things to me," I cried, "even though we are old friends. How dare you insinuate that your cousin Bertram and I are more to one another than the merest——"

"Acquaintances," he sneered. "My dear Miss Merriman, am I blind, deaf, or imbecile? Bertram is clever. What am I that I should enter into the field against him?" His tones again grew terribly bitter. "As it is, he has all that I lack to commend him to a woman — looks, charm, intellect, and all; I have nothing."

There was a ring of such genuine pathos in his last words that again my heart melted towards him. How could I know, how could I ever guess that this man——

But I must tell my story straight on as it comes without looking forward into the future.

"I am sorry," I faltered once more; "one's heart is not always entirely under one's own control. I cannot love you, I cannot marry you!"

"Tell me the truth, then," he muttered, coming nearer to me, but not touching me again; "my great love for you gives me at least the right to hear truth from your lips; is it Bertram who stands in your way?"

Something compelling in his eyes forced me to answer him against my will.

"Yes," I whispered. "Why should I hide it? Why should I be ashamed? Bertram and I love one another. There is no love in my soul for any but for him."

By the dim light in the conservatory I saw the deadly pallor that overspread his face, his breathing came short and quick; no other sound was audible except that panting, hurried breath, and the drip of the fountain amongst the palms behind us, and from far away inside the house the soft notes of a waltz.

When my companion spoke again his voice was hoarse and low.

"Heaven forgive you," he said, "for throwing away my love for his. Some day you will know the truth about Bertram. Some day you will learn that his saint-like face does not hide a saint-like character. Some day you will know the gold from the dross!"

"Yours being the gold?" I cried.

"You will see!" he said significantly. "Only promise me one thing—one thing," he repeated, and his hands took mine again and wrung them hard.

"What is it?" I faltered, afraid because of the gleam in his eyes, and the stern set of his lips.

"Promise me that if you find you are mistaken in your estimate of Bertram—if you discover that, after all, I am right, you wrong, and he is truly more devil than angel, promise that then you will listen to me, the lover who loves you with a love beside which Bertram's love is as water to wine? Promise me that."

"How can I? How can I?" I said. "I love Bertram—I trust him; his is no surface goodness and no watery love. I love him! I am not ashamed——"

"*But you will be ashamed*"—a deadly significant ring in his tones—"mark my words, Miss Merriman. I know my cousin better than you know him. I have known him for many a long day. Mark my words, Bertram will shame you yet. When that day comes remember I shall still be your friend. Promise you will let me plead my cause again—*when Bertram fails you?*"

"He will never fail me," I answered proudly.

A harsh laugh rang through the conservatory. Mr. Dallas' eyes looked into mine, a mocking smile in their depths.

"You will see," he said. "I do not speak in ignorance. Keep your faith whilst you can. When it dies—remember Hubert Dallas loves you, loves you, loves you!"

His voice sank to a passionate whisper; he caught me in his arms and strained me to him for an instant, murmuring in my ear:

"Is love like mine to go for nothing? I swear you shall be mine, you shall be mine some day—by fair means or foul."

The words came through his clenched teeth, his eyes blazed into mine, his face was white with passion. "You madden me with your lovely face!"

I struggled wildly in his arms, and at last he loosed me.

"Bertram the saint will fail you—you will be mine some day," he said.

Then I covered my face with my hands and fled from the conservatory; shame and deadly anger and a deadly fear for which I could not account setting my heart beating wildly in great throbs of terror.

Why did that new, strange fear grip at my heart, and what did it mean? Escaping upstairs by a back way to avoid the crowd of dancers in the ball-room and the hall, I locked myself into my room, and panting, breathless, miserable, flung myself down upon a couch to try and think.

I saw as in a vivid picture the faces of the two men who loved me—Hubert Dallas, and his cousin Bertram Henderson—and I shuddered as I remembered the ominous words to which I had just listened.

Why, oh, why, did Mr. Dallas repeat and repeat again that Bertram was unworthy of my love? Was it a lover's jealousy that made him wish to blacken his cousin in my eyes—or was it—could it be truth? No! a thousand times no! I reflected, rising impetuously to my feet and pacing the room with restless, fevered steps.

Bertram, a double-faced ruffian as his cousin would have me believe? Bertram, anything but a noble, honourable, Christian gentleman? It was absurd, ridiculous, and I laughed aloud, recalling my lover's fair face and clear eyes, and broad, open brow, and candid smile. And yet Dallas

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had always been my good friend and my father's friend; kindly, gentle, chivalrous to me and mine; why should I distrust his words? My soul was torn with doubts; and the words of Hubert Dallas swung to and fro in my mind with an ominous significance that filled me with dismay.

Yet I could not stay upstairs alone, I should be missed from the gay scene below. I must return to the ball-room, or my aunt and cousin would wonder what had become of me.

Removing as well as I could the traces of emotion from my face, brushing back the hair, I stood for an instant before my glass looking silently at my own reflection.

"Is it," I whispered very low, "is it good for a woman to have so fatal a gift as beauty? Why does he say I madden him with my lovely face? I only want him as a friend. Bertram is my lover. I am glad to be beautiful for him; I want to madden no other man."

Then I smiled at the vision of myself in the long glass—glad of my loveliness for Bertram's sake; and, if the glass told me true, it was not silly vanity to dream myself beautiful. Though my face was still white after the storm I had just passed through, nothing could spoil its lovely outlines, nor the curve of my lips that Bertram said was like Cupid's bow itself; my eyes, deep and blue as sapphires, shone like twin stars; and my hair—the glory of my hair gleamed with the burnished gleam of copper under the electric light.

I wore white, a trailing satin gown, not even its whiteness could rival the shining snow of my throat and neck, on which a diamond star that was my uncle's latest gift to me glistened and sparkled.

I smiled again, and nodded at my smiling face, some of my confidence restored to me.

"Hubert Dallas is only jealous," I said softly; "he told me my face maddened him. Bertram is true and good. My faith in him will never die. Hubert Dallas is mistaken—and yet——"

Then I switched off the light and went slowly downstairs to mingle once more amongst the gay throng.

My uncle, Mr. Merriman, was a banker, a millionaire, men said, and I, his orphaned niece, lived with him and his family in their beautiful Grosvenor Square house, treated by them all as one of themselves; made a petted daughter of by uncle and aunt, cherished as a sister by my cousins, my lot, indeed, was a happy one, and only a few weeks ago the crown of my joy had come when I learnt that Bertram Henderson loved me. Bertram and his cousin Hubert Dallas were both in good positions in my uncle's bank, and were both friends of the Merriman family, and, alas, both men loved me!

But it was Bertram whom I loved. Bertram, whose beautiful face Hubert scoffingly likened to an angel's; Bertram, of whom he had spoken so ominously; whilst Hubert, I knew, was my uncle's favourite.

Over and over again uncle John had told me how he had trusted and respected Mr. Dallas; what powers he had left in his hands; how highly he thought of him.

But it was Bertram I loved, though Hubert and I were always good friends. I knew he was a good man, because uncle John was perpetually telling me so; yet he had sown seeds of doubt in my heart about Bertram, and try as I would I could not quite shake them off, the more so that Bertram never came to the ball, though I watched and longed for him till daylight crept in and dimmed the light of the electric lamps and showed us that the banks of flowers in the great rooms were faded and dead.

And the next day the blow fell.

* * * * *

"To hang by the neck till you are dead, and may God have mercy on your soul!"

The court seemed to reel and grow dark before my eyes; the crowd of upturned faces ran together into one great blur, excepting that one face that stood out upon the darkness, white, stony, horror-stricken, the face of Bertram Henderson, my lover, the prisoner in the dock!

I think I stood up; I felt that I swayed, and that a hand went out and drew me gently back into my seat, and I heard a voice—it was Hubert Dallas' voice—say:

"We will get away in a minute; try to bear it a moment more."

I don't know why, but I wanted to laugh in his face, and then I longed to weep, but no sound came; and still I saw nothing save the white, stony face of the prisoner at the bar.

Then all at once a voice broke the silence. It was Bertram's voice, so changed, so ghastly, that I wanted to cry out to him to be silent.

"As there is a God above, I swear that I am innocent!" he said, and he looked all round the court; and suddenly the mist cleared from my eyes, and I saw the upturned faces fixed upon him, and on some I saw unbelief, on some horror, on some pity.

"I swear I am innocent!" he repeated, and then the mist swam before my eyes again. I held out my hands blindly, and it seemed to me that I fell into a great abyss of outer darkness.

When I woke from that long, long swoon I was safe in my bedroom, and for just one wild moment I tried to think that what I remembered was just a ghastly nightmare, from which presently I should awake.

But my cousins stole in, and their white faces and deep mourning reminded me it was no dream but a ghastly hideous fact; uncle John was dead—murdered, they said—and Bertram Henderson, the man I loved, was the murderer.

Lying there in the darkness all the facts came back to me, and whirled in my brain till they drove me nearly mad.

It had happened the day after the ball—the ball to which Bertram had not come; that fact had been used as evidence against him.

The morning after the ball my uncle went to the bank as usual, and Bertram was there, in his place, so also was Hubert Dallas.

During the course of the morning, so the testimony went, my uncle had sent for Bertram into his private room, and detained him there for some time. Many witnesses affirmed that when Bertram returned to his place he looked white and disturbed and very unlike himself.

No other clerk had been summoned to my uncle's room that morning, and nothing was seen of uncle John at lunch time, when it was his custom to pass through the bank, giving a nod and a smile to his subordinates.

Not until the bank closed did anyone enter that private room, and then the old doorkeeper, having knocked and received no answer, went softly in, thinking his master had passed out unobserved.

But uncle John sat there, still and silent, and his dear white head bent over his desk, his hands still holding the pen in its stiff fingers, but his kindly voice was hushed for ever; his eyes were closed in the sleep that knows no waking.

He had been struck from behind, a blow aimed well at a vital part, and death, the doctors said, must have been instantaneous and probably painless.

And beside his chair, a mute witness to the crime, lay a heavy, loaded stick, bearing along its side in silver letters the words "Bertram Henderson!"

During the time that intervened between my uncle's death and the trial an amazing series of frauds were brought to light; clever forgeries, ingenious doctoring of ledgers; skilful embezzlements; and though Bertram strenuously denied any knowledge of these things, his guilt was proved, and proved up to the hilt.

At least so it seemed to me, as it must have seemed to all men; and my heart grew sick and yet more sick, seeing that the words of Hubert Dallas were coming true!

Oh! but it was a bitter blow, an agony past recording, to know that the man I had loved and honoured above all living men was, after all, a thief, a forger, a

"A Foe in the Family." Our Powerful New Serial. Begin To-day.

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murderer. My heart went near to breaking, those bitter days; but Hubert was good to me, gentle and thoughtful, and tender, never obtruding himself, always at hand if I needed him, never alluding to his words of warning about Bertram, but ever watchful over me.

Hubert implored me not to go to the trial, yet I went. I could not keep away, and throughout its course my eyes never seemed to leave Bertram's face, which, even in this supreme hour of his shame and disgrace, still looked like the face of an angel, pure, strong, and beautiful.

Over and over again he asserted his innocence; declaring that when he left his uncle John's private room on the morning of the murder my uncle had been perfectly well, declaring also that he had no knowledge whatsoever of how his stick had come to be in my uncle's room at all, and of the figures and embezzlements he swore he was absolutely innocent.

But the proofs seemed so plain, so deadly plain, what could any jury do but commit him, that was what everybody said, and, as they said, the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

After that awful last day of the trial I lay ill for weeks, raging in the delirium of brain fever, and when I woke again to a knowledge of the outside world they told me that influence of a powerful sort had been brought to bear upon the authorities, that a monster petition had been signed begging for mercy for Bertram, and finally that his sentence had been commuted to that of penal servitude for life.

* * * * *

A year had passed.

I stood in my bedroom of the great house in Grosvenor Square, looking at myself in the long glass as I had looked a year ago on the night of the ball which, so it seemed to me, had been the beginning of such a sea of troubles.

I had sent away my maid half an hour before, and had begged my cousins to leave me alone for a few minutes after they had put the finishing touches to my gown; and now I stood silently contemplating my own form decked out in its bridal array.

Yes, it was my wedding-gown that gleamed white and beautiful in the summer sunshine flooding the room, my wedding gown that lay billowing round me in graceful, heavy folds, my wedding veil that covered the shining glory of my hair, on which nestled a spray of orange blossoms held by a glistening diamond star. I was dressed for my wedding, and the whole thing seemed like a dream.

"You are as lovely as the day!" the bridgeroom had said to me triumphantly the previous evening, but his words had brought no joy to my heart, no answering leap to my pulse.

And now I was dressed for my wedding, and in a little while, such a little while, Hubert Dallas and I would be husband and wife; Bertram and the past must be forgotten.

I had yielded to Hubert's wishes. The old love was dead and buried. Bertram had gone out of my life, and the man who had been a faithful friend pleaded so hard with me that I yielded at last, though I told him that I had no love to give him.

And he answered with a smile of triumph.

"I have won you; I will win your love, once you are mine! I will win your love!" and something in his tones made me shudder, I know not why.

I turned from the glass when they called me to come, and, still feeling like a person in a dream, I went downstairs and into the carriage, to be whirled away to the church.

The building was packed from end to end, and I heard murmurs of admiration as I swept up the nave on my cousin's arm, but the faces of the congregation flashed round upon me, and I shivered and clung to the arm I held; for that flash brought back to me the memory of the crowded court, a blur of faces turned towards the white, still countenance of the prisoner at the bar.

I think I tottered a little as I reached Hubert's side. He took my hand and held it closely, and his eyes watched me closely.

"Mine at last!" he whispered.

I was only dimly conscious of all that was passing round me. I vaguely noticed that my cousins stood close round me, that the clergyman had an odd stutter in his voice, that the sun poured through a stained glass window above me, and made great stains of colour on my white gown, that Hubert's close clasp of my hand hurt me. I did not take in a single syllable of what the stuttering voice of the clergyman was saying, until he paused and spoke again more gravely, more solemnly, and I woke to a consciousness of these words: "Let him now speak, or else hereafter for evermore hold his peace."

A great silence followed these words; so utter a silence it seemed and so long that a nervous tension seized me, and I longed to cry out.

And then the stuttering voice was beginning again, when suddenly a great hubbub arose far down the church. There was a scuffling of feet, a storm of angry voices, a babel of sounds that grew and spread till it became almost deafening, and the clergyman's voice fell silent, and, looking up, I saw his eyes grow wide and round with horror.

A low scream burst from my cousin, who stood behind me; the clamour in the church grew and grew, and I turned my head to see.

And what I saw made my heart stand still for a moment, then rush on, till its beating nearly suffocated me, and I clutched the altar rail to keep myself from falling.

Hubert had turned, too; he staggered where he stood, and for a moment I thought he would have fallen; his face grew white as death, and he put out his hands as though to push away a grisly phantom of his brain.

But it was no phantom who stood on the chancel steps in front of the swaying crowd, who tried in vain to pull him back; no phantom that looked at Hubert with grave, accusing eyes, and at once with the sorrowful eyes of an avenging angel.

Bertram stood there! Bertram dressed in the mud-coloured dress of a convict, the broad arrow marking every garment he wore; Bertram whose voice said slowly and distinctly so that it penetrated all over the church and hushed the hubbub:

"I declare an impediment. That man is a murderer!"

His uplifted hand pointed at Hubert, his accusing eyes looked straight and square into those of my bridegroom, which shifted and fell under that steady gaze, and I saw a look of deadly terror sweep over Hubert's face even whilst he said huskily:

"It is a lie!"

The clamour was renewed afresh. Two constables pushed their way through the crowd, the clergyman turned from the altar, and went to the convict's side, but Hubert stood like one rooted to the spot, saying mechanically over and over again, "It is a lie! It is a lie!"

One of the constable's clasped a pair of handcuffs upon Bertram's hands, but he only smiled into the man's face and suffered the indignity unresistingly.

"The truth will out," he said, as they prepared to lead him away; "and, thank God, I have stopped this infamous marriage!"

Suddenly the icy band that had been about my heart for a year seemed to snap. I sprang to his side and laid my hand upon his arm.

"You were innocent!" I whispered. "You were innocent all the time!"

"All the time," he whispered sadly. "Why did you doubt me, sweetheart?"

And the icy band round my heart melted more and more, and before the gaping crowd, heedless of comment, heedless of aught but Bertram, I flung my arms round his neck and lifted my face to his, and said out loud that everyone might hear:

"Forgive me for doubting you—forgive me for everything. I love you—only you. I have loved you all the time!"

I felt his lips touch mine, and then I saw the constables force a way through the crowd again and lead Bertram away, and on the top of the chancel steps where he had stood I fell down like a stone and fainted dead away.

It was a long time before they dared to speak to me of that interrupted wedding, so terrible had been the shock to my

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nerves and brain; and when I rose from my second bed of sickness, weak as a child, scarcely able to walk, and feeling I had no strength to bear any further blows, I found that I had awakened to a great and wonderful joy.

Bertram was beside me, no longer in convict dress, but Bertram looking almost his old self again, excepting for his close cropped hair, and the stamp of suffering on his face.

What a strange, incredible story he had to tell; and what a terrible time he had been through, and by what miraculous ways had the truth become known.

Needless to say that Bertram was entirely innocent of the crime for which he had so nearly suffered the extreme penalty of the law.

The real criminal—and this to me is the most terrible part of the story—was Hubert Dallas, the man who had been my friend, the man I almost married, the man who had tried to blacken Bertram's character in my eyes.

He had said he would win me by fair means or foul, and finding fair means impossible, he had passed on to the dastardly attempt which was so nearly a successful one.

The truth was told to Bertram by a fellow convict, a man dying of consumption, who had been Hubert's accomplice, and who reached Princetown a few months after Bertram went there, to suffer the penalty of some other crime he had committed, though no suspicion that he was uncle John's murderer had ever fallen upon him.

Bertram had shown the man some trifling kindness, and he, smitten by remorse, confessed the truth—a truth he was only able to tell to Bertram in snatches and at long intervals when Bertram had occasionally been with the dying man in the infirmary of the prison.

It seemed that Hubert had become involved in monetary difficulties of a serious nature, and the forgeries at the bank had been his handiwork, as also the doctoring of the ledgers, which he had skilfully made to appear the work of poor Bertram.

Bertram's fellow convict had, in older and more prosperous times, been a friend of Hubert's, and having fallen on evil days, was a willing prey in his hands, and ready even to commit the most dastardly crime if money was the reward.

The very large sum offered him by Hubert tempted him to murder uncle John—an easier matter than had appeared possible at the trial.

He explained to Bertram that he had affected an entrance into my uncle's private room through a courtyard at the back of the house, and that having committed the crime he had managed to escape the way he came. My uncle's well-known habit of sitting with his window wide open confirmed the story.

Bertram's stick had been used at the instigation of Hubert, who had himself given it to the murderer.

The story had been told again by the dying convict in the presence of the governor and chaplain of the prison; but, meanwhile news had reached Bertram through a letter from his mother of my approaching marriage, and barely waiting for his order of release to be signed—not waiting to change the convict garb he wore—he had hastened with all the speed that trains and cabs would allow to stop the ceremony and prevent my being joined for life to an intentional if not an actual murderer.

Those handcuffs I had seen clasped upon Bertram's wrist were soon removed by the apologetic constables when the truth of his story was known and corroborated by the governor of the prison, whose letter he showed them; and his exit from the church was speedily followed by Hubert's exit also, safely in the custody of two other constables who had arrived close on the heels of the first pair bearing a warrant for his arrest.

But for Bertram's timely appearance upon the scene I might have been tied for life to as big a scoundrel as ever walked this earth.

Instead of this I am married to the man who has always seemed to me the best and noblest man in the world, save for a short time when my eyes were blinded, my judgment weakened, my faith shaken by the man who committed crimes to win me—Hubert Dallas, that consummate villain!

L. G. Moberly.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

October 14. — Those whose birthdays fall here will experience an unsettled time; give attention to business if success is desired.

Girls born in the early morning will have some strange experiences in love affairs.

The day is good for dealing with aged people, farmers, landlords, and coal merchants.

A child born here will be fond of travel; never settle long in one place. Will be cautious and reserved.

October 15.—An unfavourable birthday for health, business, and general affairs. Some criticism and private enmity.

Girls will need care with lovers; engagements are broken through quarrels.

The day is not good for speculating, love affairs, pleasure seeking, or engaging servants.

A child born to-day will be changeable, untidy, and never very fortunate.

October 16.—A fairly successful year for those in business; avoid law and rash actions.

Young girls meet with disappointment with opposite sex.

The day is good to buy and sell, to travel, and deal with electricians or new inventions.

A child born here will be fortunate and advance in life. Fond of change and travel; lack order and method.

October 17.—An unfortunate birthday; business, health, and domestic affairs need extra care.

Girls born near four a.m. have anxiety over love letters and through third parties.

The day is evil for most things; keep quiet and let others make the first move. Don't ask favours.

A child born here will be active and rash; will have a troubled and unfortunate career.

October 18.—An active year for those born on this date. Pay attention to business and don't speculate.

Girls will have a quiet time in love matters.

The day is good to write and travel; evil for speculation, buying, and selling.

A child born to-day will be rather unfortunate, though it will have a clever and active brain; should keep in the employ of others.

October 19.—The year will be one of much stir and movement. The mind will be rash and law can easily result.

Girls will have anxiety, and quarrel with lovers; finances and jealousy will be the cause of discord.

A child born this day will be rash and headstrong. Rather fortunate in its affairs. Not so good for a girl.

October 20.—A good year for business and general affairs, but a lot of worry and annoyance is indicated. Take care of health

Girls will find love affairs very interesting; they become engaged or marry.

The day is good for business, pleasure, and visiting. Unfavourable for writing and dealing with landlords or property.

A child born here will be generous, affectionate, and lucky. Should go in business for itself and do well.

Asturel.

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A TEST IN FLATTERY.

WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT A VERY UNEXPECTED RESULT.

"I MAINTAIN," said Bertha Sargent, "that a man is even more easily flattered than a woman."

"And I," returned her betrothed, "insist that you are wrong. Do you suppose that any sane man would be taken in by the exaggerated compliments which most women blissfully swallow?"

"I will concede," replied Bertha, "that flattery, to affect a man, must usually be coated with subtlety. But he will take it every time, whereas a woman sometimes knows better."

Frank Horton laughed in high amusement.

"Show me the man," he cried, "who cannot see through any form of flattery, no matter how artful!"

"Show me the man," retorted Bertha, "who is not invariably influenced by it, when the woman who flatters him is clever enough. Even you, Frank, are not exempt from that weakness. I'll wager that even now some designing woman could make you believe she liked you and wheedle you into paying her such attention as would satisfy her vanity."

Frank Horton inclined his head with exaggerated deference. "Thank you, Bertha, I see you have an exalted idea of your affianced husband."

"There's no use being offended, Frank; but that is my honest conviction, my actual belief concerning the genus man."

"And woman?" he queried coolly. "I presume you, for instance, would be absolutely invulnerable if any man endeavoured to flatter you into believing that he loved you better than I?"

"Why, Frank! Do you think I'd be so fickle in the first place as to allow him such an opportunity?"

It ended by their having a downright quarrel. Of course after it was all over and they had made it up, each was heartily ashamed of the affair.

It seemed inevitable that these two should wrangle whenever a question came up for discussion. This disastrous habit was growing upon them.

The chemical make-up of the two characters seemed to be such that the heat of a spirited argument never failed to cause combustion.

Friends and relatives of the pair prophesied an unhappy wedded life unless matters changed for the better.

During the next few days Bertha was busy making preparations to entertain a friend of her school days, who was coming to visit her.

Kate Richards was a bright, clever, companionable girl, but not pretty, according to accepted standards.

Bertha, musing over the old days and recalling Kate's tactful ways and quick understanding, had a sudden inspiration.

"Just the thing!" she cried, clapping her hands jubilantly in the privacy of her home.

After Kate's arrival she lost no time in revealing her brilliant plan. The friend hesitated at first, but her doubts and scruples were soon swept away by the force of Bertha's enthusiastic arguments.

"You know just how to manage it, Kate dear, and I do so want to prove to Frank that he is in the wrong! I am absolutely certain that he'll walk right into the trap. And, of course, I won't have any personal feeling about it, for I know you so well. If I were dealing with an unprincipled girl it would be different. But you are so true and reliable, Kate."

She might have added, "And so plain of face." Perhaps she did mentally.

When Frank Horton called the next evening, bringing his chum, Will Armstrong, to meet his *fiancée's* friend, Bertha managed, without making the matter too conspicuous, to give Kate and Frank an excellent opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*.

She herself took Will Armstrong in hand and endeavoured to console him for his presumable disappointment. If Armstrong was dissatisfied with the arrangement he certainly did not show it.

After that evening followed Bertha's informal dinner dance given in her friend's honour; then commenced a round of delightful affairs which promised to fill to overflowing the three weeks allotted to Kate's visit.

Bertha smiled triumphantly to herself to note the apparent success of her little scheme. Just as she had imagined, Kate's method of flattery had brought the expected result.

Horton was unmistakably attentive to the girl. There was no need now for further manœuvring. He voluntarily sought her side whenever occasion permitted.

Armstrong had become a frequent caller. The thought flashed upon Bertha one day that she was perhaps acting unpardonably rudely in keeping him and Kate from becoming better acquainted. No doubt he was desirous of a closer friendship with her. As hostess she should really have assisted in the affair, instead of arranging things to suit her own selfish desire for triumph over Frank.

The scheme had proceeded far enough, anyway. She had won.

Almost any day she might divulge the secret and have a good laugh at his expense. Wouldn't he be ashamed and confounded, though!

Meanwhile she tried to atone for her former rudeness by making the way for Armstrong to see more of Kate. To her astonishment, that young man showed no disposition to follow up his advantage.

"I believe you are trying to get rid of me, yourself," he accused her one day, when she made a particularly bold move to further her new purpose.

She gave him a quick look of astonishment. How strange his eyes looked! There was a warmth, a sweetness in them that she had never noticed before. And how handsome he was!

The revelation thrilled her. She understood, now. And the understanding did not displease her.

In talking with him further, she became thoroughly convinced of his superlative delicacy and consideration where an argument was concerned. He showed such respect for her opinions! Truly, to talk with him was a wonderful relief from the nerve-racking friction which always attended an earnest conversation with Frank Horton.

Her intention of taunting Horton with the success of her test was forgotten in the exhilaration of this new experience. There was no denying Will Armstrong's influence over her.

She resolved to be honest with her affianced.

(*Concluded at foot of next page.*)

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SERIAL STORY COMPETITION.

STILL ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO WIN ONE OF THE TEN HANDSOME GRAMOPHONES OFFERED.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

The picture on this page illustrates a certain sentence in this week's instalment of our powerful new serial "A Foe in the Family." All you have to do is to read the instalment carefully, and to write under the picture the sentence which you think is illustrated by the sketch. Ten splendid Gramophones will be awarded to readers whose correct solutions are posted to us soonest after the publication of this number of *Short Stories*.

Sentence:	*Page* .....
.....	*Column* .....
.....	*Line* .....

In order that all competitors shall have an equal chance of winning these handsome prizes, we have decided to distribute the Gramophones over the British Isles thus:

Two Gramophones will be won by readers living in the London postal district whose correct solutions are posted first.

Two Gramophones will be awarded to readers living within 100 miles of London.

Two to those English readers living over 100 miles from London.

Two to Scottish readers sending in correct solutions and two to those living in Ireland.

When you have found the sentence write it down in the space below the picture, together with the number of the page, the column, and the line. Then put your name and address in the space provided, cut out this page and post it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark your envelope in the *top left corner* with the name of your postal town, and the time of posting, thus:

MANCHESTER.
2.45 p.m.

Then post it *at once*.

Name..... Address.....

Frank listened calmly to the bravely delivered account. Then a strange gleam broke over his face.

"Bertha," he said quietly, "don't you think you walked into the trap very readily?"

"Trap? What trap?" Amazed, astounded, she stood gasping before him. Then came a flash of understanding. "How dared you! Oh, how dared you!" she cried.

"You pursued the same plan with me," rejoined Horton, smiling. "Did you think I could not see through your purpose when you arranged for Kate and me to be thrown so constantly together?"

Bertha was silent.

"However," resumed Frank, "the manœuvre resulted differently than either one of us anticipated. I have really learned to love Kate, and now that you have given me my freedom I shall ask her to marry me. Will Armstrong has confessed to me his feeling for you, so I was prepared for your story."

After all, Bertha felt that she could afford to be magnanimous.

"You and Kate will make such a delightful pair," she said. "I know you will be happy. And we'll all of us be friends, won't we, Frank?"

"Oh, most assuredly," answered Horton, "for we each helped the other to find happiness."

Angela Mollan.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

NEW READERS START HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, where Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, during which Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds, and that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland.

We went to the Derby, lost heavily, and to pay our debts, Frankie prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she bought his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably. Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived. He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell. Doctors pronounced it to be a paralytic seizure.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. When alone, she was accused by Pettigrew, who swore to condemn her before the whole world. She secured his silence by managing to be found in his embrace by Lord Chesterton.

My cousin at this time met a Hungarian *attaché*, and fell violently in love with him. One day Lord Kinross called, and Frankie was nowhere to be found. Fearing she contemplated eloping with the *attaché*, Lady Gaveston determined to find her. Together we drove to his flat and found Frankie just ready to leave with him for the Continent. As she would not yield to our pleading, Lady Gaveston made the astonishing statement that the *attaché* already had a wife. He confessed, and, mad with wounded pride, Frankie stabbed him. He was taken to the hospital, but the doctor, guessing the truth, one day called upon us.

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THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

My cousin made no haste to see Doctor Musgrave, but lengthened out her dinner for quite half-an-hour. She spoke but little; gaiety had left her, her eyes, grown suddenly dark, half frightened me, and her mouth looked hard.

"Come with me, Cynthia," she said at last. She turned as she reached the door, and glanced back with a hurried yet wistful look at the room whose every detail bore the impress of her taste—the silver flagons on the mantlepiece, the quaint blue bowl upon the sideboard, the sketches on the wall.

"I sold them all," she said between her teeth, "but I did it to pay my debts—not to pay blackmail. He shall not have the money."

She swept into the drawing-room, and I followed her.

Doctor Musgrave greeted my cousin with effusion.

"He was delighted to see her looking so well. Better than he had dared to hope she would be after—after the distressing events she had passed through." This with a suave smile, but a cold look in his eyes that somehow made me think of a snake.

"Thank you, I am very well," said Frankie. "It is quite charming of you to feel anxious on my account. I could almost regret that I am in no need of your prescriptions."

The doctor bowed, and then, still more politely:

"You are too kind, Mrs. Norton, but I mustn't sail under false colours. I'm afraid I must confess my motive for calling on you was not wholly disinterested."

"No?" My cousin leant back on the lounge, arranging herself comfortably among the cushions, the picture of indolent luxury and ease.

"So long as you are here, Doctor Musgrave, the motive is really unimportant." Her eyes flashed as she spoke, she looked dangerous.

"You mustn't say that till you hear why I've come."

"If you insist," she laughed and offered him a cigarette.

"Thank you, but I rarely smoke."

"You *must*, or I shall have to put mine out. Just this once." She leant towards him, holding the dainty silver case at arm's length.

No one could withstand my cousin when she looked and spoke like that. Doctor Musgrave succumbed like the rest of his sex, he smiled and took the cigarette—but his eyes were still cold, and, I thought, crafty.

"I suppose you're leaving town shortly?" said Frankie. "Everyone who is anyone is ashamed to show their face in London during August."

"That," said the doctor judiciously, "depends."

"Your patients you mean? Of course, I was forgetting. But couldn't you get someone to take charge of your practice for a while. You want a holiday, you're looking tired and pale, almost haggard."

The doctor flushed. He was a vain man, and proud of his well-preserved looks.

"There would be no difficulty about my practice," he said stiffly. "I am kept in town on business."

"Yes? I thought it was only the stockbrokers, and people in the City, who had to worry over 'business,' I didn't know medical men had to do with those sort of things."

He smiled and stroked his fair moustache.

"I am not worried about the Stock Exchange, Mrs. Norton," he said slowly, "a much smaller affair engrosses my attention—I am interested, deeply interested in the welfare of poor sick children, and am anxious to found a home at the seaside where they can spend the first few weeks of convalescence after leaving hospital. But funds are scarce, and," he shrugged his shoulders, "subscriptions difficult to get, and——"

My cousin interrupted him with a bright smile.

"My dear man," she said, "why didn't you say so sooner? I'll give you a subscription with the greatest pleasure. I'm awfully fond of children, and I think it's sweet of you to want to give the poor mites a taste of the sea. What shall it be, doctor?" She rose and walked to her *escritoire*. "Fifty pounds?"

She glanced at him over her shoulder, her face flushed with interest or excitement. I could see she felt relieved at the turn matters had taken. There was nothing to fear in a request for a donation to a children's seaside home!

The next moment I had reason to alter my opinion.

Doctor Musgrave leant back in his chair and stared gravely at the ceiling.

"Fifty pounds is but a drop in the ocean, Mrs. Norton," he said slowly. "The exigencies of the case require a far, far larger sum. The Children's Home will require £2,000 at least!"

My cousin turned round with a sigh and a shake of the head.

"How I wish I were a millionaire," she said. "Your home should want for nothing! As it is, I'm afraid I can't do much. You see, it's quite too late for a bazaar or even a fancy fair. If I'd known sooner I could have arranged a *fête* or something of the kind, and got the money easily. But now," she shook her head, and seemed quite sorrowful.

"I, too, despair of the bazaar, Mrs. Norton, also the fancy fair. But," he smiled, "I have faith in you."

"I simply haven't a suggestion! When I return to town I might be able to think of something that will help you, but not till then, I am afraid."

"You will not return, I presume, until after your marriage with Lord Kinross?"

"Yes. We shall go abroad for a month or two, until the beginning of December, I expect."

"Ah! I'm afraid the Home can't wait till then. It is imperative the money should be raised"—he paused, and for the first time during the interview seemed irresolute. "It must be raised before your marriage, Mrs. Norton," he said quickly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"If you insist on it I will explain more fully. But"—he glanced towards me—"it would, I think, be more discreet if you did not press for an explanation."

"My dear man," said Frankie airily, "you speak in riddles. Why should I give you or your hospital £2,000?"

"You are known to be charitable," he answered with a sneering little smile. "But if you cannot see your way to help the institution I must carry my petition elsewhere. Lord Kinross, I am sure, would not refuse me."

"Lord Kinross gives me his list of charities to revise," she answered. "I'm afraid I could not countenance so large a gift."

The doctor bowed.

"His cousin perhaps would be more generous? Do you think Mr. Hope would refuse me?" Frankie caught her breath, and for a moment made no answer. Hitherto I felt she had made sure of victory, now she began to doubt her strength. Doctor Musgrave was clever, resourceful, a man of infinite tact and self-control. Throughout the interview not a word had escaped him that could be used to his discredit. He had asked for a subscription,

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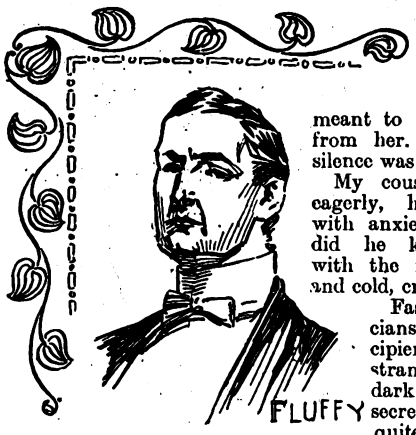

a large one truly, but there was nothing discreditable in that. And yet he meant to get the money from her. His price for silence was £2,000!

My cousin studied him eagerly, her figure tense with anxiety. How much did he know—this man with the inscrutable smile and cold, cruel eyes?

Fashionable physicians are the recipients of many and strange confidences, dark and curious secrets. It seemed quite impossible to fathom the man or the amount of his knowledge!

"I'm quite sure Mr. Hope would help you," she said at last, "especially if Lady Gaveston approved of the project. Both Lord Kinross and his cousin think a great deal of what she says."

"I don't think I should want Lady Gaveston's co-operation with Mr. Hope," said the doctor slowly. "He'd take my word—about the Home."

Frankie smiled at the words, a sudden, radiant smile Perhaps she remembered, as I did, that whatever Hope might know against her, Kinross would pay no attention to his accusations. On that afternoon when Percival's witnesses one after the other had collapsed, Kinross had declared he would never again listen to a word against her. The doctor might go to Hope and welcome, so far as Frankie was concerned.

"Well," she said, "perhaps you're right. I believe Mr Hope rejoices in an independent mind. I'm sure I trust your home will succeed, Doctor Musgrave."

"Thank you, I have great confidence in it. Failing Mr. Hope I shall try another member of the family. Lady Paula—your future sister-in-law, Mrs. Norton—is truly generous. As her medical adviser, I feel sure I shall not appeal to her in vain; nor, if you will forgive my saying so, do I think her brother will put her express wish aside—even at your suggestion. I shall have that £2,000, Mrs. Norton, you may be sure of that."

He rose and gave signs of departure.

"I shall go and see Lord Kinross to-night," he said. "I am a little anxious about Lady Paula's chest, she is delicate. Can I—or—deliver any message?"

It was a critical moment; I waited anxiously for Frankie to reply. So much hung on her answer. If she remained firm and still refused to give Musgrave the cheque, he would go then and there to Kinross and tell his tale, how and when he had found Mrs. Norton in Von Essler's rooms. And then—farewell, even at the eleventh hour, to the marriage she had risked so much to bring about.

On the other hand, two thousand pounds would buy the doctor's silence, but if she paid him she would still remain involved in debt. That, and the contempt, the fury, which the man roused in her, held my cousin back.

"Am I to go, Mrs. Norton?" he said, watching her face.

For a moment I thought my cousin would almost strike him. Her breath came in short, hard gasps, she shook with a passion that only her will could hold in leash.

Then with a sudden gesture she waved the man aside and went to her desk.

"Here's your hush money," she said contemptuously, handing him a cheque. "You earn a larger income as a blackmailer than a doctor, I make no doubt. I have paid you your price this once. I have given you two thousand pounds on behalf of the Home for Sick Children. But"—and she smiled maliciously—"if you ever again ask me for a penny, ever again dare to threaten or blackmail me, I shall demand an account of that Home. I shall ask what you have done with my subscription. You understand?"

"Perfectly, madam. You are clearness and courtesy itself."

He was not in the least perturbed, smiling and suave at the end as at the beginning of the interview.

He bowed to Frankie and to me, and was about to leave with the honours of war when there came a ring at the bell that set my heart beating twenty to the dozen.

"Wait," I said impetuously. "Wait. Lord Chesterton is here. I shall fetch him and tell him about you," and I glanced defiantly at the doctor.

"Don't be silly, Cynthia," cried my cousin. "You'll make matters worse."

As she spoke she slipped past me and out of the door. As the door shut the doctor clasped me by the wrist and forced me over to the window.

"Do you know what will happen if you tell Chesterton—big idiot that he is—of what has occurred here to-night?"

"Yes," I returned indignantly, "he'll throw you out of the house at once."

"Pray what good would that do? Silly child, such a scene would only disgrace him and your cousin, not me. Besides I should have something to say as well as you. I should tell Chesterton what happened in Von Essler's rooms, tell him that you—yes, you—took up a knife and stabbed the Hungarian. The motive? Jealousy perhaps. Not the truth?" as I indignantly denied it. "Tush, you cannot prove it. Your cousin is not likely to clear you at her own expense. Now, now will you call Lord Chesterton?"

His eyes burnt into mine, his fingers tightened on my wrist.

"Consider, Von Essler is not yet out of danger, even now he may die. And you may be charged with his death."

In a paroxysm of terror I fell on my knees, too frightened even to scream. I could not think clearly, nor reason properly, I could only remember that if this man fulfilled his threat and told Jack that I had stabbed Von Essler, honour to Frankie must keep me silent. And he, Jack, would believe.

"You won't say it," I gasped, "you won't——"

The man's face changed. He looked at me curiously, as though he really believed I had done what he accused me of. He drew in his breath and a smile, his hateful smile, came back to his lips.

"I will say nothing to-night," he returned gravely. "Get up and sit down quietly. That is better. Now," he gazed at me narrowly, "you must be sensible and do as I tell you. You're nervous and excited, you'd better go to bed, and I'll send you a soothing draught. To-morrow"—he paused—"to-morrow I shall come and see you, and we'll discuss the matter thoroughly. Meantime, keep as quiet as you can. Good-bye."

He bowed himself out, leaving me crouched on a chair.

The horror of it, the horror of it!

Again and yet again I'd been the scapegoat not of my cousin—*that* I could never believe—but of circumstances.

Pettigrew's missing pocket-book, Pettigrew's stolen notes, both had found their way into my possession, and had helped to estrange me from Percival Hope. And now that this other, and I felt strange interest had come into my life, now that I had learnt to care for Jack, the same dark shadow fell over me. The shadow of unjust and cruel suspicion.

My cousin entered the room abruptly. "Has he gone?" she said.

I nodded.

She sat down beside me, and laughed in a jarring, mirthless sort of fashion.

"My dream of a calm future with no unpaid bills to worry me, or spectres to haunt me, hasn't lasted long," she said. "It's a difficult matter to run straight, Cynthia, once"—she paused—"once you've done the other thing. I was a fool to sell my furniture," she added fiercely, "a fool to listen to Lady Gaveston. I've left myself without a home, for what? To satisfy that man's rapacity."

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Can't you pay any of your bills, Frankie?" I urged. I so longed for my cousin to get free of debt that I roused myself to discuss the possibility.

"No," she shook her head, "not one. I'm going to stick to my last thousand. I'll not be left without a penny."

"I wish you could pay them, Frankie," I sighed. "I'd do anything to get you the money."

"Well," she glanced at me quickly, "if that's so, you might do more than wish! Chesterton's in the morning room. Ask him for three thousand pounds; he'd be delighted at the chance of lending it to you. You can pay it back after I'm married, you know. I shall have a good allowance."

I shook my head. "I could not, Frankie, after—after what that dreadful man said to me just now."

"Do you mean Musgrave?"

"Yes."

"What's he been saying, or rather threatening? He surely didn't try to get any money out of you."

"Worse than that. He—threatened to tell Chesterton it was I who stabbed Von Essler. Frankie, if he does I can't say anything. I wouldn't give you away for all the world. But"—I laid my head on her shoulder, and, having nothing better to do, began to cry.

"Didn't you tell the doctor the rights of the affair?"

"No."

My cousin made no answer, but suddenly caught me to her and kissed me hard.

"Don't fret, Cynthia," she said softly, "whatever happens, Chesterton shan't think anything but what is true about you. I haven't always been fair and square to you, I know, but this time you shan't suffer the least little bit. I will explain everything that may seem strange to Chesterton about you. When the time comes I will speak out."

I remembered that promise later. So did she!

"You'll ask him for the money, dear?" she said, after a while.

"Yes, I'll go now."

"You're a good child. Does it ever strike you, Cynthia, as a strange thing that what has taken me such time, trouble, and—and other things to reach, you should have gained without any effort at all? Look," she pulled me in front of the glass, so that we faced the mirror side by side, "we make a charming pair, Cynthia, and we're different as night from morning. Yet we're both engaged, you to Chesterton—don't be silly, child, it's nonsense to deny it—I to Kinross; men of wealth and title. You're pretty and ingenuous. I'm something more than pretty," she glanced at her lovely face and perfect figure, "and I've more brains in my little finger than you have in your flaxen head. And yet you are beginning where I leave off. It's strange, and it's not altogether fair. It's easy, of course, to point a moral, and declare that innocence unaided has accomplished what I found so difficult to do. But that's all nonsense. If it hadn't been for me you'd have stayed at the convent all the days of your life, teaching and sewing from cock-crow till sunset. Whereas I broke away from a life of drudgery by sheer strength of will. You would never have had the courage to do as I've done, Cynthia."

"I know I owe everything to you," I whispered, feeling vaguely reproached.

"Get the money from Chesterton, and I'll give you a receipt in full," she laughed with a sudden change of manner. "Hurry!"

I went swiftly towards Frankie's den, picturesque in its medley of rose-coloured draperies, soft-cushioned chairs, and its quaint array of shoes. Strangely enough, I had no doubt or hesitation as to what I was about to do. Had it been Percival Hope I was going to ask, I should have been weighed down by the thought of those searching eyes, that firm, hard mouth, the suspicion that it seemed to me lay ever in his smile. But in the case of Lord Chesterton it was quite different. Frankie had assured me that she would never let him think ill of me. I had no cause to fear.

I went straight up to him, and without any preliminaries asked abruptly:

"Will you please lend me three thousand pounds for six weeks? I can pay it back then."

He laughed in an amused sort of fashion.

"Six weeks or six years, if you want it Cynthia. What is it—bets?" and he smiled provokingly.

"You know I never bet," I answered flushing. "It's, it's — bills. Dressmakers' and milliners', you know."

"Bills? For £3,000! You're a transparent baby, Cynthia; as if anyone would give you credit for such a sum. A little girl like you," and he tried to slip his arm round my waist. I suppose he meant to be paternal!

"I don't want to tell you whose bills they are," I said gravely, "they may be mine or Lady Gaveston's, or"—I paused—"Mrs. Curtis Blount's. Anyway they've got to be settled. The money is only wanted for six weeks," I continued. "Can you trust me to repay you?"

I don't think it's necessary to state exactly what he said. Some things should be left to the imagination. Anyway, he left shortly after in great contentment, and I returned to Frankie with the promised cheque. Once again she had triumphantly surmounted a threatened danger—turned a defeat into a victory.

Next morning Dr. Musgrave made his promised call. I think he was surprised, though hardly pleased, at the result of the interview.

"Thank you," I said quietly in answer to his kind inquiries, "I am all right to-day, quite recovered, in fact. By-the-bye, if you have anything you want to tell Lord Chesterton, you'd better see him this morning. He's leaving for Cowes this afternoon. This"—I produced a card—"is his address. I've nothing more to say, Dr. Musgrave. You can tell Lord Chesterton anything you like—and—good-morning." I left the room breathless, but with dignity. The doctor, thinking discretion the best, if not the only card to play, departed silently.

That afternoon we said "Good-bye" to Pont Street. In but a few hours the house that had been our home for the past six months, where every room was reminiscent of a chapter in my cousin's life, in but a few hours, I say, it would be empty, desolate! Stripped of its gods, desecrated by the unholy fingers of a dealer in furniture!

Once again Mrs. Ponsonby would instal her horsehair chairs, her mahogany tables, and early Victorian sofas. Once again Sir John would cross the threshold of the house that had brought him so much ill, carried helpless as a child through the rooms, where he had waited in the flush of a strong and vigorous manhood for the woman he had loved more dearly than all else.

Tears filled my eyes as I passed down the stairs, looking a last farewell in every nook and corner.

Only a short time truly since I came there, but how much had happened in that time!

Frankie was waiting impatiently in the hall.

"Sentimental as ever," she said. "Cynthia, you're a goose!"

We got down to Southampton at half past six, Kinross and Chesterton, who had arrived by an earlier train, met us at the station, and we had dinner together at the hotel.

About eight o'clock we went down to inspect the yacht—

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Hartland's latest and most expensive craze. She looked like a picture in the clear moonlight, her white sails like pinions unfurled in the breeze!

We were to cross to the island that evening and join the rest of the party at Mrs. Venables' house in Cowes.

I enjoyed the trip immensely; the twinkling lights across the Solent, the gentle swishing of the sea upon the distant shore, the breaking of the surf against the rocks, the churning of the water as the yacht sped on its course, gave me a sense of rest and quiet. Here, on the eternal sea, the life of the teeming city seemed very far away, a thing of fret and worry, without end or purpose.

Mrs. Venables' reception, however, speedily dispersed the sense of quiet. She was a little woman of overpowering activity. Wanting no rest herself, she denied her guests the right to wish for any, and stirred them up to tennis, yachting, to go for a picnic or a drive at weird hours of the day and night.

My old friend, the pink youth, was there, also the faithful Algy, and Mrs. Curtis Blount was expected shortly! I wasn't best pleased at the intelligence and was very dignified with Chesterton in consequence, until he assured me that if there was a woman for whom he felt a cordial detestation, it was Vi! Then I felt sorry for her, but pleased with him.

The time passed very pleasantly, enlivened by "games" of the pink youth's invention, puerile but harmless. Kinross won a cup at the regatta, which he handed with great joy and pride to Frankie.

They were a most devoted couple in those days.

Frankie laid aside her coquetry and had eyes only for Hartland, while he grew more infatuated daily.

"Everything," as the pink youth remarked constantly and with great irrelevance, "was lovely!" It seemed as if Frankie had passed out of troubled waters, and could hope for a quiet and peaceful future.

The marriage was to take place at Cromer the second week in September, from the house of one of Hartland's aunts. It was arranged that we should spend a fortnight cruising round the coast in his lordship's yacht, and arrive at Cromer a week before the wedding.

The party was to consist of ourselves, dear Vi, Algy and Chesterton. Mrs. Venables was to come as a chaperon, and the pink youth was thrown in by way of ballast.

The evening before we were to start, Frankie and I went on board with Mrs. Venables to settle our belongings.

About half past nine Chesterton turned up and called us on deck.

"The post's just come," he explained. "I thought I'd bring you your letters. There's an important looking missive for Mrs. Norton marked 'Immediate'."

My cousin smiled her thanks and took the packet. She tore it open quickly and glanced hurriedly over the contents; as she read her face whitened and she grasped the rail as if for support.

Then thrusting the letter in her dress, she crossed over to Kinross.

"Hartland," she said, "I want you to do something for me." She linked her arm in his, and led him to the end of the boat. (I'm sorry, but to this day I can't tell the bow from the stern.)

I could not hear what she said, she seemed pleading for something, half in earnest, half in play. At last, with a quick glance round, she dropped a light kiss on his cheek.

"You can't refuse *now*," she cried.

"You're a witch," he returned, "and entirely unreasonable. But you shall have your way."

A minute later Frankie called me and Mrs. Venables to help her move a trunk in her cabin.

"It seems to me," observed that lady, when, after much exertion, we had put the box in place, "as if we'd slipped anchor. Positively"—she started to her feet—"I believe we're out at sea," and she ran up on deck in great excitement.

Frankie shut and bolted the cabin door.

"Mrs. Venables is right, Cynthia," she said, "we're off! We shan't put into port for three weeks—not till the day before my wedding."

"But the rest of the party——"

"What do they matter? Who wants Vi or Algy? As for gossip," she shrugged her shoulders, "Mrs. Venables is a sufficient chaperon, and love is a colourable explanation. People do mad things for love, don't they, Cynthia?"

"But you?" I exclaimed. "What's your reason, Frankie?"

For answer she gave me a letter—*the* letter.

"Read it," she said, "and you will understand."

"It's from Fluffy?" I asked, recognising the handwriting.

"Yes."

"But you've nothing to fear from him, he wouldn't do you any harm!"

"Read," she said impatiently. "Your questions madden me."

Trembling I drew near the lamp. For a while the words were blurred before me. Gradually, however, they grew plain—

"I have just returned to England," said the letter, "to learn that a marriage between you and Lord Kinross is arranged to take place in September. I tell you now, as I have told you many times before, you shall marry no one but me. You or I must tell this to Lord Kinross. Remember, if it is not you, it will be I."

I dropped the letter, and stared blankly in my cousin's face.

"What have you said to him in reply?" I gasped.

"Nothing—it is no use! Listen, I have still one chance. I must marry Kinross before Fluffy can see, or speak, or write to him. Fluffy could tell him things——" she paused. "If they see each other before the marriage I am lost," she cried; "after, he can do nothing."

"But how can you prevent their meeting?"

"I have persuaded Hartland to put off to-night instead of waiting for the rest. I shall persuade him to keep to sea till the last moment—the sea, where no letters can reach him, nobody find him. We shall not put into port until the day before our marriage. And then——" She broke off and stared at me with wide, unseeing eyes.

"I'll do it," she said, in a low, hoarse voice, lifting her hand as though to strike. "I'll do it. Nothing shall stop me now, not even——"

With a scream I rushed to her and forced my hand over her mouth.

"Don't say it," I shrieked, "you shall not say it."

She put me from her, and spoke no more until the morning. But all through the watches of that dreadful night, again and yet again, I heard the words—

"You or I must tell Lord Kinross. You or I——"

The yacht flew through the waters, my heart beat loud and fast. It was a race, a race between this man and Frankie. He to find Lord Kinross, she to hide him.

Who, who would win?

[This series of articles will conclude in two weeks' time, and will be followed by another series of equal interest entitled, "How I Chaperoned Belinda."]

"Doesn't your mother like me?" asked young Mr. Gilley in an effort to ascertain why Miss Keedick refused him. "Oh, yes, she likes you," was the reply of the maiden, "but she is already married to papa."

Uncle Joshua: "These city people have very polite manners, Maria." His Wife: "How so?" "Just let a couple of fellers have my watch, which they offered to regulate free gratis. They're to bring it back to me at the hotel."

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He Saved as Much.

"This talk about it being more expensive to live when married than when single is all rot," said Groomley. "Why, I've been married a year, and I save just as much as I used to." "And how much is that?" "Nothing."

Never too Late.

Miss Withers: "I'll never marry." Miss Prime: "Don't say that. Someone may leave you a fortune some day."

Where the Prompting Came from.

Hunker: "What prompted you to ask Miss Giddey to be your wife?" Spirits: "I think Miss Giddey herself prompted me more than anybody else."

But Mary Knew.

"Mary, did anyone call while I was out?" "Yes. Mr. Snooks." "Mr. Snooks—Snooks? I don't know anyone of that name." "Probably not, mum; he called to see me."

His Mission in Life.

"You are Mr. Quezeen, the husband of the celebrated lecturess on cookery, are you not?" "Yes, sir," replied the dejected, hollow-eyed man. "I am the man she tries her new dishes on."

Kissing Powder.

A very agreeable girl about twenty, having, during a country visit, run out of powder to whiten her face, has tried pounded sugar with the best results; she says it tastes nice when she is kissed.

The Benefit of the Doubt.

Emmeline: "Alfred, I am very fond of you, but I doubt if I love you well enough to be your wife." Alfred: "Emmeline, give me, oh, give me the benefit of the doubt." Emmeline: "I will, Alfred. Henceforth, all is over between us."

And Didn't Come again.

"Is your sister in?" "Yes, but she's sewing a button on a coat. You'll not see her yet awhile." "But it doesn't take long to sew a button on a coat." "It does when there's a man inside the coat." Hearing which, he went to call on his next girl.

Base Ingratitude.

Mr. Newhitch: "There, my dear, I've locked all the doors, turned off the gas, brought up the silver, and shut the hall window. Don't you think I'm an angel?" Mrs. Newhitch: "Well, I don't know; the butler used to do all those things at mamma's, and he was a fiend."

Why Harry Stayed out Late.

Middle-aged Matron: "And do you find married life as pleasant as you expected?" Young Wife: "Oh, it would be if it were not for the dog next door. He barks all the early part of the night and Henry is so nervous that he has to stay in town until two or three in the morning to escape the annoyance of hearing him."

And He Got it.

"I have had a delightful evening," he said, as he rose to go. "May I call again?" "I shall be glad to see you," she replied, with a blush. As he walked into the hall he saw in the mirror of the hat-rack a reflection of the roguish girl slyly throwing a kiss at him, and he turned back. "I must have that in the original package," he whispered. And he got it.

As He Wished it to be.

She: "You'd be the last man in the world I'd fall in love with?" He: "Well, that's all I ask. I don't want you to love anybody after me."

Very much Settled.

She: "Really, now, aren't you a married man?" He: "No, why?" She: "Oh, you have such a settled look." He: "Yes, I've been refused by thirteen girls."

Why he Left.

Miss Summit: "I was very much surprised, Mr. Jagway, to see you coming out of a public-house on Thursday afternoon." Jagway: "Yes; I had to catch a train."

Where Ignorance is Bliss.

He: "And did you see Monte Carlo whilst you were at Nice?" She: "No; papa called on him, I believe, but from his disappointed appearance when he returned to the hotel I think Mr. Carlo must have been out."

Couldn't Trust Herself.

Jenny: "Here comes Jack, auntie. I wish you would come down and stay in the room." Auntie: "Why?" Jenny: "I'm afraid he's going to propose, and I can't trust myself—he looks so poor and so handsome."

The Ways of Bachelors.

Proud Mother: "You haven't kissed the baby." Bachelor Uncle: "Um—er—I'll try to remember next time. I'll kiss her when I—er—come back from India." "When will that be?" "Let me see. About sixteen years."

Short Relationships.

"No, Mr. Jones, I cannot be your wife." "But you'll be a sister to me. Promise me that." "It is unnecessary. Your brother proposed to me last week, and I promised to be his sister. I have been your sister for a week."

Had to be Particular.

She: "It can hardly be questioned that every woman is more or less of a mind reader." He: "Do you think you could read mine?" She: "I'd rather not. Mamma is a little particular as to the character of my reading."

The Inconstant One.

A pretty girl, a winter night, a moon impassioned fellow, a gentle word, a solemn vow, a kiss— And all is well oh! Again the girl, another night, same moon— Thus far, 'tis well, oh! But if we took another look, we'd see— Another fellow!

Pa was Sarcastic.

Father (entering parlour at midnight): "Here is the jug, Ethel. You can get an extra half pint of milk when the man comes in the morning." Ethel: "Why, pa?" Father: "And get two extra rolls. I presume George over there likes them for breakfast."

Wanted Value for Money.

Wife: "Why are you smashing the works of your watch in that way?" Husband: "Well, I presume there's a grain of dust in the hairspring that makes it necessary for me to take it to the jeweller. He always charges me for rebuilding it throughout, and this time I intend him to earn his money."

A Week's Success.

Widow: "Do you think marriage is always a failure?" Bulfinch: "Always a failure! Well, I should say not. Why, I know a case where a wife fairly idolises her husband, and he—why, he can't keep away from her a minute." Widow: "Bless me, how long have they been married?" Bulfinch: "Nearly a week."

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A LADY OF RANK.

A Charming Little Tale of a Milliner's Bill.

If ever a man ought to have married money it was Charlie Lorrimer. Brought up in good style, the death of his father just before he, Charlie, came of age, revealed to him the unpleasant fact that instead of being in receipt of a good income, all that he had coming to him was a few hundreds a year; quite enough, of course, for many men to enjoy life comfortably upon, but not so to one who had been accustomed to have his every whim gratified without considering the cost.

Through influence, a post under Government was in due course obtained for him, and if he had been content to remain single, as hundreds of other young men similarly situated would have done, he could have been exceedingly comfortable, seeing that he had the *entrée* of some of the best society in town.

He was really an extremely good-looking young man, of undeniably pleasing manners; still, girls are more sensible, or more mercenary, whichever you like to call it, nowadays than they were formerly, and do not give their mothers and chaperons so much trouble in the way of forming undesirable attachments as they used to.

Hence it came about that as Charlie Lorrimer had the good sense not to pay marked attention to any young lady individually, in the particular set in which he moved, he was regarded as harmless enough. It is true there had been something between him and a certain Miss Diana Carew, a lady several years his senior, the daughter of a rich, fox-hunting baronet whose property adjoined the Lorrimers.

She was a lady who, if report spoke truly, was not only one of the best horsewomen in the county (a fact which was universally admitted on all sides), but just a wee bit fast as well; preferring to make her bets in coin of the realm rather than orthodox boxes of gloves, and not disdaining to take a hand at a card party where the smallness of the stakes was *not* a prominent feature.

Whether there had ever been more than a flirtation between them, or whether he or she were to blame, is a matter of uncertainty.

At any rate, before Charlie Lorrimer's bad luck came upon him, a coolness had sprung up between them, and Society was startled one day by the announcement that Miss Carew was engaged to Lord Duncombe, a middle-aged peer who did not enjoy the best of reputations.

In course of time they were duly married; the alliance, as people had predicted, proving anything but a happy one for the lady, her spouse speedily dissipating her ample fortune, and finally, finding England too hot for him, betaking himself somewhere abroad.

Possibly it was from being unsuccessful in his first effort that made people set Mr. Lorrimer down as a confirmed bachelor, but to everybody's surprise, he quietly announced one day, when he had just entered his twenty-eighth year, and ought to have known better, as his friends said, that he was going to get married; and, what was in their eyes still more discreditable, to a girl without a penny—a clergyman's daughter from a remote parish down in the west of England.

His friends could not help admiring his choice, a handsome specimen of English girlhood; but so for the matter of that was Miss Bungleigh, the rich brewer's daughter, who had unmistakably set her cap at him, and would have jumped at the chance of marrying him, and brought him a fortune into the bargain.

In due course the wedding came off, very quietly, down in Devonshire, and the happy couple, after the usual Continental honeymoon, set up housekeeping in a very pretty flat in West Kensington.

For a time all went well; he was not continually going to his club, and she, charmed with the novelty of life in London, after the dull quiet of the country, was perfectly happy and contented; but after a while the desire seized her to extend their somewhat small circle of acquaintances, and she began to rally her husband on not taking her about more, and introducing her into the set in which he had moved before they were married.

At the same time she had by degrees developed a somewhat expensive taste in the matter of dress, and her milliner's bills had more than once given her husband a severe shock, indeed he had hinted as much to her on one or two occasions.

Things had been going on in this way for upwards of a twelvemonth, and a certain amount of estrangement had grown up between them. The sweet, girlish maiden became somewhat snappy at times, and he in consequence had recourse to the pleasures of his club more regularly than she altogether approved of.

One day things came to a climax; the dinner had not been quite what it should be. Mrs. Lorrimer did not, as a rule, keep her servants very long, and the cook was under notice to leave, so that when the trim parlour-maid had brought in the coffee, the storm broke.

"I was looking for some stationery in your escritoire this morning, Charles, and I came across some letters signed Diana Carew. You never mentioned her name to me, I think."

"Didn't I, dear? Oh, she was an old flame of mine; used to live next door to our place in Loamshire; very jolly girl she was too."

"And what became of her, may I ask?"

"Got married."

"To whom?"

"Oh, a fellow who was no good, Lord Duncombe; ran through her money in no time, and then bolted."

"I wonder you never thought it worth while to mention her name to me, Charles."

"Oh, it was all over years before I knew you. I quite forgot I had any letters still by me; they were all very matter-of-fact, if I remember right;" he went on in as airy a tone of voice as he could command.

"I see she used to address you as 'Dear Charlie,' so you must have been pretty intimate?"

"Oh, that's nothing; we were brought up together, you

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know—oh, by the way, Hilda, I have an invitation for a dance at the Laces' next week."

"I am glad to see that some of your old friends are beginning to recognise my existence, and that reminds me, Charlie, I want some money. I have ordered a new dress at Madame Elysée's, and I want to pay her account. She does charge awfully."

"All right, my dear, you can have a tenner," said Charlie, thankful at the turn the conversation had taken.

"If you mean ten pounds, Charles, all I have to say is that that will be no good at all; this dress I have just ordered will be £10 10s. at least, and I fancy my account must already be nearer £60 than £50; you don't want me to go about like an old frump, I suppose?"

Her husband lit a cigarette before replying. "I am afraid £15 is the very most I can spare you—you see, my dear, we are living in a rather more expensive style than my income justifies! and £70 for dress. Well——"

"I beg your pardon, I said about £60."

"Yes, and then this new one which is going to cost £10 10s., you say?"

"Oh, she can wait for that."

"Yes, but it must be paid sometime, I suppose; I have meant to speak to you about your dress expenditure for some time. Your mother told me before we were married that if I allowed you £30 a year I should be doing——"

"Oh, mamma doesn't know what things cost in London; it is for your sake more than my own I dress well. You always say how necessary it is to study appearances."

"Well, it is no use arguing about it; all the money I have at my disposal until the end of the quarter is less than £50, and I cannot possibly spare you more than £15."

"I wonder what your cigar bill comes to in the year?"

"I can easily tell you; for months past I have almost always smoked a pipe."

After a few more controversial remarks the lady retired with as much dignity as she could command.

"I wonder," thought Mr. Lorrimer to himself, "whether there was anything very compromising in those letters. Poor Di, she was a good sort. It is not quite the thing to do to dun a lady for a debt, but I know she would have paid up long ago if she had ever thought of it. It's lucky Hilda did not see it, though. Perhaps she did, and did not understand what it meant."

A minute later Mr. Lorrimer opened the drawer from which his wife had a few hours ago unearthed the bundle of letters from Miss Carew.

"Ah! here it is," as he picked up an envelope in which was contained a half-sheet of note-paper bearing the words, in a bold handwriting, "I.O.U. £100, Diana Carew, July 3rd, 1887."

"Now, what's to be done? If I drop her a line she will reply by return, but Hilda would know the handwriting at a glance, and that would never do. If I go and call, some good-natured friend would be sure to tell Hilda, which would be worse still. Hold on. Yes—the very thing—I'll do it, too."

The subject of finance was not again referred to between them that evening, but the following afternoon, on his return from the Foreign Office, Mr. Lorrimer saw unmistakable signs of a storm brewing on his wife's face, and was not long in being enlightened as to the cause of her displeasure.

"I went about that new dress to-day, and the way in which people go on in London is really quite incomprehensible. Having been brought up in the country, my education in certain social matters may have been neglected, but I certainly should not expect a gentleman holding any sort of position in the country to take off his hat to a milliner, and in her own shop, too."

"And do they in London?"

"Why, the men who go to this Madame Elysée's not only take off their hats to her, but her customers chat away to her as if they were on grounds of perfect equality."

"And she isn't a particularly pretty woman either?"

"Pretty indeed—as if that ought to make any difference—why, she is as ugly as sin, and will never see forty again."

"Are you quite sure? She is a very quiet, unassuming woman."

"Oh, you know her, then?"

"And if her customers like to make themselves agreeable to her," he continued, ignoring her question, "from what you tell me of the class of people you see there, it is, you may depend upon it, the correct thing to do, and you'd better do the same. I have told you how my account stands at my bankers; you had better be civil to her until you can afford to be independent, I think."

"I shall most certainly give her a piece of my mind if she attempts any familiarities with me."

"You must please yourself, my dear."

"I mean to," was the reply.

The opportunity was not long in coming. On Mrs. Lorrimer's next visit to the Bond Street emporium she found the proprietress engaged in affable conversation with a well-known M.P. and his wife.

An assistant came forward to attend to her, and before she had concluded the mysterious operation of "fitting," Madame had taken leave of her friends, the gentleman courteously taking off his hat as he wished her good-bye, and she came forward to Mrs. Lorrimer to express a hope that everything was satisfactory.

"As satisfactory as can be expected, I suppose."

"I don't understand you, madam. I am very sorry if you have any cause for complaint."

"I have been recommended to you as a person who gave individual attention to her customers, instead of which I find myself invariably waited upon by one or other of your assistants."

"I cannot possibly be everywhere, madam, and all my helpers are thoroughly qualified to execute orders and attend to customers, even more so than I am, probably."

This was said in a quiet, ladylike tone of voice, although the speaker, a plain, middle-aged woman looked as if she could, on occasion, bandy sharp words with anybody.

"When I come to a shop I expect to be attended to by the principal."

"Very well, then, madam, it will be best for us to sever our connection; I will send in my account shortly."

"Send it in at once by all means."

Mr. Lorrimer was agreeably surprised when he next saw his wife to find her in a very good temper.

"I told you I should give that milliner woman a bit of my mind."

"And you have?"

"Yes, I have; I told her to send in her account as soon as she liked."

"And if she takes you at your word?"

"You will have to pay it."

"I have told you I can't, that is, not at present; I might in one way, though," speaking as if he had suddenly remembered something.

"I don't care how you do it so long as she is paid. What do you mean to do, borrow it?"

"No; in going through some papers in that drawer in which you found Miss Carew's letters, I came across an I.O.U. for £100, and, of course, I could get that by asking for it."

"A hundred pounds owing to you and you complain of being short of money? Really, Charlie, you are altogether incomprehensible."

"You see, my dear, this money is owing to me by a lady."

"I don't see that matters much. Not a lady of rank, I suppose?"

"She is, as it happens."

"Oh! isn't it rather a strange thing for ladies to incur debts with gentlemen?"

"I thought you might think so,

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when I decided to mention it to you, but then this isn't exactly a debt."

"What on earth is it, then?"

"A sum I won at cards some years ago now, and I imagine the fact must have escaped the lady's memory, otherwise I am sure she would have sent me a cheque long since."

"All the more reason you should remind her. I would do anything rather than be under an obligation to that Bond Street woman."

"If I get this money to-morrow I will send you a wire, and you can meet me at Madame Elysée's."

"Do you mean to call for it? If so I think you might take me. Women are so much more tactful in these matters than men."

"On second thoughts I will meet you in Bond Street to-morrow at four o'clock; I am quite sure to get the money, and I can settle by cheque afterwards."

* * * * *

Punctual to the appointed time, Mr. Lorrimer arrived in Bond Street, and after waiting something like half-an-hour he saw his wife's brougham (hired) coming along.

Mrs. Lorrimer's look of triumph gave way to one of genuine consternation when on entering the shop she saw her husband courteously raise his hat to Madame Elysée, and express himself pleased at seeing her looking so well. "My wife tells me she wants her account if you have it ready, please."

"Here it is, Mr. Lorrimer. I hope you won't think me awfully extortionate," replied Madame with a laugh.

"Just glance over it, dear, will you?" handing it to his wife, and turning to the proprietress he resumed his conversation. Presently she was called away, and Mr. Lorrimer asked his wife casually if it was correct.

"The—the items seem all right, but what does this mean, Charlie? Total £73 15s.; less due to Mr. Lorrimer on his I.O.U., £100; balance in his favour, £26 5s."

"That's the I.O.U. I spoke to you about."

"But you said your debtor was a lady of rank."

"And so she is! Madame Elysée to the world at large, Lady Duncombe to her friends. You see, when Duncombe left her she had to do something, lots of titled people are in business nowadays, and——"

"Charles, you will oblige me by calling the brougham at once!"

"Certainly, my dear, but I must just say good-bye to Lady Duncombe first."

L. Payne.

A man must make his own way in the world, while a woman merely has hers.

"They say she's worth half a million." "Well, she wants it in her business." "What's that?" "Looking for a husband."

She (pensively): "Ah, well! What is wealth, after all, but the mere difference between income and expenditure!" He: "So is debt."

She: "Why does that piano sound first loud and then soft when your sister plays it?" He: "Well, you see, she is learning to ride a bike, and uses the pedals alternately from force of habit."

"Ah, beautiful lady," exclaimed the clairvoyant, "you have come to find your future husband, is it not so?" "Not much," replied the beautiful lady. "I have come to find out where my present husband is when he's absent!"

He: "I had a queer dream about you last night, Miss Louisa. I was about to give you a kiss when suddenly we were separated by a river that gradually grew as big as the Thames." She: "And was there no bridge and no boat?"

The blushing bride-elect was rehearsing the ceremony about to take place. "I shall expect you to give me away, papa," she said. "I'm afraid I have done it already, Caroline," replied the old man nervously. "I told your Hubert this morning you had a disposition just like your mother's."

Your Editor Chats.

Last week I promised to tell you something more about the lady who is writing a series of her confessions as a chaperon.

All the articles have now been written and delivered, and I may say that I consider them even stronger than "The Confessions of Cynthia," which I think my readers will readily admit are extremely good. The fact which makes the new series more interesting is that the scenes are laid, not only in London, but in the chief centres of gaiety all over the Continent.

Naturally all the names of persons and places have been disguised. This is absolutely necessary, and is a condition of the terms under which the articles were written, for to give the real names would be to cause a great deal of unpleasantness and ill-feeling amongst those dealt with.

The object of the series is by no means an idle one. It is not my desire merely to arouse the interest of readers by tickling their mental palates with brightly written facts, but to give them a vivid insight into the way in which members of "the smart set" in Society pass their time.

In the last number of *Short Stories* I published extracts from certain letters which appeared in a big London daily dealing with the moral tone of "The Confessions of Cynthia," and I think that, as the matter finished up, there was everything to be said in favour of the articles, and nothing to be said against them. One half of the world is always interested to know how the other half lives. It would be of little interest to you to read of how those people in your own sphere of life manage to pass the time. You know how they do it. But, unless you are living in high Society circles, you cannot possibly know how these people live. Their methods of existence, from the time they are born until the time they die, are so absolutely different from those of the ordinary person.

No one can write about their doings except a person who has lived with them since childhood, and even then there are very, very few people who can truly and vividly portray their exact method of living. One of these very, very few people is Lady Peggy Carstairs—the name under which the new series of articles is being written. Lady Peggy is unquestionably an able writer, and I am sure that the revelations which she makes will interest you more than anything else has ever done.

The first article will appear in *Short Stories*, ready Tuesday, October 28th.

The offer of £5 for distributing leaflets of our new serial has been increased to nearly £15, and is being awarded in the shape of five splendid Gramophones, each worth, with records, about £3.

Your Editor.

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DOROTHY MERRILL had taken it into her head to be literary. The fact that she showed more decided talent for other things seemed to her no indication that she should not persevere in the matter of becoming an authoress.

She could make her own hats and dresses, she could play the piano, and she could sing. But all of these accomplishments, in her eye, were of pallid insignificance compared with the one burning ambition that possessed her.

She would be a writer. Just what steps to take she did not yet know.

Kindly disposed friends gave her varied advice. "Set about cultivating it just as you would anything else," said one who honestly thought she knew. "Take notes on people and things about you. Carry a writing pad and pencil with you always to record impressions. Get into the literary atmosphere."

Which advice sounded alluring indeed to the listener. Dorothy proceeded at once to lay in a stock of writing materials and invested also in a brand new dictionary. This she supplemented by a book of synonyms and a wonderful volume which bore the luminous title "How the Inexperienced Author May Succeed."

Miss Merrill congratulated herself that during the approaching vacation she would have ample time to follow the wonderful instructions contained in this book. By winter she would be seeing her name in print as a charming new writer of fiction.

When she went on board the steamer which was to carry her to the resort where she purposed spending the summer she buoyantly took with her pencils and writing paper.

No doubt this trip would afford her a most excellent opportunity to record impressions.

"There will be all sorts and conditions of people to study," she reflected.

It happened, however, that she did not find asserted humanity quite so interesting as she had anticipated.

After a few minutes' survey of the blank-faced, weary individuals who lounged about the cabin with parcels and lunch bags at their feet she went outside, hopeful of improvement.

She found herself confronting people even more uninteresting than those she had just left.

Lifting her trailing skirts gingerly—and unconsciously her dainty nose as well—she crossed to a seat by the railing.

At her left a vexed mother scolded two fretful children. Yielding at length to their importunities, she opened the lunch basket. Thereupon the youngsters fell to and attacked with vigour some abnormally large sandwiches and home-made cake.

Miss Merrill was not hungry and withdrew her eyes.

At her left sat a young miss in an exceedingly pronounced pink lawn dress. It had a yoke and sleeves of very open work lace. Her rose laden hat was reminiscent of a draper's shop on bargain day.

She and her sweetheart were blissfully discussing chocolate and apples. His honest face shone above a candidly clean collar and an innocent blue tie.

Miss Merrill sighed impatiently. Any author who could gather inspiration from such discouraging material deserved fame and fortune. For her part, she would give it up for the present.

Certainly there was no one in sight who would serve as the hero of a charming romance. If only some really nice young man——

Miss Merrill glanced up suddenly as there appeared in the doorway of the cabin a person whom she had not seen before.

It was as if some unseen wand were wafted and she found her uncompleted wish gratified. The young man who stood there was handsome of face, well groomed and distinguished.

He crossed to a seat not far from her and she could observe him without being observed. He brought an impression of deep, healthful tan and a flashing sweetness of brilliantly clear blue eyes.

Miss Merrill produced writing paper from her magazine and forthwith proceeded to make jottings.

Now, it must be admitted that the young man in question, although most polite as to behaviour, did not entirely conceal his interest in the maiden who wrote. Not that the fact of her writing concerned him. He was only vaguely aware that she was so engaged. The picture of the young woman herself was what engaged his thoughts. She looked so sweet and bright and fresh—so altogether wholesome and attractive.

More than once did he send a glance over his shoulder—a glance presumably aimed at the sea-green waves, but which nevertheless included the daintily clad maiden with the piquant face and dark grey eyes.

He was sorry when she left her place and went inside to listen to the music. Others followed, and soon the chairs near him were quite deserted.

There was no earthly reason why he should not follow, too, and hear the musical performance within. However, he wavered. A guilty soul is its own accuser. He felt somehow that she would divine his interest and hate him for his presumption.

So he lingered outside, still undetermined. Strolling abstractedly about among the chairs he picked up a magazine lying upon one of them.

The leaves opened at a definite place. Pages of pencilled jottings faced him.

"He was well browned and athletic, my hero, with the bluest of blue eyes, a strong but tender mouth, and—yes—a very stubborn jaw, which I like, and——"

He looked up and flushed guiltily to behold the unknown divinity beside him. She reached quietly for the magazine, with a cool frown and a murmured "Pardon me," which expressed worlds of mingled contempt and chagrin.

"Pardon me," he said quickly, with emphasis on the pronoun. "I am exceedingly sorry—I——"

But she checked further words with a cool nod of disdain.

Her looks only faintly expressed the mortification and shame that burnt within her. He had actually read it!

Her lips drew closer, her face flamed a deeper crimson.

When she left the boat at her destination and climbed into the vehicle that would take her to the Langley Hotel it was with a great sigh of relief.

The driver waited. Was it possible that she was the only party bound for the Langley Hotel? Evidently so. But no—a young man was approaching, bag in hand. It was her hero of the blue eyes!

Dorothy Merrill gave a gasp and sat with exaggerated dignity in a far corner of the seat as he entered. She would show him that she was not so foolish as her pencilled words might indicate.

As this narrative aims to tell the truth, however, it must be related that she unbent from her hauteur before the journey was over. There was a beautiful sunset, and certain remarks concerning it were not only appropriate but unavoidable.

In short, all animosity had vanished when they reached the hotel.

The hero—Joseph Hanly by name, had intended to stay only one week. He remained four.

Her affianced was not at all regretful when she decided to give up becoming an authoress.

"Bother the writing," he said. "I like you just as well without that accomplishment."

A. M. Hearst.

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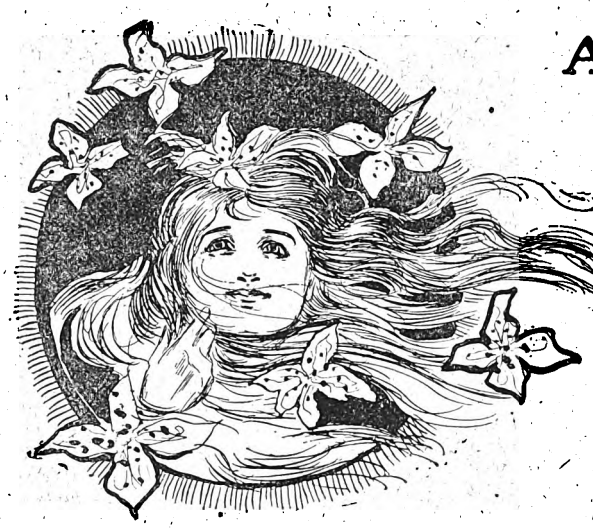

A BELIEVER IN REALITIES.

A Pretty Little Story of a Fight Between Riches and Poverty.

"He is very rich and very good-looking, Amy," said Mrs. Ainsworth. "You can't do better than captivate him. I give you full leave, so far as I am concerned."

"Thank you," I responded, smiling; "but are you sure he is at liberty? Has not such a prize been secured by some one before now?"

"I think not; indeed, I am quite sure of it. You have only to go in and win."

I made no disclaimer, though this kind of conversation did not really please me; it hardly coincided with my ideas of delicacy. Not very consistent, you may say, since I was not too delicate to think about it. But then, who ever is consistent? I did not pretend to be. I thought a good deal about Mr. Otis for the next three or four days; wondered what his own style might be, and what he preferred in women. Perhaps he liked blondes best. No matter. I had tolerable confidence in my own ability to teach him to admire brunettes.

He came at last, and Mrs. Ainsworth gave a party in his honour. She was always giving parties, if she could find sufficient excuse; a temper of mind which, you may imagine, made her popular with the young folks of the neighbourhood. I wore my prettiest dress, and looked well enough; so, at least, the mirror said when I consulted it; and no eyes that met mine spoke any contradiction. I went downstairs a trifle excited, though outwardly serene. It seemed as if the meeting with Mr. Otis might be the turning-point in my fate.

But I forgot his very existence in five minutes.

He had not come alone; a friend had accompanied him—Mr. Heathcote. I could have told him, had he asked advice of me, that it was very poor policy to carry about a person so much more attractive than himself. If Mr. Otis was good-looking, Mr. Heathcote was superb. Just the tall, stately form, the deep, dark eyes, the broad, white brow, with which girls fit out a hero of romance.

He was introduced; we talked together. Of anything that came up—the weather, the place, the company. He was not the kind of man to diverge into side-paths of sentiment or poetry. Yet some people can give a charm to commonplaces; some eyes, some voices, have poetry in their very glance and tone, no matter what they say. That sounds fanciful, perhaps—but it is true; at least, in my experience.

The evening passed, and I went home; mother was sitting up for me, as usual. I told her there never was such a delightful party. She asked in what it differed from our ordinary gatherings. I could not say; there was music and dancing, as always; only it happened to be so very pleasant! Being a housekeeper, she inquired about refreshments. Did we have nice ices, and was the cake made at home, or bought? Oh! we had ices, of course, I said; or no, I wasn't certain—but it was probable, was it not? Mrs. Ainsworth always had them. As for the cake, I couldn't say; I really did not notice.

Mother looked surprised, but made no comment. "And how did you like this cousin?" she asked—"this Mr. Otis, whom we have heard so much of?"

I did not know; I had hardly seen him. We were introduced, I believed, but that was all. "But I can tell you of an acquaintance that I did make, mother—Mr. Heathcote." I paused, and did not care to expatiate upon the subject.

Mother gave a little smile, and then looked grave.

"You found him pleasant, I suppose," she answered.

"Yes," I answered—"very pleasant." I was ashamed of the colour that I felt creeping and tingling up into my cheeks. "I hope you will think the same," I added, with an effort. "He asked if he might call to-morrow, and I said yes."

As it was late, I bade her good-night.

Why could not the evening end as it began? Why must one be obliged to stop and think instead of floating on in pure enjoyment? Who was Mr. Heathcote, and would it do to find him so delightful? What had become of all my fancies about Mr. Otis? How immeasurably insignificant did the man appear, he who had filled so large a space in my plans that very morning! I was a little frightened. I said to myself, "You must be careful. You know you can't marry a poor man, however enchanting he may be." Why? Because I had long before decided that I had seen enough of poverty. It had been an inmate of our dwelling from my earliest remembrance. We belonged, indeed, to the gentry of the place, if you will not laugh at me for speaking so about a little country-town; but no one else was, or appeared to be, so limited. We had shelter, and food, and clothing, to be sure; but in everything we stopped just short of what was pleasant; the plainest necessaries were all we could accomplish. I sighed for something that should embellish life; I hoped one day to achieve it—for I thought I held the golden key that would unlock all treasures, and leave me to enrich myself at will. I was handsome, and knew it. It is so long ago that there is no harm in speaking of it now. My olive cheek mantled with a rose-red flush; my profile might have been copied for a cameo; large, lustrous eyes, dark, shining hair lit up and framed my beauty. This was my capital; I meant to make the most of it. Not that I ever thought of marrying for money; no, indeed! Oh! the gay arrogance of youth! I was to have everything; love and splendour, and luxury. All would come in time; but meanwhile it would never do to find a poor man charming.

I made a sort of compromise with myself. I knew nothing of Mr. Heathcote, had never heard his name before; for aught I could tell he was a millionaire. I must inform myself. He might prove as eligible as he was agreeable. If not—I must avoid him, that was all.

This does not look very pleasant, written down in black and white; but so I settled it. Having thus arranged for future prudence, I was at liberty to recall the evening's happiness, to dwell on certain glances, to wonder if such and such remarks

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had special meaning, or were at the service of any lady Mr. Heathcote encountered.

There was soon an end to dreaming. Breakfast was hardly over the next day when Mary Orme came in. She was just the one to tell me all I wished to know—a girl who heard everything, and repeated it as fast as she heard it. She rallied me on being so "taken up," as she expressed it, at the party, and neglecting the lion of the evening.

"Why should not Mr. Heathcote be as much a lion as the other?" I inquired.

"He is good-looking," she admitted; "not that I admire him as I do Mr. Otis. I always prefer fair men. But one is rich, and the other poor. It's a choice between a West-end mansion and a suburban villa. Oh, you need not look so vexed! Mrs. Ainsworth told me about him. He is a young lawyer, just getting into practice; very promising, and all that. But, bless me! how many promising young lawyers there are that one never hears of a second time! Not that I suppose it would make any difference to you—you're such a romantic thing!"

"I wish you would choose your words a little better," I said not half so savagely as I felt. "What have you ever seen in me of the moonstruck, maudlin sort, that you should fix such an epithet upon me?"

"Take care that you don't justify it, that's all," she said, nodding with a look of wisdom. Then mother came in, and the conversation changed.

"Justify it," indeed! Of course I wasn't going to do that. When Mr. Heathcote called, I tried to be extremely cool and self-possessed. I must be on my guard against that happy outflow of spirits, that careless yielding to the impulse of the hour, which had made last night so pleasant. Yet I was glad to see him—glad and flattered. At one moment I behaved too coldly; that would never do—rudeness was inexcusable. In trying to avoid it, I passed, perhaps, the limit I had set myself.

Then, mother, I was sure, would notice anything peculiar; this embarrassed me yet more. I grew impatient for his departure; yet, when he was gone, felt grieved and angry with myself.

I could not go on thus; I had sense enough left to see that. If I had not sufficient self-command to treat him rationally, I must keep out of his way. The next time we met I gave the brightest answers to everything he said, and left his neighbourhood as quickly as I could. It was prudent, doubtless, but not pleasant. However, when the evening ended, I was able to praise my own discretion; and wish, with all my heart, that there was no occasion for it.

A day or two after we had a picnic down the lake. We went in boats—a merry party. Mr. Heathcote was very troublesome. Apparently he liked to be with me, and indulged the preference, knowing no reason why he should not. I was unable to avoid him without rudeness, and, perhaps, was not sorry that prudence, for once, must have the go-by. It was such a happy day; I enjoyed it all the more in that it was a stolen pleasure—a something that I must not have again. We spread our tablecloths upon the grass, and set forth the feast; encountered a hundred inconveniences, and made light of all. The meal was over, coffee was served. Mr. Heathcote handed me a fragrant cup, and seated himself at my side.

"Delightful, isn't it?" he said, glancing at the waving tree-tops and bright lake. "What a relish there is in this gipsy freedom, after being pent up for months in bricks and mortar!"

"You are rather Bohemian, I fear."

"Not at all. But there is a sort of 'vagrant' instinct that awakens in such scenes; an inheritance from the old days when the race dwelt in tents. Have you never felt it?"

"Never. I should not fancy tent-life in the least."

"Are you sure? Don't you feel the charm of that unfettered, wandering existence? To rise in the morning without the least idea where you shall rest at night; to go forth, impelled by nothing but your own will; to linger or depart from any spot, just as the humour prompts? How different from the hard recurrence of our conventional ways! Life would have no chance to grow stale amid this frequent change and absolute freedom."

Facts About the Alphabet.

You know the English alphabet has twenty-six letters. Do you know the number in other alphabets? The Sandwich Islanders' alphabet has twelve letters, Burmese eighteen, Italian twenty-three, Bengali twenty-one, Spanish twenty-seven, Arabic twenty-eight, Russian forty-one, and Sanscrit fifty. There is an A B C of disease too. In various countries, climate and conditions attack various organs. In the British Isles the organs most affected are the liver and digestive system: and the A B C of health lies in keeping these healthy. Authorities agree that the use of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans is the most certain means of doing this. Mrs. W. Davidson, of Dunhead Farm, Monikie (Dundee), says:—"Indigestion and biliousness made my life one long misery for years. Night after night I had to sit up in bed racked with pain. My head often seemed as though it would split, and the pains across my back, shoulders, and stomach, were almost unbearable. I held cold, damp cloths to my head to ease the pain, and I tried to bring up the bile from my stomach by making myself sick, but it was all to no purpose.

Sometimes I would be going about doing my work, milking the cows and doing other farm work, when suddenly a mist would rise before my eyes and almost blind me. So acute were the pains in my head that my eyes would get quite black underneath. I was also subject to dizziness, and often when I crossed the farmyard I would turn so giddy and faint with pain that I had to walk about almost doubled in two. No matter what I took I could get no relief. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans were recommended and I owe my life to them. A few doses gave me relief and you may be sure after that I gave them a good trial. They have cured me entirely, and ill health is now unknown to me." Such is one case out of thousands. Wherever Bile Beans are used, beneficial results follow. Indigestion, constipation, piles, biliousness, anæmia, rheumatism, all female ailments, dizziness, and headache cannot resist their powerful yet painless action. All chemists stock them at one and three-half-pence or two and nine per box. The large box is really the most economical.

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"I doubt your being so free," I said. "You would have to consult the welfare of the herds, and go where they had pasturage and water. Bondage at once! And there would be no easy chairs in the tents—and when dinner-time came, oh! what woeful wants you would experience!"

"Perhaps you are right—if we must come down to details."

"That is always my way of looking at things," I said. "I am matter-of-fact, entirely."

"Young ladies often tell us so," he replied; "but, of course, we never believe it. They do not expect that we should."

"Indeed! But I expect it, because it is so."

"Don't!" he said, with a little lazy smile. "A touch of romance is as native to youth and beauty as the bloom to fruit.

Well—this was surely a good time to declare myself. "To youth in some circumstances, perhaps," I answered; "not to me. I look at the world in the most prosaic fashion possible."

"Why so?" he asked. "Why do you insist on brushing off the charm so early?"

"Because I am poor. I can't afford it."

"You must be poor, indeed," he said, gravely, "if you cannot afford the feelings natural to your years."

This seemed like a rebuke, and vexed me. What right had he to take that tone?

"I don't say it is of set purpose," I replied. "People are different, you know. Romance is very pretty, but so are some realities. I believe in these last devoutly."

"I congratulate you on your prudence," he said, pointedly. After that I felt a difference in his manner. What had I spoken? Mere nonsense, such as any girl might utter. So I told myself; but I did not so mean it, nor did he so understand me.

Thenceforth I had no further trouble with him. It was hard. I don't think I could have kept on my way had he not aided me so well. Had he followed me about, persisting in attentions, I should have been obliged to yield, in spite of resolutions; but I was never tempted. I felt some twinges of conscience in adopting my plan of operations; I did believe in my heart that Mr. Lorimer was attracted by me, would be pained by my behaviour. I had a sense of guilt, of something like cruelty, in determining to set him aside and think of him no more. I might have spared myself all trouble on that score. His feelings were safe, out of my power to wound. He was attentive to the other girls, especially to Mary Orme. Me he let alone. This was what I had decreed; and surely such a result should have been gratifying; but it did not gratify me. I began to be really jealous of Mary Orme. I remembered what she had said about admiring Mr. Otis. "Oh, yes!" I thought, "she would call Caliban, with money, handsomer than Apollo without it! Mercenary creature!" Here conscience aroused, and made some unpalatable remarks. I had very little to say, she averred, about anybody being mercenary. Besides, was not Mary now vindicating herself from such aspersions? Did she not show far more interest in Mr. Heathcote than in his richer friend? This view of the case suited me no better. I was afraid I would rather have had him entrapped, for a time, by a heartless manœuvrer, than have believed her honestly in love with him.

What would I not have given to know his feelings! Mary was a pleasant girl; rather pretty, very clever; and men were so fickle! "Let him go," I said, "if he wants to go—if he can console himself so soon!"

If he could change with so much ease, it certainly did not become me to mope and pine; particularly as I had taken such pains to bring this very state of things about. And the world stood just where it did before; poverty was just as painful, affluence just as much to be desired, though I had lost sight, in some measure, of the truth. I set myself seriously to cultivating Mr. Otis. He was good looking, as Mary had said, and intelligent. Very well disposed, too, to be gallant, if one offered him a crumb of encouragement occasionally. Other girls could be interested in him; why should not I, and take the good of it? I tried faithfully. Oh, but it was weary work! He used to stand at my side, chatting and playing with my bouquet, and any looker-on supposed, no doubt, that we found each other exceedingly agreeable; and all the time I hardly knew a word that he was saying. My mind was busy with the one endless theme—does he like her—does she care for him—will it come to anything?

I grew pale and thinner with this constant worry. It was bad enough now. But what if we were parted utterly? I began to doubt the wisdom of my stern resolves. Poverty was not so dreadful, after all; there were worse things in the world. Mother was not an unhappy woman, in spite of her cares and her privations; and we might not be so very poor—there was always a hope of rising. Yet, take it at the very worst, could we not bear it together? At that I flushed, half with joy and half with shame.

I fell in love presently with a picture I had conjured from the future. A little house, but, ah, so exquisitely neat! Myself, going about brightening, arranging, beautifying everything—for him! Then nightfall, the curtains drawn, the lamp shining softly over books and work; his footstep at the door; the evening at his side, with all the world shut out! What could be more delicious than poverty like this?

But how to realise these charming visions? I had sent him from me, I could not go out of my way to seek him now. Yet might not look or manner convey some signal of relenting? Would he not hail the change with joy? Yes, surely. I went in good heart about my work of reconcilement.

Only disappointment awaited me. I saw with terror that my timid wiles were all unnoticed. He did not or would not understand.

I took long, restless rambles in those days, and came back wretched from them. One day we chanced to meet. He turned and kept on with me, talking rather fitfully. As happens in such cases, we touched on dangerous themes. One word followed another, till suddenly he stopped and stood in the path before me.

"Amy," he said, seizing my hands in his, "do you love me?" I trembled from head to foot. I could not speak. "For I love you," he said, "with my whole heart! I cannot go on as we have been going lately. You have understood me, I am sure, from the very first night we met. Did you not read my heart when you warned me from you?"

I could not answer in words. But I dreaded to drive him away again. I had long repented of my foolish warning. I stole a beseeching glance at him, as much as to say, "Spare me!"

"Forgive me, dear," he said. "I am ungenerous to accuse you. I have been to blame. Determined to appear indifferent, I have pretended to admire Mary Orme. Pride, and pique, and folly, had almost led me further—this chance meeting has saved me—I see now I can never love anyone but you."

"I am punished," I said, softly.

"We have both been punished," he answered, gently. "You could love me, darling—you do!"

He drew me to him, as he spoke, and I did not resist. I was ready to forgive and forget it all; for had I not been the more to blame? My head fell on his shoulder, and I burst into tears; but they were tears of happiness, nevertheless.

Before we parted, I had told him all. I could not be fully happy till I had made my confession and been forgiven. How I had thought I could give my hand without my heart; how I had been taught to fear poverty; and how, at last, I had found that I did not know myself.

"No, you are too noble," he said. "It is not poverty, however, darling, that I ask you to accept. If I am not as rich as Mr. Otis, I have, at least, a sufficiency."

I was doubly punished, I could not, after all, make the sacrifices for him I had planned; for the "sufficiency" proved to be a handsome fortune. Our marriage, which soon took place, removed me for ever from the old atmosphere of want and limitation. Luxury surrounded me. My husband's generosity even brightened the old home, and relieved my mother's declining years of many cares. All my early dreams were realised.

My husband has risen to fame and eminence. We have everything that earth can afford. I sometimes think I am too happy. Certainly I am more happy than I deserve.

E. B. Ripley.

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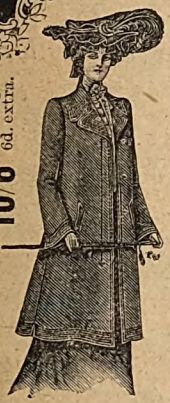

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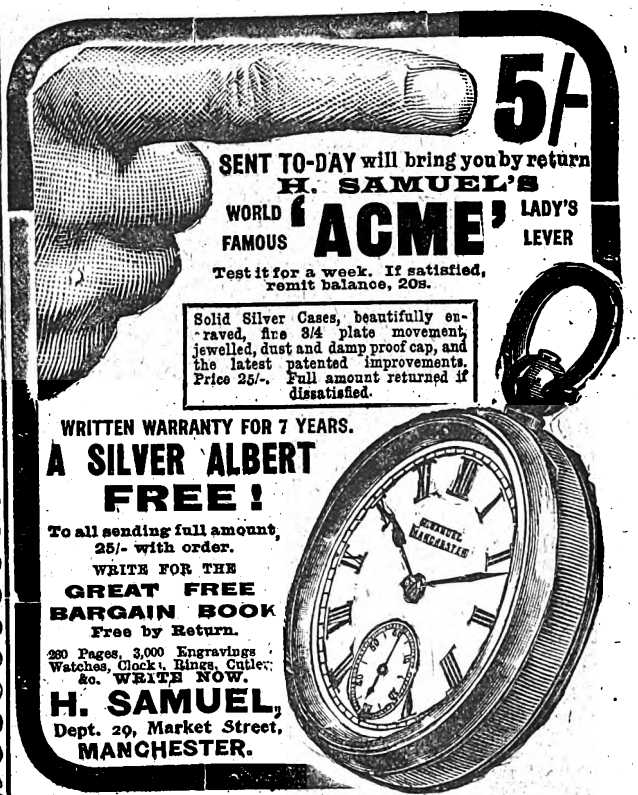

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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A PRETTY GIRL AND A PLAIN WOMAN.

Out on the screened verandah it was cool, quiet, and cosy. Easy chairs, rugs and sofa cushions suggested the comfort of indoors. Vines, flowers, a hammock and the freedom of open air proclaimed the advantage of outdoors.

Never had the Pretty Girl looked prettier than she did to-night, swinging gently to and fro in the hammock, her coquettish face half turned from the man who sat and watched her.

Everything was propitious for a proposal. There was moonlight and there was fragrance—such fragrance as the gods distil on dew-drenched nights to enchant a lover's soul and lure his lips to confession.

Yet Ernest Holmes failed to feel either intoxication or enchantment. He was only placidly conscious of the beauty and the allurement about her. He was aware that conditions were favourable if he wished to speak. The time, the place, the acquiescent sweetness of the Pretty Girl—all pointed that way. But in spite of the readiness of circumstances his heart maintained a fixed indifference, refusing by some stubborn law of its own to respond to the external drawing.

He was a spectator, not an actor. He had no part in this scene—could have none. Never had this fact impressed itself so forcibly upon him as now.

He found himself wondering vaguely why this should be—why it was that he had no impulse to say the thing that was expected of him—the thing which all events leading up to the present time would seem to warrant him in saying.

Why could he not feel anything deeper than admiration for this girl—this girl whose beauty had so appealed to him at first? Why could he not tell her he loved her?

How very lovely she was! A perfect figure of curves and daintiness and grace. How absolutely faultless her profile, touched by the moonlight. How luminously white her dress and the snowy carnations that nestled cool and sweet in the coils of her dark hair.

Yes, she was perfect. And yet—was he capable of no greater depth of emotion than this? Could this surface admiration, this regard for mere form, be the love of which his soul had dreamt?

Somewhere in his heart lay a hope, a dear imagining, of what real love should mean. This cherished ideal seemed to rise and face him now.

The hour wore away. Still he had not spoken the words that would bind his future to that of the Pretty Girl. It was with a sense of relief that he rose at last to go. He had preserved the dear ideal inviolate. It glowed before him brighter than before.

* * * * *

It was two months later that he met the Plain Woman.

She was not really plain, even of outward feature, but she lacked the curves, the tints, the perfection of the Pretty Girl. By contrast people spoke of her as plain. That was before they knew her, however.

After they had really come in contact with her vigorous sweetness, her wholesome charm, they recalled the former verdict and pronounced her beautiful beyond compare.

Even from the first, Ernest Holmes had a stimulating sense of her real loveliness. There was that in her individuality which appealed to the unsatisfied depths of his nature.

After he had once met her he wanted to meet her again and yet again. Like a sun-starved plant, his soul reached yearning tendrils towards the wondrous light of her glowing companionship.

He remembered the inadequate quality of that other friendship and smiled. Now he could understand. It was like the husk and the kernel contrasted.

This true and powerful attraction needed neither moonlight nor fragrance to lend it magic.

Common daylight became enchanted if he was in her presence. Her charm, her magnetism bewitched the most prosaic landscape. It was on a dim, drizzly day that he told the Plain Woman of his love. It is doubtful, however, if either he or she realised the unfavourable conditions of the elements.

In the heart of each were sunshine and skies of blue. In the soul of each was a song.

* * * * *

"I can't understand it!" said the Pretty Girl, when she heard of the engagement.

She stood staring into her mirror with wounded, incredulous eyes.

"I can't understand it!" she repeated.

She looked upon the beautiful reflection that faced her; the exquisite face, with its baby freshness, its perfect curves; the long lashed, lustrous eyes, the softly-rounded throat, the prettily-moulded arms.

"And he chose her—deliberately chose her—in preference to me. It's beyond belief."

But as she looked her mood changed. A new realisation dawned. She seemed to see herself as a mere image, an insignificant bit of flesh and blood.

A consciousness of her lack, of her insufficient soul-development, came over her all at once.

"I'm just like a stuffed doll— a dummy—a harmless, helpless, pretty piece of prettiness," she told herself.

Then she sighed and turned slowly from the mirror, still meditating.

"There's something else, after all," she mused. "Something besides beauty, and I never believed it until now."

A. M.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Should Girls Go to Sea?

"M. D." is twenty-one, and has a passionate desire to go abroad. She asks me if I would advise her to seek the position of stewardess on a liner, if stewardesses have "bad names," like actresses, and if it is difficult to secure a post as one.

* * * * *

Firstly, why has "M. D." such a violent desire to go abroad? In a man one can understand the desire to seek new fields for gaining wealth and experience, but unless a girl is an authoress, artist, or a serious professional of any kind, I cannot see why she must want to leave her own country, save, of course, for short periods. Further, "M. D." would not get the travel she seeks by becoming stewardess on a liner. She would only remain in port for a very few days, and a girl left alone in foreign seaports could scarcely do herself any good unless she has friends. Then the continuous tedium of work on board ship would jar on most women's nerves. I do not think stewardesses have "bad names" any more than actresses, as in both cases all depends on the person. Positions would largely be filled by those having influence and able to get introductions to principals of steamship lines. I advise "M. D." to give up this fantastic idea of getting employment on board ship and to knuckle down to home life.

Lena's Critics.

"Last summer I stayed for a week with some friends on a house-boat. While there, naturally, I made myself as agreeable as possible to the gentlemen. But whenever I was seen by my hostess and her lady friends talking to a man, I heard they were referring to me as a flirt. How, my dear Miss Morris, can a girl behave to the other sex without giving this unpleasant impression, and yet make herself agreeable?" This letter comes from "Lena," and is, I am sorry to say, not an unusual one for me to receive.

* * * *

If "Lena's" hostess is of the kind likely to make such malicious remarks, if I were "Lena" I should decline any further invitations from her. "Lena" should most certainly make herself as agreeable to men as she can, without passing the bounds of correct conduct. No man likes the stiff, prim miss, and a girl who can talk nicely will always be popular. You can afford to disregard such mischief-making people as you late hostess, "Lena," if you are confident that your own behaviour has been quite correct. There are always jealous people in the world, who seek to lay down the law for others, and it is as well to absolutely ignore them if a girl is to have any enjoyment in life.

Should He Take His Wife?

"Leonard" has been working at a business without success. He is married to a girl with a lot of relations, of whom she is very fond. He thinks he would do well at his business in the Colonies. If he continues his present work he is afraid he can never make a good living. Should I advise him to go abroad, though his wife would have to be parted from her people?

Every man ought to consider his wife before making such a change, and I am glad "Leonard" is doing so. Assuming him to be right in what he says about his business, I think he ought to take whatever steps are necessary for success in life. But it would be very unkind of him to take his wife out to the Colonies unless he has some definite prospects to go upon. If he is serious in this idea, why should he not go out first himself, leaving his wife to be looked after by her people? If prospects out there are good, and he sees chances of success, he might ask her to follow him after a certain time. If they are not good, then he should arrange to be able to return home and resume his old work without loss of connection. It is certain that if he is going out on speculation, he should not take his wife with him at first. A woman could not share with him the privations he might have to undergo.

How to Address the Unknown.

How should a man address a girl he does not know? "Jackie" is in love with a girl he has seen about, but sees no other means of getting to know her than by writing to arrange an appointment. Should he address her as "Madam," and sign himself "Yours respectfully," and how should he couch the wording of such a letter?

* * * *

I should think "Jackie" had better omit any such expression as "Madam" in writing to her. It sounds stiff and formal, and quite unsuited to such a letter. He should write without any word of address. And as for "yours respectfully" it sounds ridiculous. Better omit any such expression before the signature. Couching a letter such as this must depend on "Jackie's" literary style. If I were he I should say something like this—"I should very much like to meet you. I have long admired you. Would it be presumptuous to ask if my wish is returned? If so I shall be at—— at such and such a time." Formality would be out of place in a letter of this kind.

The Lorn Lover.

"Maisie" has been receiving attentions from a man for whom she does not care. He is a solitary individual, with few friends and very little knowledge of women. But the other day he told her she was the only woman he had ever loved, and asked her if she could return it. Now "Maisie" was very sorry for him, and not wishing to give him a pang, allowed him to think she really did care for him, whereas she really has no serious feeling at all. Was she wrong in doing this, and how can she best extricate herself from the position without driving the man to despair?

* * * *

"Maisie" would have been better advised had she told him at the very outset that she could not care for him. It might have been a blow, but one that would have been more easily recovered from than the present one. I think she had better now make a clean breast of her state of mind, telling him just how far she likes him. There is no reason why she should not continue his friendship. It should not be necessary to give him the pang of parting, as there should be no obstacle to friendship.

A Case for Kindness.

"E. F. C." used to know a man, and at one time there had been some intimacy between them. But for a long time they had seen nothing of each other. The other day she heard that he was lying seriously ill in hospital. Would it be wise for her to visit him?

* * * *

She should write to him expressing her sympathy, and say that if he would like to see her she would be very glad to visit him. One cannot be too kind to those who are suffering, and "wise" or not, it would be a gracious action which could do "E. F. C." no harm.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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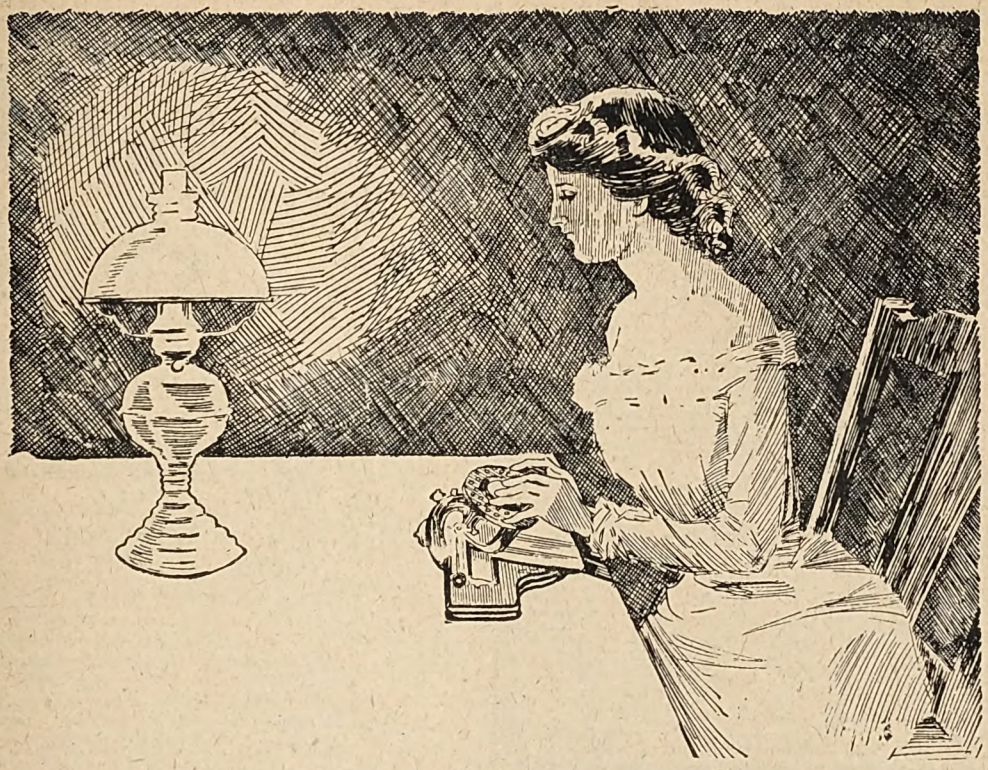

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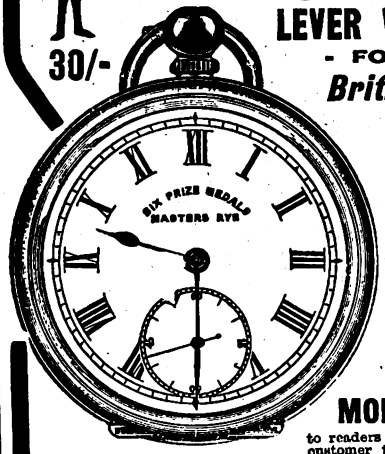

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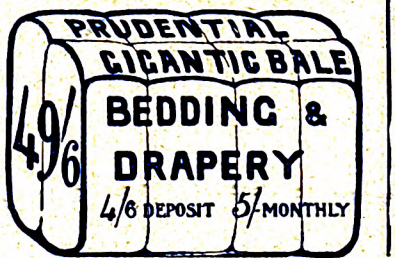

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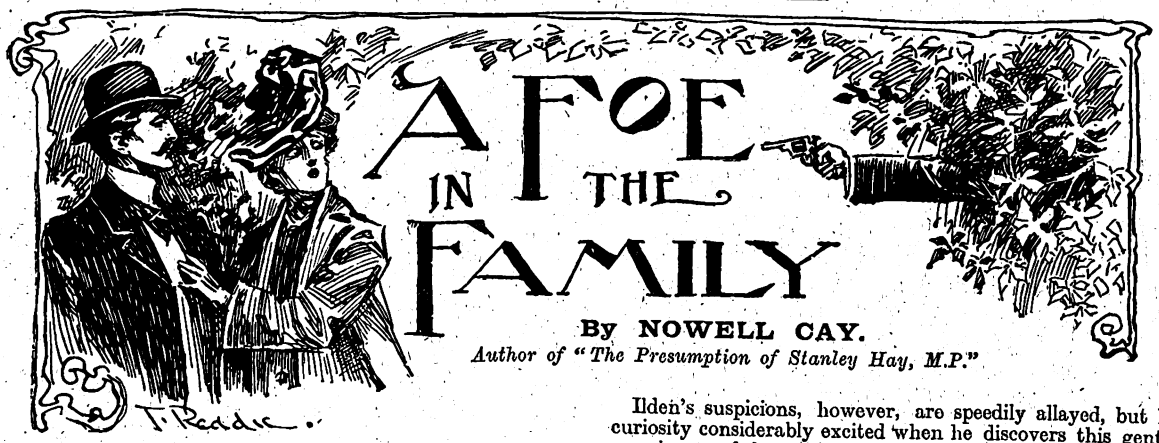

Five Abortive Attempts on a Peer's Life.

While returning one evening to Pennybrook Hall, the residence of his uncle Jasper, Lord Ilden discovers a young girl in great distress at having lost two five pound notes, the whole of her wages for six months as a country governess. Together they search for the missing money; but as it is getting dusk, and Lord Ilden wants to get rid of his pretty companion, who turns out to be the sister of one of his old college chums, he manages to substitute two of his own notes and return them to her. She goes away overflowing with gratitude.

When she disappeared, however, Lord Ilden continued the search. He failed to find the money, but instead discovered an envelope addressed to himself, the contents of which he had never seen. The envelope, addressed in a girl's handwriting, is postmarked "Lallerton." Pocketing his find, Lord Ilden is lighting a cigarette, when the report of a rifle suddenly breaks the stillness of the evening, and a bullet whizzes just past him and buries itself in a tree behind.

"That," mutters Lord Ilden, "is the third attempt which has been made on my life during my stay at Pennybrook Hall."

On his return to his uncle's, he tells his cousin, Catherine Hay, of his adventure, and, feeling assured that the attempts are being made by some member of the family, many of whom would profit considerably by his death, proposes marriage to her as a means of reducing the value of his own death to his enemies. Cathie, however, refuses.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden has discovered that it is his cousin Percival who opened the post-bag and extracted the letter addressed to himself, the envelope of which he found in the coppice.

That same evening Lord Ilden's valet discovers a large quantity of poison in his master's flask. This makes the fourth attempt.

Upon receiving the news, Lord Ilden considers it wisest to leave Pennybrook Hall at once. He is driving to the station with Cathie when they overtake a man who appears to take a great interest in them. Ilden's suspicions are instantly aroused, especially so as the man takes a short cut across the fields, and is waiting at the station when they arrive.

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Ilden's suspicions, however, are speedily allayed, but his curiosity considerably excited when he discovers this gentleman in one of the carriages in the train he is about to enter, in animated conversation with Florence Courthorpe, the lady of the bank notes. At Witterly station Florence is met by Mrs. Morgan Wright, her new employer. Lord Ilden alights at the next station and wanders along the main road, looking for a quiet inn where he could stay for a time. All unconsciously he walks back towards Witterly and settles down at the "Black Bull," exactly opposite Florence's new home. Florence, however, sees him, and that same night, after all in the house had gone to bed, sits at her window gazing abstractedly across the street. Suddenly a man in a slouch hat is silhouetted against Ilden's bedroom window. He carries a revolver—his purpose being easily discernible. Fortunately Ilden is not in his room, and, taking advantage of the few minutes' grace thus allowed, Florence slips on a dressing gown, quietly leaves her room and the house, and runs across to the "Black Bull" to give the alarm. But the would-be murderer has escaped. Florence then returns to her house, only, however, to meet her scandalised employer on the stairs.

Thus a fifth attempt has been made on Lord Ilden's life.

(*The above is a short summary of the opening chapters.*)

Cast Adrift for Ilden's Sake.

Lord Ilden was becoming serious. The unmistakable plot against his life showed itself as more and more formidable. He had complacently imagined that a trifling artifice would put him out of the power of pursuit, and allow him to live in perfect security so long as he was willing to remain in exile. His only uneasiness had been that by remaining in exile he lessened his chances of discovering his opponent, and he had taken precautions to avoid being followed half-heartedly, as something not really called for. And now his precautions had shown themselves not only called for but insufficient. The speed with which he had been followed and his life threatened robbed him of a certain contempt he had felt for the cunning pitted against his own, and it changed the position very considerably. He had imagined the struggle one from which he could retire whenever he pleased, so long as he remained hidden and passive, but it had become a struggle from

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which he could not know a moment's escape until it ended one way or the other.

To-night it forbade him to sleep. He had examined his bedroom and its approaches critically. The windows had no fastenings, while a sloping roof beneath it made access as easy as the least athletic of would-be assassins could desire. Ilden decided that it would be the height of imprudence to close his eyes in such a place after his warning, and intolerant as he felt of the necessity he sat up all night by the window on the watch.

He could not remain at Witterby. That was apparent. Apart from the sense of insecurity at night, he would not be able to take a single stroll without expecting a bullet from behind the hedge. And when he changed his whereabouts he would no longer feel secure. He must think out some new plan, and he gave the night to planning.

Not that any brilliant plan suggested itself. It was true that he could, if he chose, enlist the aid of the police, but the idea did not appeal to him. He had no great faith in their ability to protect him or to discover his enemy. The long list of political assassinations tended to show how little their protection was worth, and their investigations would almost inevitably mean publicity, a thing he was determined to avoid at all costs. The deeply-rooted impression that his danger was due, directly or indirectly, to some member of his father's family, had made him from the first determined to keep the whole matter so far as possible in his own hands. Without having a very high regard for any of the individuals who shared his name, he had a very tender regard for the name itself, and he had no mind to see it in the papers in connection with a disgraceful plot.

The welcome arrival of dawn found him with no practical resolve except that of leaving Witterby at the earliest possible moment. But with morning the possibility of evading pursuit had assumed a more cheerful aspect. It was true that he had been traced once, but he had given the pursuer too many opportunities. In sending for his bag to the next station he had completed the clue for anyone who might have seen him leave the train there. In future he would remember that he had a person of some little astuteness to cope with.

At the first sound of anybody stirring below he ran down, glad to think that a new day had begun, and breakfasted in good time to catch the first train that left for Rickerby.

The landlord of the Black Bull drove him down in person, and by calling him "my lord" with every word showed that Florence's question of the previous night had not been lost upon him. He was so concerned for "his lordship's" safety, and so curious about the danger which threatened him that Ilden was glad to get rid of him.

It was barely seven yet and the train was not due till a quarter past, and the young man was irked by the waiting.

He was alone on the platform, and in spite of his steady nerves, a sense of the danger surrounding him insisted on holding his mind. He felt nervous of the empty waiting-rooms, in any one of which an assassin might be waiting revolver in hand, and he turned back to the booking-office where he could scarcely be taken unawares. He found himself watching the doorway with an intensity which annoyed him, although he could not control it, as footsteps approached from the road. They belonged to the porter who had given him Mrs. Morgan Wright's name and address, coming to begin his day's work. Then a vehicle stopped, and Ilden's eyes turned once more to the doorway. A groom was bringing in luggage, and he turned to the ticket office which had just opened. He booked to Ilden Market as a precaution against inquiries that might be made there later.

Then as he turned to watch the doorway again, his face filled with a surprise in which was something both of pleasure and dismay. For following her luggage which the doctor's groom had deposited unceremoniously on the floor, was its owner, Florence Courthorpe.

She had already seen him, and made some effort to control the rush of emotion which had brought all the blood involuntarily to her cheeks.

She managed to smile almost with composure as he hastened forward with outstretched hand.

"This is a pleasure I did not anticipate," he said. "But you are not leaving Witterby? You only came yesterday."

Her face crimsoned again at the question.

"Yes, my engagement at Minerva House has ceased," she said with attempted indifference. "Mrs. Wright has discovered that I shall not make a suitable governess for her children."

Ilden's face grew anxious and disturbed.

"Not on account of what happened last night, I hope?"

Florence hesitated.

"I am sure that Mrs. Wright was prejudiced against me before that."

"But the affair of last night led to your dismissal?" he insisted.

The girl nodded.

"But you must really not blame yourself," she added quickly, as she saw how disturbed he was. "I am sure that I should not have been happy there."

"Tell me what happened," he said, ignoring the palliative, and the sternness of his tone frightened her a little, even while it thrilled her with a sense of sympathetic championship. She no longer tried to evade his questioning.

"She met me as I returned and would not believe me when I told her what had happened. She spoke very cruelly, and insisted that I should leave the house the first thing in the morning. I never guessed that you would be leaving by the same train." For her it had been another of the wonderful coincidences.

"But this is intolerable," he interrupted hotly. "To be insulted like this for performing a simple act of humanity! Why did you not let me know? I will come back with you to the house at once and insist on this woman offering you an apology and reinstating you."

The girl's expressive face showed how disturbed she was by the suggestion.

"It would only make it worse," she cried quickly. "She would believe nothing that you said, and I could never go back there after the way in which she has spoken."

Her distressed earnestness impressed him.

"I can quite understand *that*," he said gravely. "I should not like to think of your going back. Such women are best avoided; but I shall write to this Dr. Wright and give him a proper sense of his wife's injustice. I wish that I had known—I should not have left you last night to give your explanation alone. But where are you going now?"

A sudden sense of responsibility weighed upon him, as something burdensome but not by any possibility to be avoided after what had happened. He must interest himself in Miss Courthorpe's future—no longer as a voluntary acknowledgment of his regard for her brother, but as a duty demanded by simple justice.

Intuitively, no doubt, she read something of what was passing in his mind, and answered with forced cheerfulness.

"For the present I am going to stay with a friend—an old schoolfellow, at Lallerton, near Shipton Gate. You know the village?"

His surprise at the coincidence had shown itself involuntarily in his face.

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"I have never been there," he said; "but the neglect is soon to be remedied. For, strangely enough, it is my destination this morning. We shall fortunately be able to travel together."

Politeness demanded the speech, but Ilden was inclined to doubt whether the circumstance *was* fortunate. It was always more easy to trace two than one, and the fact emphasised itself when he took a ticket for her to Shipton Gate.

But the claims of courtesy were paramount with him, and his manner gave her no hint that the coincidence was anything but pleasing. Florence's pleasure was undiluted, and could not hide itself.

The thought of his mysterious danger, never actually out of her mind, only made the meeting more providential. She had been conscious of a vague yearning to watch over him and avert danger, as she had averted it on the previous night; and an emotion of tender, womanly protectiveness was satisfied for the present, when she knew that on the journey at least she would be with him. Her attention was already on the alert, as they walked out on the quiet platform together.

The train was just coming in, and there was little opportunity of speaking until they were seated in it together.

Florence drew a breath of relief.

"We are sure, at least, that nobody has followed you from here," she said, as the train started again without taking up any other passengers than themselves.

The words sounded like an echo of his own thoughts and surprised him. He had not expected her to understand his anxiety so intimately.

"No, but they may be in the train already," he said.

"That is what I feared. He might guess that you would leave by the first train and enter it at the station before this. But I think I noticed everybody as the train came in, and I certainly saw nobody wearing a slouch hat. It is certainly the only thing I noticed about the man last night."

Ilden became less conscious of the disadvantage of having a companion. It was pleasant to be able to compare notes and plans with her. She might indeed be of service to him if she seconded his vigilance in this manner. He pleased her by saying so.

"If I could only help you," she said, her eyes glowing, "but I know so little about you. Have you no idea who it is that is trying to kill you? Can anybody have any motive for wishing you dead?"

It was the question which Catherine Hay had asked him, but Ilden had no thought of answering it so explicitly this time.

"I am quite in the dark," he said; "that is what handicaps me. But before we talk about my enemy, I want you to tell me about yourself. Have you no relatives living?"

"None at all. My father and mother were both only children, and my father's death left me absolutely alone in the world."

"But you had friends?"

"Practically only one—the friend to whom I am going to-day. We lived a very secluded life after my brother's death and adversity showed me that those I had counted friends were only acquaintances. But Miss Despard, my friend at Lallerton, is a very true one. We were at school together, and I stayed with her after my father's death. She would have had me stay with her altogether. But I could not do that. She is not rich. She and her brother share a small annuity and live together in an idyllic little cottage. I travelled part of the way to Witterby with Mr. Despard yesterday."

"The gentleman who got in at Pennybrook with you?" asked Ilden, and smiled at a past suspicion when she answered in the affirmative.

"And you will remain with your friend until you obtain another post as governess?" he asked, and her face fell a little. But she answered with assumed brightness:

"I shall probably have to exert my talents in some new direction; Mrs. Wright will not recommend me as a governess, and she is writing to Mrs. Haydon."

Ilden nodded rather gravely. He was thinking that even the Marchioness would prefer the written testimonials of her former patrons to his personal recommendation.

But he had learnt all that he wanted to know before writing to her and enlisting her sympathy on the girl's behalf, and he returned to his own affairs.

"You say that you have stayed at Lallerton," he remarked. "Have

"They have all gone away, and Mr. Despard told me nothing," cried Florence in dismay.

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you met anybody there who knew or was interested in me in any way?"

Florence shook her head.

"No. Have you friends there?"

"That is what I am going to try and ascertain," said Ilden with his characteristic smile, and drew out an envelope.

"I suppose you do not happen to recognise this handwriting?"

Florence examined it carefully and looked up with surprise in her eyes.

"Why, it is Miss Despard's! Then you know her?"

Ilden was as surprised as she, although his face did not show it so clearly.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked sceptically.

"I only know that it is exactly like her writing. Was it she who wrote it?"

"That is what I have to find out. Do you know of any reason why your friend should write to me? Has she ever mentioned my name to you?"

"Never."

"Then I think that the similarity of the handwriting is probably a coincidence," said Ilden, "but you make me curious to see your friend, if I may, when we reach Lallerton."

The train was slackening speed at Rickerby as he spoke, and all their attention became engaged again in the attempt to detect any sign of pursuit.

There was nothing, however, to rouse their suspicion. Of the few other passengers in the early train only two left it at the junction beside themselves, an old countrywoman obviously beyond suspicion, and a workman who left the station at once without displaying the least interest in them.

As they changed over to the other train, the scene brought back a remembrance of the previous day, and it gave direction to his questioning when they had resumed their journey again.

"Your friend, Mr. Despard, was on his way home to Lallerton, I suppose, when I saw him travelling with you yesterday?"

Florence nodded.

"And had he been to Pennybrook to see *you?*" he asked, and her violet eyes lifted themselves in quick surprise.

"To see me? Oh, no. I was very much surprised to see him at Pennybrook station. And I was very pleased, too, because I was wanting to know whether anything had happened to Daisy. For more than two months she has not answered my letters. If it had not been for my meeting with her brother, I should have been feeling a little nervous to-day, wondering whether my friend had left home or become estranged from me in some way. Mr. Despard put my mind quite at rest. It is only that his sister is absorbed in a new picture she is painting. I am sure that she will be glad to see me."

Her voice had a touch of anxiety, despite the words.

"And suppose that she could not for any reason give you a home?" asked Ilden, impelled to anticipate the fullest possibility of his responsibility. He regretted the question when he saw the shadow of hopelessness that crossed her face.

But she forced it back with a smile. Somehow it seemed easy to be brave this morning.

"I really do not know," she said with a nervous little laugh, and Ilden's face grew graver as he changed the subject.

"And you do not know what took Mr. Despard to Pennybrook? I ask," he added, noticing the incipient surprise on her expressive face, "because I had an idea, when I saw him, that he might have gone on my account. I have to suspect everybody." And he told what had passed on his way to Pennybrook station.

"Oh! that is just like him," she said. "He is the most absent-minded of men, and is always falling into fits of abstraction in which he forgets everything. He had no doubt forgotten that he had a train to catch until the passing of your wagonette reminded him of the fact. I found him very abstracted myself, and I did not like to ask him what had brought him to Pennybrook when he did not volunteer the information. He is a very curious and melancholy sort of a man, as different as one could imagine from his sister, but they are very deeply attached to one another. In fact I almost think that it would break Guy Despard's heart if Daisy married and left him. He is even jealous of her affection for *me*."

"That is unfortunate, since you say she is your only friend," said Ilden. "And is Miss Despard equally opposed to the idea of her brother marrying?"

Her quick glance made him colour slightly with the feeling that he had been detected in an unjustifiable inquisitiveness. He was conscious that he had been wondering what the chances were of this Guy Despard solving his companion's difficulties by making her his wife. The idea did not please him. He had taken a prejudice against the tall, lean man, with his hooked features and moody eyes, and little as he had welcomed the responsibility thrown on his shoulders, he did not wish to find his help made quite unnecessary by another man.

Her answer did not reassure him.

"Oh, no! Daisy is quite different," she said. "There is no jealousy in her affection. But I do not think Mr. Despard will ever marry. He is over thirty now, and he is a very curious man. But you will probably see him for yourself within the hour. For here we are at Shipton Gate."

They left the little station apparently as free from any sign of pursuit as ever, driving in an old-fashioned fly that carried Ilden's bag as well as Florence's luggage. This time the Gladstone should not serve as a clue to any possible pursuer. The fly should leave it at the hotel where he would put up after seeing Miss Courthorpe to her destination and interviewing her friend.

The chance that Miss Despard would turn out to be his unknown correspondent seemed to him unlikely. His companion must have been misled by a resemblance in the handwriting. Such remarkable coincidences only occur in stories. But still it was strange that the postmark of the mysterious envelope had shown it to come from Lallerton. Possibly it *had* been written by Miss Despard, but had contained a letter only on some trivial matter. She was an artist. Perhaps she wanted permission to paint Ilden Castle. He smiled at the importance his fancy had given the communication, and was glad to remember that he had at least a slight justification. The lost letter was evidently one which somebody had thought it worth while to intercept.

The thoughts kept him silent as the rattling fly took them down a steep, winding road into the pretty valley of Lallerton.

Florence, too, was silent. Now that her anxiety on her companion's behalf was put to rest for the time being by the fact that nobody had left the train beside themselves at Shipton Gate, she had time to let her mind dwell on her own position.

If her one friend failed her, it seemed to her tragically hopeless, and the dependence she was placing on Daisy Despard's help filled her with a feverish anxiety for the meeting which would assure her that she was not counting on it in vain. She had no reason for doubting it.

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In spite of her friend's silence, Guy Despard had assured her that his sister's feelings for her remained unchanged—and yet—when so much depended upon it, she could not dismiss her uneasy fears.

Her impatience increased as the fly, rolling across a picturesque stone bridge over a babbling stream, entered the approaches of Lallerton village. They were passing the forge now, musical with the fight between glowing iron and human muscle.

In the distance the square tower of a church showed itself above the trees, and the next turn brought them in sight of the village green, a picture of lazy peace in the morning sunlight.

"Chez-nous," as the Despards had called their pretty, rose-covered cottage, lay at the other side behind a thick-grown privet hedge which shut it out from the road.

Florence's impatience increased visibly as they approached the wooden gate, and Ilden was very conscious that some at least of the puzzling questions in her mind were likely to be answered within the next few minutes. Before he could assist her, Florence had alighted while the fly was still moving.

"I will see whether Daisy is at home," she said, her voice trembling a little, and it was not until a minute or two had passed that he decided to go down and follow her.

As he swung open the gate the first sight of the cottage with its shuttered windows told him that the place was deserted. He was prepared to find Florence with a face full of hopeless dismay pulling in a vain hope at the bell, which only sounded a hollow answer from an evidently empty house.

He was afraid that she was about to burst into tears as she turned to him with the dismaying truth.

"They have gone away, and Mr. Despard told me nothing."

A Message in the Pathway.

"What can I do?" cried Florence Courthorpe, her lips trembling, as they stood together in the porch of the deserted cottage; and the complete dependence upon him which showed itself unconsciously in her appeal, made Ilden realise that his responsibility had assumed a new shape.

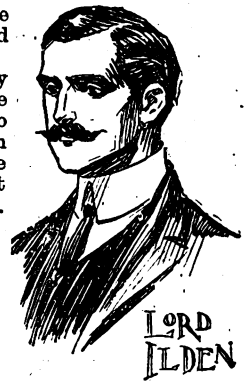
But the thought was not unwelcome. The expectation of a few minutes earlier, that he was about to hand his charge over to the care of this Despard and his sister, and resign his claim to any immediate interest in her welfare, had pleased him so little that he was conscious of some relief even when he found that, for a little while longer at least, Florence was left entirely to his care.

The charge had shown itself, so far, much less burdensome, and much more agreeable, than he had anticipated. He had found Miss Courthorpe very different in her complete absence of self-consciousness from the women to whom he was accustomed, and of whom he had always been a little afraid.

And it had been pleasant to find an ally in his plans who understood and sympathised so completely with his efforts to escape the pursuit of his unknown enemy. It had been as easy and natural to confide in her as in Catherine Hay; and, much as he liked his cousin, he was conscious of an additional attraction in the new ally. Her beauty charmed him. It had been a pleasure to watch the subtle changes that passed over her delicate face as she talked. It was a pleasure to watch it now, although she was almost in tears. The tiny, trembling lip filled him with a vague tenderness, which he did not try to analyse, but which made him welcome the chance that had placed her in his charge.

The picture of her, as she had appeared to him in the inn, with flowing hair, and little, slippered feet beneath her dressing-gown, recurred to him, as it had done a hundred times in the night. She had looked so child-like in her fear that he had felt an impulse to take her up in his arms and soothe her with a kiss, as he would have soothed a child.

He was conscious of the same impulse now, but he only smiled cheerfully.



"What can we do? Well, for my part I am very hungry, so the first thing is to get something to eat if we can manage it at the inn across the green. After which we can make inquiries and find out where your friends have gone. They must surely have decided to move very quickly if Mr. Despard told you nothing about it yesterday."

"That is what makes it so strange," she said anxiously. "They must have left Lallerton when I saw Mr. Despard. See, there are cobwebs across the door already. He does not wish me to know where Daisy is, and she is the only friend I have in the world. What shall I do if I cannot find her?"

"I have no doubt that we shall find out very easily where she has gone when we begin to make inquiries," said Ilden cheerfully, "and you must not speak of her as your only friend. I should like you to look upon me as one."

She looked up gratefully with the tears in her eyes.

"You are very kind. I do not know what I should have done if you had not been here to advise me."

Then a smile burst like sunlight through the cloud on her face.

"I suppose I should have sat down on the step to have a good cry," she added.

"Whereas you simply realise that you are my guest instead of Mr. Despard's. Wipe your eyes and drive on to the inn to lunch with me while we consider the next step. We can evidently learn nothing more from these shuttered windows."

"But my luggage?" she said dubiously, as they turned back to the waiting fly.

"Oh, that can come to the inn too, until we decide what the next step is to be."

She did not answer, but her pretty brows remained dubious and anxious.

"I do not know what I ought to do?" she said after a long pause. "I cannot think."

"Then you must let me think for you," he said cheerfully, although his own thoughts were serious enough.

In his heart he had very little hope of her finding a home with the Despards. The fact that the brother had given her no hint of his sister's departure from Lallerton was significant, as was also his sister's previous silence. Despard had seemed a little mad to him. If, as Florence suggested, his madness took the form of jealousy of his sister's friends, he had probably managed to force or persuade her to abandon her friendship with the governess. In either case, his charge could scarcely hope to find a home with them, even when their address was discovered.

And putting aside the thought of Florence joining her friends, her position was indeed a gloomy one. She was a governess without references, the latter disadvantage due in a great measure to himself. And the worst of it was that any help he gave her only threatened to increase the prejudice against her which her late employer had conceived. Mrs. Wright's attitude had enabled him to realise very clearly how much more necessary circumspection is on the part of a governess—than, say, of a hereditary baron.

He was already feeling doubtful of the success of his meditated appeal to his aunt. Yesterday he had felt more than hopeful. The Marchioness' interest could be depended upon for the sister of a dead friend of his who had fallen upon evil days, with whom personally he was practically unacquainted, a young lady who had accepted bravely

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the drudgery of governess-work, and could produce credentials from her employer. It was just the "case" which would have appealed to the good lady and set her exerting herself until she had obtained for Miss Courthorpe some comfortable post, either as companion to one of her aristocratic friends, or secretary to one of the many charitable institutions in which the Marchioness was interested.

But it was quite different now, when, instead of the credentials, her nephew could only offer her an explanation proving that he was responsible for their loss. His aunt was scarcely the woman to accept it in a right spirit. To suspect him of any personal interest in his protegée would be to prejudice her at once, and the more Ilden thought of her the more hopeless he felt of enlisting the help that would have been so valuable.

It seemed preposterous that he could not help the girl himself, when he had both the will and the means. Why could he not out of his wealth offer her an allowance sufficient at least to keep her out of want until she found something to do?

The thing was not to be thought of, of course. In the first place, he knew that she would never accept it, and he racked his brains trying to find some possible way of escape for her from her difficulties.

And yet he was scarcely conscious of disappointment when inquiries at the inn made the chance of their tracing the Despards appear more remote than ever.

It appeared that their departure had been raised by village gossip to the dignity of a mystery. Mr. Despard had not been seen in Lallerton for some time, although nobody knew precisely when he had left home.

His sister, however, had been gone only four days, taking her maid with her, but nobody had known that they were leaving the cottage for good, until on the following day a van came from Marnham Market to remove the furniture.

"We thought then that we should know where they had gone to," said the landlady, who was gossiping as she laid the cloth in a dismal little sitting-room for their lunch; "but it remained just as great a secret as ever. The furniture has only been taken to Marnham to warehouse."

Her tone suggested that she felt personally injured by her inability to satisfy curiosity.

"And I suppose you have no idea why they left Lallerton?" asked Ilden, half expecting to hear a tale of unpaid bills.

The woman hesitated.

"Perhaps you are friends of Miss Despard?"

"She is a great friend of mine," said Florence quickly.

"Then I am sure I hope that it is not true, ma'am. But they do say in the village that the young lady got into trouble with some gentleman who was staying at Castledale, just over the hill, in the summer."

Florence flushed and turned pale.

"No, I do not think that can be true," she said.

"No," remarked Ilden, "stories like that are so easily invented when there is a little mystery to explain."

"Had the Despards no friends here who would be likely to know what has become of them?" he asked when the landlady had left them alone to their meal. Florence had grown silent and preoccupied, and a deep concern for her growing anxiety and hopelessness struggled in his mind with this new enjoyment of his responsibility.

To have a beautiful woman so entirely dependent upon his aid, so exclusively delivered over to his charge. For him it made quite a novel and pleasing romance, and he had to remind himself that for her it was almost a tragic one.

She shook her head.

"No, they lived a most secluded life. Daisy, I think, has always felt it to be dull, but she is ruled by her brother in everything, and he has never made friends. I shall never know where they have gone. And if I discovered——"

"Oh, I think they must have left some trace," he interrupted with affected sanguineness. "I propose making a voyage of investigation round the village. Perhaps you would like to stay here and rest."

He wanted to be alone to think out the problem quietly without the distraction of her presence, as she guessed intuitively. The anxiety in her face deepened.

"Do you think that you will be safe?"

"Safe?" he repeated.

The thought of his own mysterious danger had almost been forgotten in the concentration of his mind on a new problem, and her unforgetfulness touched him when she reminded him.

"You may have been traced here already. I feel afraid as soon as you are out of my sight. But——"

She did not finish the sentence. She was thinking that the time must come very quickly when it would no longer be possible for her to keep him in her sight, or feel that she was helping in some small way to guard him from danger.

He answered almost indifferently. Once more the plot against his life had become an unreal thing, which it was difficult for him to realise or take account of.

Florence, however, could not forget the sinister scene of the previous night so easily, and her beautiful face was full of a repressed fear and anxiety as she watched him leave the inn in the direction of the village

She was evidently trying to attract his attention to some object in the path. A moment later and she had completely disappeared.

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street. Standing where he could not see her if he looked back she watched him with apprehensive eyes until he was out of sight.

Then she turned back to the dismal little sitting-room to try and forget his danger and concentrate her mind on her own hopeless plans. She would have to leave Lallerton, of course; but her heart filled with a double bitterness at the thought. For away from Lallerton the world seemed very cold and friendless, and she would never know what happened to the man she would leave there until it was too late. Her eyes filled with tears, but it was not at the thought of her own uncertain future.

Meanwhile, Ilden was pursuing his investigations without much hope of result. They served to give an object to his wanderings while his mind busied itself over the problem of Florence Courthorpe's future.

An interview with the Rector of the parish served to show him that the rumoured reason for Miss Despard's departure was a generally accepted one. As for her destination, the Rector could hazard no surmise. He seemed a little indignant at being consulted on the subject when the Despards had never been members of his flock. But Ilden gained from him two facts that might be useful. The cottage which they had vacated was the property of the squire of the parish, whose residence, Lallerton Hall, was at the other end of the village. He was as likely as anybody to know what the Despards' movements were. The other piece of information was that, although Miss Despard had taken one of her servants, an elderly woman, with her, she had left another behind her, a young girl who was living now with her parents in the village.

Ilden copied the name and address down in his pocket-book and took his leave. He had two places already to visit, and took the servant's cottage first as being the nearer.

The girl herself, Clara Wimple, was not at home. She had gone on an errand to Shipton Gate, but was expected back shortly. A garrulous mother made it apparent to him, however, that he was not likely to gain anything by waiting to interview her. The girl, it seemed, had left Miss Despard's service nearly a month before the latter left "Chez-Nous." The departure had been as much a surprise to her as to anybody else.

Nor at the Hall was Ilden any more successful.

On the day that the furniture was removed from "Chez-Nous," the squire had received an intimation from Mr. Despard that he was leaving Lallerton, and a cheque in lieu of notice. Reference to his papers showed that the letter had been posted at Marnham Market, where Despard had also given orders for the warehousing of his furniture.

Ilden turned back to the inn with his impression confirmed that his charge could find no home with her former friend. And the question of what to do with her became more than ever pressing. The day was advancing, and the longer she remained in his personal care the greater would be the need of explanation, when he enlisted the interest of his aunt or some other lady friend on her behalf.

The thought of doing so was still unpalatable. It had seemed outrageous to him at the first that Gerald Courthorpe's sister should be suing for a situation like a nursery-maid, and all that he had seen of her had served only to make him tolerate the position less.

He was approaching the village again along the high road that led from the Hall, when his attention was attracted by the sight of a young woman leaning over the high wall of roughly-piled stones which divided the road from the fields. She was a hundred yards or so in advance of him, and it seemed to Ilden that she was trying to attract his attention.

He hastened his steps, so forgetful of the shadow hanging over his life that he never thought of caution.

The girl seemed to be pointing now to something on the path. Ilden hastened more than ever, his curiosity fully aroused, but before he could reach the spot where he had seen her, the young woman had disappeared, and he looked up at the tall wall wonderingly. Then his eyes turned to the path where she seemed to point, and his wonder increased. For lying on the gravel was an envelope with a name written upon it.

When he found that the name was his own, wonder turned to something akin to consternation. He had been scrupulously careful since leaving Witterby not to give his name to anybody, although both the rector and the squire had asked it. To see the words "Lord Ilden" staring at him from the paper here in a place where he thought himself so completely unknown, filled him for a moment with a thrill of almost superstitious fear.

He thrust the paper into his pocket before even stopping to see what was written inside, to clamber up the wall. But no sign of the woman was to be seen. It was easy enough for her to have hidden where the fields were so hilly and so thickly intercepted with hedges, but the loss of all trace of her added to his feeling of strangeness. It seemed almost as though some supernatural agency were at work to prevent him hiding his identity for a day, and he remained for full five minutes staring in vain from the top of the wall before getting down to read the message so mysteriously delivered.

Only One Way to End the Plot.

"Lord Ilden, if you value your life, you will keep clear of Lallerton."

Ilden stood and stared at the badly-written and ill-spelt words, which appeared to have been hastily scribbled in pencil on the sheet of paper which he had found thrown in his path.

Who could have sent him the warning? He gave up the attempt to form a conjecture in sheer hopelessness. He had no starting point—no loose end of a clue by which he might even begin to unravel the mystery surrounding him. The intrigue against him surrounded him on every side. Here, in this quiet village, where he had imagined himself quite unknown—where he certainly knew nobody—it seemed that his life was just as much in danger as it had been at Pennybrook.

A feeling almost of despair seized him. The fight was too unequal when he was forced to walk in darkness, and his enemies seemed to know everything that he did.

It appeared from the scribbled warning that he had a friend; but of what use was a friend who remained as unknown as the enemy against whom she warned him.

The thought occurred to him that he might try to find the girl who had thrown the note; but she had shown plainly enough that she was anxious to avoid him, and, while he was searching in the dark, the enemy was awaiting his opportunity with eyes open.

He took out the envelope he had found in the coppice at Pennybrook, and compared the writing on it with that of his strangely-delivered warning; but a glance was sufficient to tell him that the writing was not the same. He was baffled in every attempt to form even the beginning of a theory, and in his bewilderment he was conscious of something nearer to actual fear than he had ever been conscious of in his life.

Even now, if the warning meant anything, the mysterious assassin might be lying in wait to take his life behind any one of the low stone walls which surrounded him.

He walked back to the inn absolutely nervous.

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He found Florence waiting for him anxiously in the little parlour.

"I have been very uneasy about you," she said frankly, as he sank into an ample armchair. "In a quiet little spot like this it seems as though anything might happen. You have heard nothing about my friends?"

"Nothing practical."

"I felt that you would not," she said, making a brave effort to keep her voice steady. "And I have been looking at the trains. I have decided to go to London. There is a train from Shipton Gate in an hour's time."

Ilden's face fell.

"To London? Have you friends there?"

"No, but there always seems a chance of getting employment in London. Here it is of course quite hopeless to think of such a thing. And I must find something before my money is spent."

Her voice was heroically cheerful. He wondered whether she realised as clearly as he did how tragically hopeless was the plan on which she had decided. He could not think of allowing her to carry it out.

"But I was hoping that you would help me in my troubles," he said, as they turned into the dismal sitting-room. "I have never needed an ally so much as now, or been so completely non-plussed."

Her eyes filled with instant alarm.

"Something has happened? You have been followed here after all?" she cried.

"I do not know whether I have been followed, or whether I have unconsciously followed my enemy, but it is known that I am in the village. It seems impossible for me to hide myself.

And he told her what had happened, feeling his own uneasiness decrease strangely as she began to share it.

"You will leave Lallerton at once?" she said.

"I suppose so, but this travelling about seems a hopeless business, when I am traced so easily. I was counting on having your help."

"I wish that I *could* help you," she said with her heart in her voice, "but what can I do?"

"There is only one thing which can put an end to this plot against me. And you are the only person I should care to ask to do it."

Florence's eyes opened wide with wonder and hope.

"I? I would do anything to make your life more safe," she said earnestly, and Ilden hesitated no longer.

"Would you even become my wife?"

(Florence's answer, among other things, is told in a further long instalment on Tuesday next.)

Mrs. Forrester's First Husband.

A Story of Blackmail and Love.

My name is Spencer Lockwood, my profession the law. As a barrister, not altogether briefless, I find it more difficult every year, even in vacation time, to get away from the Middle Temple for my annual fortnight's holiday.

Last year, it was a toss-up whether I should be able to go at all, so that it was much to my satisfaction that I found myself, one week-end, comfortably settled in snug quarters at the old-fashioned "King's Head" Hotel, Overcoombe, Bucks, in the very heart of the lovely Vale of Aylesbury.

I congratulated myself upon having left "pleas," "plaints," and all things legal far behind, for a time at any rate, absolutely unsuspicious that I was on the eve of becoming a leading actor in a stranger criminal drama than ever I had played in, in my capacity as advocate, at the Old Bailey.

"By Jove!" I said to myself as I sat at the open window after dinner, on the evening of my arrival, and watched a young lady, accompanied by an elder one, passing up the main street towards the railway station, "that's the sweetest-looking girl I have seen for many a day! Wonder who she is? I thought I knew pretty well everybody, by sight at least, in Overcoombe. I'll ask Jackson, perhaps he knows; or, rather, he's sure to know."

As Overcoombe had been my yearly place of retreat for the past five or six years, Jackson, the landlord of the King's Head, knew me well, and would have no hesitation in enlightening me as to the identity of the fair stranger.

"That, sir!" said Jackson, "is Mrs. Russell and her daughter."

"Russell!" I said. "Russell! I don't remember the name."

"Like as not, sir; they've only been here about six months; since just after Christmas."

"They look quite superior people, Jackson."

"They are, sir. Mrs. Russell, so I've heard, is the widow of a captain in the Navy, and, I should say, is pretty well off."

"Where do they live?"

"You know that old red-brick house, sir, on the Aylesbury road, half a mile the other side of the station?"

"I know; the place that was empty for so long. 'Sandilands' is the name of it, I think."

"That's it, sir! Well, that's where they live. The old lady's a bit soft-headed, so they say, hasn't a soul above tea-table gossip, and is about the worst mother a young girl could possibly have, according to my humble opinion."

All this only whetted my curiosity to know more of the young lady, a desire which the next day was gratified through the good offices of a mutual friend, who introduced me to Miss Russell.

She was young; in fact, barely twenty-one. She was good-looking, too, but wore, I thought, a depressed and anxious expression. Naturally, I concluded that she was in ill-health, a victim, perhaps, to the gaieties of the London season. Later on I hinted as much to Mrs. Russell, who, as it seemed to me, with somewhat heartless indifference deprecated the idea in no measured terms.

Netta Russell and I became very good friends, but came no nearer to getting at the reason of her trouble. Her strangeness of manner haunted me, and yet, after all, I thought, why should I worry about it. It did not concern me.

But I was not able to satisfy myself so easily. I was obliged to confess that my interest in Netta Russell was stronger than I had imagined. I was not in love with her; the idea was absurd, having regard to the shortness of the acquaintance, though she peculiarly interested me, and I earnestly wished to be of service to her.

An exploring pedestrian of the ardent order, I was making my way, towards the end of the week, through what was locally known as the "Nut Scrub."

This was, at least, a square mile, if not more, of dense hazel bushes, through which ran a narrow strip of path.

I was about half-way through this leafy tangle, when I heard voices within a stone's throw of me.

One of them was evidently a woman's, and, for the life of me, I could not shake off the impression that I knew its owner. The other was that of an uneducated, if not vulgar man.

"Very well, Mrs. Forrester!" the latter was saying. "I've give you Jack's message, and you'll only have yourself to

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blame if you don't do as he says. Which, shall I tell him, is it to be; you to go back to him, or—what I think'll suit him just as well, or, perhaps, better—that you send him, by me, five hundred pounds before the end of next week?"

"Neither!" replied the woman, in raised, decisive tones, "and you may tell him so!"

"You'd best listen to reason," persuasively replied the other. "Jack Forrester is a dangerous customer to cross, and I *know* as he'll never let you alone, or leave you, if you don't do one or the other of them two things."

"Well! you have my last word! I will do neither, and any attempt to molest me in any way will only bring trouble to you and to him."

"Have you any money about you now?"

"No; and if I had I would not give it you!"

"Supposing I were to take it! This is a pretty lonely spot; nobody could hear you, I fancy!"

It was Netta Russell without a doubt, and, unless I was mistaken, in sore strait from some blackmailing ruffian. That he addressed her as Mrs. Forrester did not for the moment appeal to me.

Forcing my way, in breakneck fashion, through the intervening scrub, in the direction of the voices, I came face to face with Miss Russell and her threatener.

"Don't be too sure of that!" I cried, addressing the latter, a truculent-looking, flashily-dressed specimen of the genus cockney. "I have overheard quite enough to know that you are intimidating this lady, and I warn you that if you don't sheer off on the instant, it will be the worse for you!"

The fellow looked me up and down, as if to calculate probabilities, but, judging discretion to be the wiser course, with a jeeringly defiant laugh, disappeared in the thicket to the right.

The immediate strain lifted, Netta Russell all but completely collapsed on the reaction, and I saw that there was nothing for it, but for me to accompany her home to Overcoombe.

Her helplessness rendered her still more an object of solicitude to me, and I begged her to, if possible, confide in me, so far, at least, as to enable me to do what I could for her.

She then, after a brief hesitation, told me the most extraordinary story, imposing upon me, however, the condition that I would not repeat it to a soul.

I, of course, assured her upon this point, and listened thunderstruck to what practically amounted to a confession.

"Miss Russell," I said, "I——"

"That is not my name," she interrupted me.

"Not your name?" I exclaimed.

"No. Not a human being knows what I am going to tell you—I am married."

"Married!" I echoed.

"Yes; I was married nearly four years ago, and my name is—is Forrester."

Then she went on to say that when—a girl of seventeen—she was staying with some friends at Scarborough, she met a man with whom she fell in love. Handsome, fascinating, and knowing far more of the world than she did; she believed in him. His proposal to marry her, on the condition that she should keep the matter a profound secret for a month, so that he might obtain the consent of his father—who, he said, was a wealthy landed proprietor in the Midlands—she innocently agreed to.

She, indeed, told her mother, who, with the imbecility natural to her, made no inquiries; letting the girl in fact do just as she pleased.

Leaving home one day on the pretext of paying a visit to a relative in London, she met Jack Forrester, by arrangement, at a certain little church in Chelsea, and was married with only the pew-opener and verger as witnesses.

The catastrophe was not long delayed.

At the entrance of the hotel, where they were to dine, her new-made husband was arrested on a charge of "long-firm" swindling, by a couple of detectives, who it appeared had been upon his track for days.

Not staying to think or to hear more, she returned home at once, and managed to keep the whole wretched affair a secret.

Her mother thought it was but an engagement; weak-minded as she was, she never dreamt of a run-away marriage. Had she known that, Netta's life would have been unbearable. The poor girl just threw away her wedding-ring, and resigned herself to misery.

In little more than a year, she saw in a paper that her husband was dead. He had tried to escape from Dartmoor, and had been shot.

Though once more free, she was never able to shake off the haunting memory of her mistake and its consequences. Her conscience upraided her with deception as towards her mother, with passing under a false name, and with posing as an unmarried girl, when she was in reality a widow.

"But this man," I said, "who is he—the man I mean who accosted you this afternoon?"

He had followed, she explained to me, upon a letter—a terrible letter—received from her husband.

"But," said I, a bit bewildered, "I thought you said he was dead."

"Yes—yes!—I quite believed so; but I suppose the man who had tried to escape was another of the same name. He demands——"

"I know," I interrupted her. "Your return to him, or a sum of money."

"I would sooner die than return to him; and as for five hundred pounds, I haven't it, and would not send it to him if I had."

"You have his letter?" I asked her.

She produced it and gave it me.

"You are sure that it is his handwriting?"

"No; I am not sure, but I think it is—I never had a letter from him before."

In a flash I saw what ought to be done, and at once.

"You must answer this letter," I said.

"No;" she replied, "I will *not* write to him!"

Then I sought to show her that if she would write a note at my dictation, saying that at that moment she had no money, but promising to send him some in the course of a few days, I would take charge of it, and go to London with it.

The same evening I left Overcoombe with the letter in my pocket, and within three hours had laid the whole case before the smartest private detective in town.

In three days he had news for me. Jack Forrester, confidence-man, swindler, and cracksman, had been undoubtedly married to Netta Russell; and, as undoubtedly, was now dead, in the way the newspapers had stated.

The relief I felt was immense. Netta was free, and the way was open to me to win her for myself if I could.

There was, however, one little thing more to discover—the writer of the letter.

"I think," said the detective, "that if you will wait half an hour, my agent will have something to tell us about this very enterprising gentleman." As, indeed he had.

He reported that having taken Netta's note to the address given—a tobacco shop—he left it to be called for.

He found that a man had been asking for letters in the same name, each day for the two previous days.

Posting himself in the passage, the agent saw the man come and receive the letter, and shadowed him home. He knew him as a notorious "crook."

Handing his memo-book to his principal, the latter read out:

"Name, Earney. Well-known turf operator. Ten years in 1888. Out on ticket."

It was decided, subject to Netta Russell's opinion, that nothing much was to be gained by a prosecution of the rascal.

It is needless to say that I caught the first train back to Overcoombe, and that, prepared by a wire from me, Netta met me at the station.

Already she looked brighter, and comparatively free of her melancholy.

I found, too, to my great satisfaction, that she had told her mother everything.

Netta married a year later. Who she married you may well guess, and I think I may suggest that her second husband was an improvement upon her first.

E. Ralph.

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A DOUBLE EVENT.

A Tale of Four Lovers.

"What in Tophet is amiss with me to-night?" muttered General Warringham savagely, as he strolled restlessly out of the glittering ball-room at Lady Merton's. "I'm as seedy as a Smyrna fig! It's that confounded boy of mine, I suppose!"

The General stepped on to the terrace, and thence down the broad flight of marble steps into the lovely gardens of Doringham Park, where he resumed his meditations.

"The puppy has had his own way in everything, and I have never interfered. But when it comes to marrying *her* daughter—by Jove! it's time I put my heel down!"

He stopped, took a choice Havana from his cigar-case, viciously bit off the end, and lit it with a scented fusee. The light revealed a frown upon his handsome sun-burnt face that was not agreeable.

"Hang it!" he muttered, as he resumed his walk, "why couldn't the lad have chosen someone else—*anyone* else but *her* daughter!"

He walked on, musing as he went, down the long, curving paths, white in the moonlight, which intersected the beautiful summer-gardens of Doringham Hall. There was not a breath of wind to disturb the stillness of the lovely scene around him. Not a leaf stirred among the branches of the stately old trees that skirted the moonlit gardens. Exquisitely tinted fairy-lamps glowed with a subdued radiance from every point.

Not a bough but had its pendant of sparkling jewels. Not a bush that did not lift its blushing roses to be kissed and beautified by the warm, amorous light that dropped in limpid streams from glistening globes. Even the fountains, merry in their play, sent forth their gurgling jets of sparkling water into the warm air above. And then, as if unwilling to desert such fair enchantment, they shook out their dewy tresses in the air, till every drop became a diamond, full of liquid light, which rained, in cascades of reflected radiance, among the many multi-tinted lamps which lit the fountains, and fell into the marble basins beneath.

Yet, though moon, stars and fairy lamps combined to dissipate the darkness, they only served to vaguely outline shadows which, before, had seemed not to exist. The air was still and warm and languorous. A subtle tropical enchantment brooded, like an angel's wing, upon the sleeping scene. Ever and anon, the General caught a fleeting glimpse of other guests who, like himself, had left the dazzling glories of the ball, to wander out among the gardens. But these, he saw, were generally in pairs.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Poor deluded fools! But time will teach them wisdom! I wonder whether *they* are out here too. I've half a mind to go back and investigate. But that would be distinctly 'nosing'—quite a feminine mode of strategy—so the other half of my mind is, perhaps, the wiser."

He was gradually approaching the outskirts of the gardens, where the great, stately trees of the surrounding park shut in the fairy scene. But he still walked on, unconscious of the path he took, and lost in reverie.

"And *she* objects as well!" he mused, as a little puzzled look came into his face. "I wonder why. It is but natural *I* should do so, after all that has passed. But what cause has *she* to forbid her daughter's union with my son? It is not possible our reasons are identical. Confound the boy!—and the girl too, for that matter—one is as bad as the other! By Jove, there almost seems a fate in it! But it shan't be!—if I have to turn the boy adrift, it *shan't* be! I'll see him — Hullo!—there's a lady in front! Just my luck! Give a man a chance to relieve his pent-up feelings with a wholesome British oath, and a woman bobs up to strangle it in its birth! I wonder what she's doing out here alone. Same old game, I suppose. Going about like a roaring lion—by Jove, no!—that's an insult to his majesty the king of beasts!—fox is the animal—sneaking about like a cunning old fox, seeking whom she may devour! The saints be praised, I'm past such peril! But I don't want to be recognised, mooning around out here in this veritable hot-bed of sentimental impropriety, so I'll hang back a bit."

Apparently the lady in question had also been made aware of the close proximity of a stranger, for she immediately quickened her steps, and was soon lost to view in the dim, uncertain light. No other path diverged from the one the General was pursuing, and he had a fancy for the deep shadow of the tall trees that towered before him. So, after waiting a few moments to allow the lady to get well in advance, he once again resumed his walk. A short stroll brought him to the verge of the gardens, and he stood under the jewelled branches of the stately sentinels which girt them about. Two other paths here joined the one from which he had emerged, but no one was in sight.

Presently he saw a low, trellised structure close to where he stood. It proved to be a pretty, creeper-covered summer-house, standing among the fragrant flower-beds of the garden, and, though the roses and creepers without were illumined here and there with softly shining fairy-lamps, the inside—either by accident or design, but probably the latter—had been left in deepest shadow. The place looked quiet and inviting, so, after listening for a moment to assure himself that no one was within, the General entered the low porch and tried to discover the nature of the interior.

The structure had been curiously built. It was circular in shape, but appeared to have been cut into four quarters, and placed at a distance of some four feet from each other. Thus it presented the appearance of four summer-houses. The two cross-cuts that had been made in the circle formed transverse passages, terminating in four rose-latticed porches, one of which the General had entered. These passages had originally been open to the sky, but were so thickly covered with creeper and vine as to be impenetrable even in the day. Entrance to the four summer-houses, or arbours, could only be obtained from these passages, the outsides being thickly trellised. There was just sufficient light to reveal this much to the General, and, as nothing stirred within, he entered one of the arbours and sat down on the rustic seat with which it was provided.

"Another impropriety of Lady Merton's!" he grumbled under his breath. "Thank Heaven, however, no one—or perhaps I should say, no *two*—have availed themselves of such an unqualified aid to folly! I wonder at it, too, for folly—or at any rate, *that* sort of folly—is amazingly keen in discovering the existence of such disgraceful nooks as this. There's that boy of mine, for instance—confound him!"

The General took a long, last, stubborn pull at the butt of his Havana, and tossed it viciously out into the dark passage. A moment later he heard the sound of footsteps on the gravel outside.

"Ah!" he muttered grimly, "I am a little premature!"

The footsteps were coming nearer.

"I'll bet there's two of 'em!" he went on in a whisper.

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"Twenty to one in shillings there's a deuce of 'em! If there isn't, General Warringham, you will send a sovereign first thing to-morrow morning to the Dogs' Home as a donation for the benefit of the inmates—anonymously too—that's a wager!"

The footsteps sounded beneath the porch, came slowly down the dark passage, and entered an arbour on the opposite side of the summer-house. Presently a voice, which he knew well, said:

"Someone has been smoking in here! I wonder if they are here still."

There was silence for a moment, during which the General sat bolt upright upon his seat—grim and frowning.

"They must have gone," resumed the voice. "The place is as deserted as people in our position could wish to find it."

Then followed two sounds. The first was unmistakably a laugh—a merry, boyish laugh. But the second is altogether untranslatable upon paper. It reached the ear of the General, however, and he immediately became even more rigid and grim and angry.

"The Dogs' Home has lost that little bet," he whispered to himself. "Hang the Dogs' Home!" he went on. "I wish the yelping little beasts had won! Confound that boy! What the dickens does he mean by coming here, after my strict injunction to him only this afternoon to discontinue this impossible and preposterous business! By my spurs, it's sheer mutiny—bare-faced rebellion—and he ought to be tried by court-martial!"

He bit his moustache savagely and listened.

"Milly," said the young man, when the extraordinary sound above mentioned had been repeated. "I am loth to distress you, but I feel it my duty to conceal nothing from you that touches our betrothal. I had a talk with my father this afternoon, darling, and he still persists in reiterating his objections to our engagement."

"Did he say why, Harold?" asked the girl.

"No. I asked him point-blank, but he curtly said that was *his* affair."

"It seems so unreasonable," said Milly after a pause. "There must be some cause for his antipathy to me."

"He *has* no antipathy to you, dearest. That is the most inexplicable part of the mystery. He said distinctly he had no doubt that you were gentle and good, and all that could be desired in the choice of a wife. But he had reasons—indisputable reasons—wholly unconnected with yourself—for strongly opposing our engagement."

"Mamma talks in exactly the same strain," said the girl with a sigh. "I wish I could discover this secret, which proves such an obstacle to our love."

"Not to our love, darling," said Harold quickly—and again the untranslatable sound reached the General's ear—"To its fulfilment, yes—but not to our love. That is incapable of change."

"There is comfort in that, dear Harold," said Milly, "but can we not unravel the threads of this dark mystery?"

"Well," responded Harold, "let us look the matter square in the face. We have known each other from children—ever since the time when we were both called upon to suffer a common loss—the loss of a parent—you, of your father—I, of my mother. No restraint has been put upon our intimacy or our friendship, and, until the question of marriage was broached, everything went on swimmingly. But that consideration completely changed the situation. Immediately the possibility of such a contingency is mentioned, the governor and your respected mamma kick up rough, put a damper on our little plan, exercise their high authority, and read us homilies on filial obedience. They both declare that *we* are not the causes of this unlooked-for decree—consequently, we must look elsewhere. The governor does not dislike your mother, nor, so far as I can see, does she hate him. True, they are not given to gush when they meet, but people of five-and-forty seldom do, and they are always polite and amiable to each other."

"Harold," interrupted Milly, "I may be silly and fanciful, but I sometimes think their amiability—if not their politeness—is a trifle forced. There is a look in the General's eyes when he looks at mamma that has often surprised me. I cannot define it, or even guess its meaning, but it is indisputably there."

"You are quicker than I, darling," said Harold thoughtfully, "for I have never noticed it. What on earth can be the reason?"

"I do not know," said Milly plaintively. "They say a good detective should excel in two things—observation and deduction. I may do something of the former, but the latter is beyond my power."

"Never mind—you do the observing, and I'll try my hand at deducing from your observations," said Harold hopefully. "The plot thickens, as they say in the play—or perhaps—perhaps it isn't quite so treacley already. Have you observed anything else, Miss Scotland Yard?"

The girl laughed, and the General had to wait for the resumption of the conversation until a little by-play had been gone through, whereat he was greatly scandalised—or imagined he was. Presently Milly resumed:

"Yes, dear—something very surprising. I have never spoken of it before, because it seemed so strange and unaccountable. From the day the General sailed for the Transvaal to the day when he returned, some six months ago, mamma was never like herself. The day he left England, she locked herself in her room and saw no one. Whenever news came from the war, she was almost beside herself with excitement until she had read the details. Then she would generally become more composed. But sometimes it made her even more agitated than before. She would never let me look at the papers, but took them up to her own room. One day I saw her open the paper, and give a great start. I pretended not to notice her, but covertly watched her all the time. Her face grew deathly white at first—then she blushed—I have never seen mamma blush so vividly before. Then, as she read, I saw the tears trickle down her cheeks.

Harold, dear, I may not be skilled in reading countenances, but this I *do* know—they were not the tears of sorrow, but of joy. I felt as if I could have cried too, and fearing lest she should see me, I walked quietly to the window. Presently I heard a sob, and, looking round a moment later, found that she was gone. The paper lay upon the table, where she had left it, so I picked it up. And what do you think I read?"

"Heaven only knows!" said Harold irreverently—"but go on, for goodness' sake!—this is growing exciting!"

Milly laughed.

"On the top of the page, in big black type, I read this heading:

'GENERAL WARRINGHAM'S SPLENDID VICTORY!

THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT OF THE WAR!

A Masterpiece of Military Manœuvring and Unparalleled Bravery!'

No doubt you remember the incident well enough, Harold."

"Rather!" he ejaculated, with a note of unmistakable pride in his young voice. "Three cheers for the governor!" And he would actually have given them, had not Milly promptly restrained his enthusiasm by stopping his mouth in a very (from the General's point of view) gracefully immodest way — a process which was evidently infectious.

"Well," said Milly a few moments later, "what do you make of it all?"

"I'm hanged if I know!" was the rejoinder. "Have you told me all?"

"Yes—all—except one thing. Later in the day, I saw mamma reading a bundle of old letters, and, while I was looking, a photograph dropped from one, which looked just like the General must have looked when he was your age. It seems so odd, for they did not know each other then."

"They did!—they did!—they *must* have

YOU MAY WIN A CRAMOPHONE BY READING THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT OF "A FOE IN THE FAMILY." SEE PAGE 527.

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dono!" almost shouted Harold. "What fools—what asses—what unmitigated idiots we have been, not to have guessed it long ago!"

"Eh? What did you say?" said Milly with dignity. "Speak for yourself, sir!"

For answer, he took her in his arms and kissed her rapturously.

"By Jove!" he blurted out, "you're a regular brick, Milly! You've given me the key of this mystery, and now I'll see it through, so don't worry any more. Now let us go back to the dancers."

A few more of those indescribable sounds, and they turned to go.

"I think I have a plan," said Harold meditatively, as they went out.

But Fate decreed that Harold's plan could very well be dispensed with in the working out of this little drama.

Ten minutes later the General went out too. Just outside he paused, and, as he did so, another figure glided from the summer-house—a dress rustled in the rose-trellised porch, and a woman stood beside him in the dim, uncertain light of the fairy-lamps. Some instinct told him who she was, and the same instinct apprised him of the fact that she had been crying.

"You heard?" he said, in a voice that would have disgraced him on parade.

"Yes. Did you?"

"H'm!" assented the General gruffly.

There was an awkward pause. Then the General turned and faced his companion.

"And you—you cared?" he asked huskily.

No answer.

"Madge," he said, "we have let a foolish quarrel of our foolish youth wreck half our lives. Can we not remedy the past by finding happiness in the possession of each other in the future?"

She laid her head contentedly on his shoulder, and the General lifted up the happy, tearful face and kissed it.

"Thank God!" she whispered in his ear, "the day has come at last! But it has seemed so long, dear—so very long!"

"We married the wrong people last time, Madge," he said, "but this time there'll be no mistake."

Again he stooped and kissed the upturned face with such warmth and tenderness that even he himself marvelled at the change which, in a few brief moments of time, had been wrought in the opinions which he had so very recently voiced.

Next morning, Harold was summoned to his father's study, where the General awaited him. Evidently desirous of getting through with what he had to say, the General plunged awkwardly in the business by announcing his withdrawal of his former objections to his son's engagement with Milly. He even went so far as to approve the match. Harold stared in bewildered amazement, and the General, noticing this surprise, attempted to explain. He stammered—grew confused—and even blushed—but it all came out bit by bit. And Harold, who had been bottling up his feelings during the recital, burst forth at last.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, as he executed a sand-jig on the study carpet and clapped his astonished and somewhat outraged parent on the back—"Hurrah! Three cheers for the governor! Hip, hip, hurrah! Never too late to mend! Who the dev—I beg pardon! Who'd have thought it! Well I'm blowed!"

And he dashed wildly out of the room, leaving his bewildered parent in a state of mingled surprise, confusion, outraged dignity, amusement and happiness, and tore off to acquaint Milly with the astounding developments of the morning.

But Milly knew already, and he found her waiting for him with her mother's sanction.

And six months later, the newspapers announced, what the sporting world would call—A Double Event.

W. J. Mowbray.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

October 21. — Those celebrating their birthdays to-day will have a favourable year for business; not a good time to travel and change.

Girls born between two and four p.m. need much caution and prudence in their love affairs.

The day is good for writing letters, asking favours, and dealing with doctors and military men.

A child born here will be active and ambitious; fond of travel, and will probably go abroad.

October 22. — Business will need careful attention during the next twelve months by those whose birthdays fall to-day. The mind inclined to pleasure and society.

Girls will meet with strange experiences in love matters, and must have a care where they place confidence.

The day is evil for most matters; guard against mishap, especially with water. Not good to deal with landlords or property.

A child born here will be fond of the sea, and give much thought to music, pleasure, and the opposite sex.

October 23.—Much worry and anxiety over business, health, and general affairs. Avoid law and quarrels; some trouble with property.

Young girls have an anxious time with opposite sex; disappointments, and broken engagements.

The day is not good for signing papers, buying property, asking favours, marriage, or visiting.

A child born this day will be moody, suspicious, and ill-tempered. The constitution will not be strong.

October 24.—A year to avoid speculation; do not change or start new things. Health will need some extra care.

Girls will have cause for jealousy; some opposition in love affairs.

The day is one of uncertainty; go quietly.

A child born to-day will be active, generous, and high-spirited. Not very successful in business.

October 25.—A favourable birthday for those born on this date. Business, health, and domestic matters are favoured.

Young girls are much interested over news and letters, those engaged marry during the next twelve months.

A good day to travel, write letters, marry, visit, engage servants, and speculate.

A child born here will be fortunate and make headway in life. Will be clever, cheerful, witty, and inventive.

October 26.—A mixed year; favourable for those in employ. Have a care against law and accident. Insure against fire.

Girls will need some tact or they quarrel with lovers.

A child born this day will be headstrong, ambitious, active, and daring. Will be fortunate in the employ of others.

October 27. — Rather fortunate for landlords, aged people, and farmers. Avoid risky speculations and do not change or travel.

Girls born near seven p.m. will receive attentions from married men and need care in love matters.

The day is good for dealing with landlords and shipping agents, but evil for speculating and engaging servants.

A child born to-day will be thoughtful, but unsettled, and not very fortunate in business.

Asturel.

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A Story of Hospital Life.

A Good Man's Love.

"Are the apple trees in bloom in the orchard? I thought I heard the bees humming amongst them."

The sister of the ward who had stopped beside No. 6 bed thought that her patient was delirious, and looked down at her anxiously. But the woman in the bed met her glance with a pair of blue eyes that were unclouded and clear—she smiled faintly.

"I wonder," she said, "if the orchard is all pink and white with apple blossom, from my window it used to look like a sea of bloom; and the air that blew in upon me was so sweet. I wish"—she sighed and broke off all at once, turning her face sharply to the wall.

"You must feel that London is very strange after the quiet of the country," Sister Helen said gently, "how glad you will be to go back there. Perhaps the apple trees will still be in bloom when you are well enough to leave the hospital."

"Go *back?*" The woman turned her face as sharply round towards the nurse, as she had just now turned it away. "Go back—I shall never go back to the farm again—I am not likely ever to see the orchard any more; I wish I didn't dream of it all every night—every night now. It's being in this great hospital does it. I never dreamt of the orchard—and of—home, before I came in here."

She moved restlessly, and the sister laid cool fingers upon her hot head. "You must try not to worry and fret yourself," she said, "we want you to get well."

"What's the use of my getting well? What is the object of saving a useless life like mine? It was a pity anybody ever brought me in here; why couldn't they have let me die in peace?"

Sister Helen was a very tactful, and a very sympathetic woman. She saw that her patient was excited and overtired, and that this was no moment for talking to her. Stroking her hand very softly again with those cool, firm fingers whose touch in itself was restful, she said:

"I think we must have a talk some time, just now I have several patients to see before their bedtime! And I want you to promise me to try to go to sleep, and do not think of any worries for a while. Will you do this to please me?" There was something in Sister Helen's quiet voice, and in the glance of her grey eyes; not to say in the compelling touch of her hand—that always made her patients anxious to please her. The woman in No. 6 bed was no exception to the rule. She smiled up into her nurse's face, and a more restful look came over her own.

"I'll try and do what you wish," she said, "and sometime, when you are not busy, I should like to talk to you—about—about—oh!—many things."

And then, as the sister moved away, the patient turned her face to the wall again.

Sister Helen's thoughts that evening very often went back to the woman in No. 6 bed; whose name, as set forth on the board that hung over it, was Elsie Dangerfield. She had been brought into the hospital a week before, sent by a doctor who said that he had found her in a miserable lodging house, desperately ill, and apparently on the verge of starvation. The sister remembered noticing as she helped to undress the woman, how old and worn her clothes were; her boots almost in holes; her dress threadbare. She recollected too how she had realised that this woman in spite of her worn and haggard face was not really old; and that she must once have possessed great beauty, traces of which still lingered in spite of the ravages which time had made.

Sister Helen's heart had ached often and often over the wreck of womanhood that lay in No. 6 bed; but to-day was the first time that Elsie Dangerfield had spoken in any way of herself or her past. She had been civil and pleasant to her nurses; but beyond that she had never gone—until to-day—and her words about the farm and the apple blossom in the orchard had roused Sister Helen's interest in her afresh. It was not till late on the following afternoon that the busy sister had a moment to sit down beside Elsie Dangerfield, and she began her talk with the sick woman by speaking pleasantly of other matters, and not of the patient herself. Then after a little pause, she said tactfully and gently.

"Last night we settled to have a little talk, didn't we? I wonder whether you will tell me now about your old home—and lovely orchard you spoke of?"

The woman's face flushed; she moved uneasily.

"I don't know that I want to tell you now," she said sullenly, "it all belongs to the past—the stupid old past, which I have forgotten."

There was defiance in her voice, "the present is enough for me, the future is—a blank."

"Oh! surely not that?" Sister Helen spoke soothingly. "I think perhaps you will find the future has some good things in store for you."

Elsie Dangerfield laughed harshly.

"Not it," she said, "there are no good things in store for *me*. I have made my bed and I must lie on it, even if it is a bed of nettles."

She was silent for a few seconds, then she burst out suddenly:

"I will tell you—though you will hate me afterwards, or preach at me. All you good women either loathe or preach at we women who are not good."

Sister Helen did not answer, but her grey eyes met the defiant blue ones that glared at her from the pillow, with such tenderness in their depths, that a look of shame crossed the patient's face.

"I believe you are really good," she said more quietly, "perhaps you can forgive sinners. But I will tell you the truth. Long ago—I think I have lost count now of how long it was—I lived in a farm away in Surrey. I had always lived in that village, and everybody said I was a lucky girl when Godfrey Dangerfield of Manly Farm asked me to be his wife. I wasn't sure about my own luck—because—because I was a *fool*." She spoke vehemently. "I had read a lot of silly trash about the life of a town, and the gay times folks had in London, and I thought I was buried there in the country, and that if I married Godfrey I should be doing him an honour, and sacrificing my own chance of seeing something of what I called life. Oh! I was a fool—a fool—a fool. Well, I married Godfrey; I thought after all it would be nice to be the mistress of Manly Farm, and raised above my old neighbours and friends—and it was very pleasant to be made much of, as Godfrey made much of me. He treated me like a queen—and I—I broke his heart." There was a long pause, and it was in a lower, more broken voice that the sick woman went on.

"My home was as beautiful as any woman could wish. It stood upon a hill, and from my door, and out of my windows, I looked across the open country to the great hills. My God! how I have longed sometimes in these city streets, to see the hills again. Just below my bedroom the orchard climbed up behind the house, and the scent of the blossoms came in to

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me in the early mornings when the blackbirds whistled in the branches of the apple trees, and the larks sang on the hillside. I ought to have been a happy woman—my home was so lovely—my husband was so good to me. But I was discontented all the time. I wanted gaiety and amusement. I pined for city life, I thought I was wasted in the country—I was a pretty woman then, sister, very pretty, they told me Godfrey was patient with me in spite of all my cross ways; he was always loving and tender, always trying to think of ways to amuse me and keep me happy—and I was never grateful to him! One day he came and told me he had taken places for some play that was to be acted in the country town three miles away; he thought I should be amused, and that it would be a change for me. I was pleased enough and excited over it; for even strolling players in a country town seemed to me delightful—then. So we went—Godfrey and I. But after that night I was just wild to go and be a player myself, I hated my life more than ever. I could think of nothing but the glory and delight of being on the stage, and of hearing ringing cheers of applause. I was dazzled with the pictures my own silly fancy painted; and I hated my peaceful life more than ever—and then, oh! sister, one day I threw it all away, my beautiful home, my peaceful life—and worse than all, my husband's love. In a fit of impatient anger, I ran away from home, and came to London." She paused and Sister Helen said gently:

"But your husband—did he not follow you?"

"I left him no address—I wrote him a note saying I was sick of my dull life, and that I had gone away for ever—I came to London, and I managed to get work in a small, out-of-the-way theatre—but—oh! nurse, I cannot tell you of all my life since the day I left my home. I have sunk down lower and lower; and—and when I was no longer pretty or young I sank lower still—down to the depths of misery and want and wretchedness till, when the doctor found me—I was nearly starving. I have been a wicked woman—a wicked woman; but if only I might know that Godfrey forgave me, I should die happy!"

"But have you written to your husband?"

"No—oh no—I am not fit to write to him; I am not fit," and all at once she burst into low sobbing, then controlled herself suddenly, and said, "if I die, sister, will you send and tell my husband that I was sorry, bitterly, bitterly sorry for all I did. Godfrey Dangerfield, Manly Farm, Harefield—that will find him."

Sister Helen gave the desired promise, and soothed her patient to the best of her power; and that night in her own room she thought long and anxiously over the sick woman's story, making up her mind finally to a strange step.

Two days later there stood at the door of the ward a tall man with a kind, strong face who asked for Sister Helen. And when he was taken into her sitting-room to her he held out his hand and grasped hers in a grip that almost hurt her.

"God bless you," he said, and his voice shook, "you must be a good woman."

Sister Helen looked into the strong face, and the kindly brown eyes, and instinctively trusted their owner.

"You are Mr. Godfrey Dangerfield, are you not?" she said. "Was I wrong to write to you? I could not make up my mind at first what was right to do; and then it seemed to me that I must write and tell you that your wife is here. I think I was right, because—you have come."

"I am sure you were right," he answered. "My poor little wife; my poor Elsie. If she knew how I have searched for her all these years; how I have grieved for her; she would not speak of forgiveness!—May I see her?"

"You know, Mr. Dangerfield, that she is very, very ill; and that you will find her terribly changed. You must let me prepare her a little for seeing you. I felt you would come, but I hardly thought you would come so soon."

"I came at once, directly I had read your letter," he said, and his voice was surprised, "of course I came at once."

And through Sister Helen's mind swung the words, "Thy love to me was wonderful." Truly this man's was a wonderful love.

Sister Helen went softly to the bedside of Elsie Dangerfield and told her very quietly that someone wanted to see her.

"To see me? Why I haven't a friend in the world," the sick woman said, and laughed harshly, "it must be some mistake."

"No, it is no mistake," Sister Helen replied, "it is—an old friend—who is very anxious to see you, and who has come—a long way on purpose to do so."

A flush of colour flamed over the white face.

"It is not Godfrey—it could not be Godfrey," she said brokenly, "that is impossible—how could he know?" Her voice trailed into silence as Sister Helen walked swiftly away, returning in a moment with a tall man at her side.

Elsie Dangerfield's bed was in a corner of the ward surrounded by screens, and it was not until the sister and her companion were close to her side that Elsie caught sight of her visitor—as the sister stole away. Then with a little cry the sick woman covered her face with her hands, saying brokenly:

"Oh, why have you come? You cannot ever forgive me, when you know—when you know——"

"I do not want to know anything, my dear," Godfrey answered gravely, and as he spoke, he knelt down beside his wife's bed, and took her trembling hands in his, "I want nothing but to take you home."

"*Take me home?*" She looked at him with dazed eyes. "you can't mean that you would have me at home again, you can't mean that."

"But I do mean that," he spoke very quietly, almost in a matter-of-fact voice, seeing her great agitation, "I have come on purpose to see—to see how soon you can travel, dear. I must nurse you back to health again."

The sick woman was sobbing, low, pitiful sobs.

"I didn't know there was such love in the world," she whispered, as Godfrey stooped and kissed her, "I didn't know anybody could forgive like this."

And a great restfulness came into her eyes; a wonderful peace upon her worn face.

"Oh! I will be good now, Godfrey, I will be good," she said. "Now you have forgiven me—I think God will forgive me too. But—I have spoilt your life and my own—I can never undo the past."

"We will put the past behind us and not look back at it again," he answered. "We will start afresh from to-day, my little wife, and go on together hand in hand. We love each other, and we will help each other, dear."

And when later on, Elsie Dangerfield told Sister Helen something of what her husband had said to her, the sister said softly:

"Oh, my dear, I think your husband's love for you is wonderful. Do you know those great words come back to me when I think of him and of you, 'Down on your knees and thank Heaven fasting, for a good man's love.'"

L. G. Moberly.

Draper's Assistant: "Can it be possible! Miss Coupon, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at Margate last summer? How long——" Miss Coupon: "Three yards, please."

Friend: "What did he say to you when he proposed?" Miss Rox: "He said life without me meant nothing." Friend: "He was sincere in that. That's just what his possessions amount to."

"By the way, Bishop, why is it that you always address your congregation as 'Brethren,' and never mention the women in your sermons?" "But, my dear madam, the one embraces the other." "Oh, but, Bishop, not in church!"

Husband: "The new cook makes everything too salt. It's terrible." Wife: "She can't help that, poor thing. It isn't her fault that her hands are big." Husband: "What earthly difference can that make?" Wife: "That shows how much you know about housekeeping. The cookery books always measure salt by the pinch."

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SERIAL STORY COMPETITION.

STILL ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO WIN ONE OF THE TEN HANDSOME GRAMOPHONES OFFERED.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

The picture on this page illustrates a certain sentence in this week's instalment of our powerful new serial "A Foe in the Family." All you have to do is to read the instalment carefully, and to write under the picture the sentence which you think is illustrated by the sketch. Ten splendid Gramophones will be awarded to readers whose correct solutions are posted to us soonest after the publication of this number of *Short Stories*.

Sentence:	*Page* .....
.....	*Column* .....
.....	*Line* .....

In order that all competitors shall have an equal chance of winning these handsome prizes, we have decided to distribute the Gramophones over the British Isles thus:

Two Gramophones will be won by readers living in the London postal district whose correct solutions are posted first.

Two Gramophones will be awarded to readers living within 100 miles of London.

Two to those English readers living over 100 miles from London.

Two to Scottish readers sending in correct solutions and two to those living in Ireland.

When you have found the sentence write it down in the space below the picture, together with the number of the page, the column, and the line. Then put your name and address in the space provided, cut out this page and post it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark your envelope in the *top left corner* with the name of your postal town, and the time of posting, thus: MANCHESTER. 2.45 p.m. Then post it *at once*.

Name..... Address.....

"Yes," said Mabel, proudly, "when a young man kisses me I scream." "Mabel," said Reginald, with a sudden coldness, "why is it you are so often hoarse when I call on you?"

Husband: "Come, sit on my lap, my dear, as you did in our old courting days." Wife: "Well, I declare! I haven't received such an invitation for an age." Husband: "And—er—bring a needle and thread with you, my love."

She: "Now promise me, Ralph, that you won't go to drinking just because I have refused you." He (despondently): "Certainly not. I'll have to swear off for three months to get even on the flowers and things I've wasted on you."

Mrs. Grey: "That is such an affectionate couple over there. I heard him call her 'dear' several times as if he meant it." Mr. Grey (gruffly): "Of course he meant it. She has got a three hundred pound fur mantle on."

Mother: "What! crying, Ethel? Don't you and Herbert get along well?" Bride of Six Weeks: "Yes, we get along too well, mamma. I told Herbert the other day I was willing to do all the housework, and—and now he wants me to do it."

Wife: "I have a new maid coming to-day, dear." Husband: "Is she well recommended?" Wife: "Well, she has lived in seventeen of the highest families." Husband: "I should think that would be against her." Wife: "Not at all. What delicious scandals she must know."

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Frances Norton: Adventuress.

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

FRANKIE PLAYS HER LAST CARD.

LIFE on board the yacht went very smoothly after a few days. There was some slight friction at first between Frankie and Mrs. Venables, relative to what that lady called "her kidnapping arrangement." But after a while the vivacious little woman settled down, and accepted the situation with a good grace. She seemed, indeed, to find a certain satisfaction in it.

"It's all very well, my dear," she informed me, "to have the reputation of a smart hostess, but, I assure you, it has drawbacks. Of course I felt vexed with your cousin at first; putting out to sea in such an unexpected fashion, more like pirates than anything else, upset me. But now it's quite delightful. I've wired to Vi, and she'll look after my guests and the house till I get back. Your dear cousin is charmingly romantic, Cynthia. It's quite an ideal arrangement to cruise about like this, 'the world forgetting,' and that sort of thing, don't you know."

I murmured an assent. I was too worried about Frankie to pay much heed to the little lady's prattle.

My cousin was looking well; there was not a shade of anxiety on her face or in her manner. She seemed resolved to make Lord Kinross more in love with her than ever, and had never been more winning or so gentle. Hartland appeared to idolise her, and would sit at her feet of an afternoon, with a rapt expression of countenance, watching her pale, sweet face, and murmuring irrelevancies in her ear.

The weather was perfect, not a cloud in the sky, nor a breaker in the sea. I could have been happy, quite happy, but for the haunting fear that never left me night or day—the fear that Frankie, despite all her beauty, all her wit, her courage, and her strength of will, would at the last moment fail to bring about her marriage.

But Frankie showed no sign of fear or doubt. Day after day went by; we would put in at some small fishing-port for fresh vegetables and provisions, explore the recesses of a deep caverned cave, or land in the boats at a sandy cove and have a gipsy tea. Otherwise we held no communication with the world; letters could not reach us—we were "at sea."

On one of our runs on shore I bought a society paper. I read therein, to my amazement, that Lord Kinross was cruising in the Mediterranean, and that his approaching marriage with the handsome Mrs. Norton would take place in Paris.

"Frankie, look here!" I cried.

My cousin nodded, taking the paper from me.

"Tear it up," she said, "I don't want Hartland to see the paragraph. I know all about it; I sent the notice myself."

"Why?"

"Don't you understand," she cried impatiently. "The paragraph will be copied by the other papers. Fluffy will be sure to catch sight of it somewhere, and——"

"He'll go to Paris?" I exclaimed.

"I hope so."

"And all the time you're going to be married at Cromer?"

Frankie shook her head. "Not if I can help it, Cynthia. You don't know Fluffy. He won't leave me a loophole of escape if he can help it. He will be prepared for me at Cromer and at Paris too. My only chance is to be married at a little out-of-the-way place that Fluffy's never heard of. And"—she paused—"be married quickly."

I glanced at her anxiously. We had been at sea just on a fortnight. We were, in fact, due at Cromer the end of the week—seven days before the date fixed for the wedding. Up to the present my cousin had not spoken to Hartland as to lengthening the cruise. She was, I thought, leaving it somewhat late. For the first time Frankie seemed to have lost her nerve.

That afternoon we sighted the Channel Islands. Frankie and Mrs. Venables grew quite enthusiastic over their beauties.

"Such a climate!" said the Venables woman.

"Such lovely walks," cried Frankie, "and such flowers! I believe Guernsey's a paradise of roses."

"It sounds promising," said Chesterton.

"It's perfect!" returned my cousin, her eyes sparkling. "What do you say, Hartland, shall we explore paradise?"

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"I'm quite willing to stay at Guernsey for a day or two, if that's what you mean, Frankie," said his lordship. Then, under cover of the wind, softly whispered, "If it will please you, dearest."

"That's settled, then," said my cousin brightly. "To-night we dine on shore."

"I'm willing," announced Chesterton, "and so is Cynthia. We always think alike," with which astounding statement he vainly tried to take my hand.

Nobody seemed to think it necessary to consult Mrs. Venables. But then she did not think it necessary herself. I felt much relieved at the arrangement. It seemed as if Frankie had made her first step towards defeating Fluffy!

I stood close beside my cousin watching the shores of the island growing more distinct.

Shortly after Kinross carried her off.

Together they paced the deck, until, fearing she would be tired, he placed her on a pile of cushions, throwing himself at her feet. The moon was rising over the water, we were drifting slowly, smoothly into the harbour. The whole world seemed at peace.

I knew my cousin was going to appeal to Hartland, and felt anxious, cruelly anxious, as to the result. I could not wait, I felt I must learn then and there whether or no she was successful. I lingered near them, hovering in the shadow.

"We've had a happy time, Hartland," said my cousin, "this last fortnight."

"The best and happiest in my life, sweetheart," he answered.

"You'll be sorry when it comes to an end?"

"Our cruise, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Hardly. You see," he put his arms about her with an eager gesture—"you see, my darling, every day that brings our voyage nearer to a close, hastens the day when I shall have you for my own. My sweet, my love, the weeks have gone so slowly, the hours are leaden, each day lengthens itself to six. How can I sorrow that the time of waiting will so soon be over? How can I, tell me?" He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately—kissed her eyes, her throat, her hair, made glorious by the moon's soft light.

He loved her, surely he loved her! In face of such a love, he would, he must, forgive her everything. And yet?

I sighed and wrung my hands. Men are hard, hard and cold in judging the woman they love. Percival Hope had cared for me, I thought, but he had judged me.

But Kinross was softer, more gentle than Percival. What could Fluffy know of my cousin that her lover would not forgive? Percival had tried to prejudice him against her but in vain. Was it likely that Fluffy—*Fluffy!* how the name mocked the man—would succeed where Percival had failed?

And yet Frankie had defied Hope, had laughed at him. This other she could not defy. She feared him, feared him greatly.

Frankie's voice, low and thrilling, broke my thoughts.

"Would you weary of sailing the summer seas under the blue sky and the warm sun—just you and I, my dearest?" She threw her arms round his neck and gazed at him with those strange, those wonderful eyes.

"So you were with me, I should never weary," he answered readily, almost, I thought, too readily.

"I always loved the sea," she went on softly; "but never, I think, so much as now. Wild, restless, caressing, fierce, it appeals to me like some beautiful feline thing—I hate to think of crowds these days; people and fashions and functions seem to jar on me. Need we go back to Cromer just yet, Hartland? Let us snatch all we can of this free, this beautiful life."

"My dearest——" He paused, and seemed a little at a loss. Then—"It's quite delightful of you, Frankie, to like this quiet life. In fact, it's positively charming—and so unexpected. All the same, you know, the world, being as it is, I don't think we can keep out of it much longer. We're not in Arcadia, Frankie, and the notion of prolonging our cruise indefinitely, turning up for our marriage at the last moment, so to speak, doesn't commend itself to me. After we're married we'll sail the summer seas to all eternity—if it please you."

Frankie leant against him in the darkness.

"Hartland," she said softly, "don't you think a fashionable wedding's an awful bore? A nice quiet affair in a country village is much more to my taste. Say"—she held up her face for a kiss—"shall we be married in Guernsey, you and I?"

For a moment he hesitated. She was lovely enough to stir romance in any man, and the notion was romantic, not to say far-fetched. It might even be considered ridiculous by some. That decided him, of all things Lord Kinross dreaded ridicule.

"You're whimsical as the sea itself, Frankie," he said, with an uneasy little laugh.

"Don't you think it's a delightful idea?"

"Entirely; but—well, you see, there's a horrid lot of rules and regulations about licenses, and things. A man can't get married in a casual sort of way, you know, he's got to go through an immense deal of formality. Society expects it, Frankie, and Lady Linton, my aunt, you know, simply demands it. She would be furious, and——" He laughed. "A furious aunt I cannot bear with, even for you. We'll stay a day or two in Guernsey, till Monday if you like. And then—then we must set sail for Cromer."

He spoke with an air of determination. To combat his decision further would be useless. Frankie did not attempt to do so. She patted his coat-sleeve, and said, smiling, "You're terribly wise, Hartland."

"You're adorably foolish!" he retorted, and the matter ended.

That evening, as Frankie had determined, we dined on shore, at a delightfully quaint old inn, smothered with roses and wisteria.

During the next few days we had a happy, peaceful time. Frankie's fears lessened, she felt secure in Hartland's affection, sure of her own powers of fascination. Fluffy had made no sign; he was doubtless cruising the Mediterranean or searching Paris.

I was very sorry when our stay in Guernsey drew to a close, and so was Frankie. We were to start for Cromer early Monday morning. On Sunday evening Hartland proposed an expedition to an old abbey some miles inland.

"We'll drive there," he said, "and walk back in the moonlight."

Mrs. Venables decided the fatigue would be too great, so leaving her comfortably settled on the verandah the rest of us started in high spirits for the abbey.

It was a delightful drive, the country, a very wilderness of flowers, lay fresh and fair under the blue sky, while in the distance the white-crested waves dashed against the cliffs.

We had a meal at a farmhouse near the ruins, sweet-tasting bread, coffee and cream, with pears, apples and plums. Then just as the moon tipped the trees with light, we started on our homeward way.

Laughing and talking in light-hearted fashion, the time and distance passed quickly. As we neared the town we met a group of peasants, dark-eyed women in white caps, and pretty, fair-haired children. Hartland paused to distribute pence and smiles to the little ones; Frankie, half impatient at his delay, went on. I watched her, tall and slim, as she went up the hill that looks upon the little town. She reached the top and, for a moment, stood a solitary figure outlined against the moonlit sky. The next, someone, a man, had joined her. They stood together, his face was turned towards me.

I felt as though a cold hand gripped my heart. There in the moonlight, a smile upon his face, a greeting on his lips, stood—Fluffy!

For a moment Frankie could not speak, then, with an effort, she pulled herself together and shook hands with him. By this time we had all come up the hill. Kinross welcomed Fluffy warmly, and Chesterton seemed charmed to see him.

"Where have you come from?" said my cousin at last "It's delightful, but surprising, to stumble on you here."

"So long as you're pleased," he said softly, "what does it matter. Still, if you're curious, I've come on business. You're looking well, Mrs. Norton, and Miss Cynthia," he looked at me in his old, kindly fashion, "is quite blooming. When do you leave the island, Kinross?"

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"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA," IS THE TITLE OF A NEW SERIES OF REMARKABLE SOCIETY STORIES WHICH COMMENCES IN "SHORT STORIES" ON NOV. 4TH.

"To-morrow morning early. And you?"

"My plans for the moment are unsettled."

"I shall hope to see you at Cromer, any way," said Kinross. "Thursday's the all-important day, you know."

"Your wedding is fixed for that date?" Fluffy asked.

Kinross nodded.

"I congratulate you." Fluffy smiled and offered Frankie his assistance down the hill. She laid her fingers lightly on his arm, and with wonderful self-possession commenced to ask how he was, what he had been doing, and if he had missed her very much.

Not once did she flinch or show a sign of fear, but throughout the evening she did not leave him. He had no chance, no opportunity to speak to Kinross.

At length he said he must go, he was stopping at a hotel at the other side of the town.

"I shall see you in the morning," he said to Kinross. "I'll look you up before you start."

"All right," said his lordship. "Remember, we leave at nine."

Fluffy waved an adieu and started quickly down the road.

"Cynthia," said my cousin, drawing me aside, "run after him *now*, at once. Give him this," she handed me a note, "and bring back the answer. *Run.*"

Obediently I hurried down the long white road. Fluffy heard me coming and turned to meet me.

"Frankie said I was to give you this," I panted.

He took the note and read it thoughtfully.

"What is the answer, please, I must make haste?"

For a moment he paused, then in a low voice said—"The answer, Cynthia, is 'yes'!"

Frankie hurried me up the stairs before she let me speak.

"He says 'yes!'" I announced breathlessly. "What does he mean, Frankie?"

My cousin faced me, a strange look in her eyes, a look which frightened me.

"It means that I shall win," she cried, "yes, I shall win. Listen, Cynthia," she came close to me and spoke rapidly. I'm going to meet Fluffy to-morrow morning at half-past six. I shall steal out of the hotel without anyone seeing me, but in case of inquiry you must say I'm sleeping here with you. Keep your door locked till I come back. Say I'm ill, or asleep, if anyone asks for me. You understand?" She tightly grasped my arm. "You mustn't fail me, it's the last thing I shall ask of you."

"You're going to see Fluffy, to try and persuade him——" She interrupted me.

"Yes," she said, "I'm going to *persuade* him," and she gave a horrid little laugh.

She left me then. I heard her footsteps down the passage, heard her softly enter her room and lock the door. Perhaps—I do not know—perhaps she slept that night; for me there was no sleep.

I feared, yet longed to meet the morning. The look in my cousin's eyes haunted me. The mockery of her laugh chilled me. She was going to meet Fluffy, to persuade him, to——. I shuddered and covered my face with my hands, a horrible fear at my heart. I waited, chilled, fearful for the dawn to break.

At six o'clock I heard those same soft steps outside my door. Frankie was going out. Should I go after her, beg and pray to accompany her? It would be useless! Frankie would tolerate no interference. Besides, what excuse should I make? What cause had I to fear? Nothing but a look in her eyes, a tone in her voice. And yet that vague, that horrible dread lay upon me like a nightmare. I tried to shake it off. I opened my window wide and drew in long breaths of the cool, morning air. I watched my cousin down the street, straining my eyes to follow her as she walked swiftly along the road that led over the hills towards an old stone quarry.

I wondered, was it at the quarry she was going to meet him?

Long after she had passed out of sight I gazed, until my eyes grew heavy and my head ached. I dropped upon the floor and rested my arms upon the window-sill. My head drooped, my eyes closed—I fell asleep.

A quick, sharp knock at the door aroused me. I sprang to my feet—the clock was on the stroke of eight.

"Open, Cynthia, quick, it is I," said a low voice.

Trembling I drew back the bolt and Frankie entered.

"You have seen him?" I asked. "What has happened, tell me?"

I bent towards her eagerly, but, as I met her gaze, I saw that in her face which brought a cry of terror to my lips.

"Where is he?" I screamed. "You've—you've——"

She thrust her hand over my mouth and forced me on the bed.

"You fool, you little fool. Be quiet—be quiet, I say."

"Tell me," I pleaded, thrusting her from me. "I will be quiet, indeed I will be quiet, but tell me what has happened."

"All that I wished," she answered quietly. "Fluffy will not get to Cromer in time to stop my wedding *now*."

"But how? Frankie, I must know, I will know." Something seemed to give me courage, I started to my feet and stood before her. "You've got to tell me," I said firmly.

She glanced at me curiously. "Fluffy will keep silence," she said, "does not that satisfy you?"

I shook my head. "Where is he?" I asked hoarsely.

"I don't know," she returned flippantly. "At the hotel, I suppose."

"*Frankie!*"

She turned upon me fiercely. "I'll have no more of this," she cried. "You are beside yourself. What has happened, indeed? What should happen? Anger and threats on his side, sweet words, promises, and flattery on mine. And as usual I proved the stronger. Get yourself dressed, child, and give me no more nonsense. I have told you too much of my affairs, it seems. Make haste, it is past eight already. We have to be on board the yacht at nine."

At this moment there came a knocking at the door.

"What has become of *you*, Cynthia?" chirped Mrs. Venables, "your cousin has quite disappeared, her room's empty."

With a warning look at me, Frankie, admitted the little woman.

"Cynthia's not well, poor child," said Frankie. "She's been ill all night, and couldn't sleep. She came to me quite early this morning, I've been with her ever since."

"She does look bad," said Mrs. Venables. "What is it, do you think?"

Frankie smiled, and laid her hand caressingly upon my arm.

"She can't bear the idea of parting from me, Mrs. Venables. The silly child positively dreads my marriage, it's making her quite ill. I tell her I shall always care for her the same, but she won't believe it. She's been crying half the night—look at her eyes."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Venables, "what a silly thing to do. You may be getting married yourself before long. You shouldn't grudge your cousin her happiness."

"You mustn't scold her, Mrs. Venables." Frankie stooped and kissed me. "Dear little girl," she said.

Passively I let my cousin smooth my hair, arrange my dress, and lead me down to breakfast. As usual, she had proved too much for me, I was as wax in her hands.

I got through breakfast somehow, though it was a terrible ordeal. They were all very kind to me, and said how sorry they were I was not well. Hartland was especially nice—just like he used to be in the days when I first knew him.

"Mrs. Venables has been telling tales, Cynthia," he said softly. "What a silly little girl you are! Is it likely I should wish to part you from Frankie? I'm quite as fond of you as she is. You ought to be pleased to gain a nice-looking cousin like me."

I smiled feebly and forced some toast down my throat. I was in a state of terrible expectancy. Something, I felt, was going to happen.

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Breakfast over, we sauntered down to the quay, taking a last look of the town on our way.

"Fluffy's not turned up after all," said Kinross. "I suppose he's overslept himself."

"I'm sorry," said Frankie, "I should like to have seen him."

"He's sure to turn up at Cromer, anyway," remarked Kinross.

Frankie gave a start at the words; I gave a shudder.

Just as we were about to embark, Mrs. Venables discovered she had left her writing-case behind.

"It's most unfortunate," she cried. "I must go back for it at once. I could not possibly leave it in a strange hotel."

"They'll send it on all right," said Kinross. "I've left them our address in case of any letters coming. It will mean quite twenty minutes' delay if you go back. Can't you do without it, Mrs. Venables, the tide's just on the turn?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't," was the reply.

"Send a messenger." Kinross motioned to a group of loiterers on the quay.

"Thank you, I would rather go myself."

After that there seemed nothing more to say, and Mrs. Venables was about to start back to the hotel when Frankie interposed.

"You simply mustn't go," she said, "you'll tire yourself completely; and, what is more important, we shall miss the tide. Cynthia will be there and back in no time. She shall fetch the case. No," as Chesterton stepped forward to accompany me, "you're not to go with her, we shouldn't see either of you for an hour at least. Go, Cynthia, like a dear girl, and be as quick as possible."

I hurried back to the hotel, procured the writing case, and was making my way once more to the quay, when somebody shouted to me to stop. A young man came running towards me.

"There's been a bad accident," he said, "a gentleman staying at the Hotel Poulin has fallen down the quarry. He went out early this morning, and has only just now been discovered."

"Is he dead?" I asked, with white lips.

"No, but badly hurt. He is, I think, a friend of your party?"

"He is," I said. "I will go now and tell them. He must not be left among strangers."

I flew down to the quay. Come what would, poor Fluffy should not be left alone. Some of us, or all of us, must go back and look after him. Frankie was waiting for me in the boat, the others had already gone aboard the yacht.

She realised at once that I had news.

"You must come back," I cried distractedly. "Fluffy is hurt, dangerously hurt, dying perhaps."

For answer she tried to pull me in the boat. In my fright and agitation I missed my footing—the next moment I was in the sea. The sound of many waters in my ears, the sight of Frankie's face, white and set, before my eyes—I sank down, and down, and down.

I knew no more until I found myself in my berth on board the yacht. Frankie was beside me.

"You're not to speak, dearie," she said, watching my face. "Just drink this and go to sleep."

I pushed her hand aside, and sat up with eager, questioning eyes.

"It's all right, Cynthia," she said, with a soft smile. "There's nothing for you to worry about. Fluffy's much better; Chesterton went back and made inquiries. It wasn't a serious accident, after all. How did it happen? Why," she paused, and her hands opened and shut convulsively; "He walked too close to the edge of the quarry, I suppose; he must have been standing right on the edge, and—and he lost his balance," she said hoarsely, "and fell over."

"And you, where were you when he fell?"

"I?—I?" She laughed. "I was with my little cousin; with you Cynthia, dear."

"Frankie!" I sat bolt upright and clutched her arm, "it is not true," I said. "He did not fall; you—*you* pushed him over!"

(The last of this series containing the grand climax appears in next Tuesday's issue.)

Your Editor Chats.

It has been necessary, owing to an unlooked-for development in connection with the new series of articles—"How I Chaperoned Belinda"—to postpone publication for a week. In dealing with statements of the kind contained in the articles it is absolutely necessary that the greatest possible care should be taken to give offence to no one, and I am sure that in this matter readers will agree with me. The first article will be published in *Short Stories*, ready on Tuesday, November 4th, and the cover will bear a picture of Lady Peggy Carstairs (the author of the articles) and of Belinda North.

We have paid a large amount of money for the right to publish these articles, but we hope to get a good return by way of increased circulation. Those readers who think sufficiently well of the paper and appreciate it enough to help us, can do so by *simply buying one extra copy of the issue ready on Tuesday, November 4th, and giving that copy to a friend who might be interested.* The extra cost to you is only a penny, yet if you and your fellow-readers each bought an extra copy just for one week and gave it away to a friend, the circulation would be doubled.

Don't think to yourself—"Oh, well, if I don't buy an extra copy it won't make much difference; there are thousands of other people who will do so." If everyone who reads these lines thought the same no good would be done. Your arguments should rather be—"Anyway, whatever anybody else does, *I* will buy an extra copy for that particular week."

PERCIVAL HOPE.

I gather from letters received from readers that they do not consider Percival Hope a sufficiently interesting individual to justify my trying to obtain from him an account of his experiences. I shall, therefore, not trouble him in the matter.

AN APOLOGY.

Will those readers who applied for leaflets in connection with the new serial story, and who did not receive them, please accept my apologies for the disappointment. The truth of the matter is that, so numerous were the applications that the stock of leaflets was exhausted before all the applications were dealt with. I shall, however, communicate with these readers in the course of a few days

Your Editor.

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A REAL LOVE AND A FALSE.

The Tale of an Accident.

I WAS a coquette.

Many a lover's heart I had lacerated by refusing his offer of marriage, after I had lured him on to a "declaration."

My last victim's name was James Frazer. He was a tall, awkward, homely and ungainly man, but his heart was as true as steel. I respected him highly, and felt pained when I witnessed his anguish at my rejection of him.

But the fact was, I had myself fallen in love with Elliott Tracy, a smart City man, who had been unremitting in his devotion to me. James Frazer warned me against Elliott, but I charged him with jealousy, and took his warnings as an insult. A few days later Elliott and I were engaged, and my dream of romantic love seemed to be in a fair way towards realisation. I had a week of happiness. Many have not had so much in a lifetime. Many awake from the bright, short dream to find themselves in lifelong darkness, and bondage from which there is no escape. Thank God, I was not to be so miserable as they!

There was a party on horseback winding through our grand old woods and quiet country roads. Elliott and I led the cavalcade. I rode my own beautiful Brown Bess. Elliott was mounted on the handsome black horse that had been given to him by a rich uncle. Following us were a bevy of merry girls and their cavaliers, and among them, tall, awkward, and silent, rode James Frazer. His presence had marred all the pleasure of my ride, and I was glad to be in advance of them all, that I might not see him.

And so we rode on through the lovely country and I listened well pleased to the low but animated words of Elliott Tracy, who wished himself a knight, and me a fair ladye of the olden time, that he might go forth to do battle for me, and compel all men to recognise the claims of his peerless love.

Very eloquently he spoke the inspiration of love, of the brave deeds and perilous exploits it had prompted, wishing again and again that he might thus proclaim and maintain his love before the world. It pleased me to listen to this, and to believe it sincere, though I surely had no wish to put my lover to such a test.

Suddenly a shot rang through the still woods, and a wounded bird, darting past, fluttered and fell at the feet of Brown Bess. With a bound and a spring, that nearly unseated me, she was off.

Struggling to regain my seat, I had no power to restrain her, and even as she flew the fear and madness of the moment grew upon her. I could only cling breathlessly to mane and bridle and wonder helplessly where this mad gallop was to end. She swerved from a passing waggon, and turned into a cart track that led to the river. In the sudden movement the reins had been torn from my hands, and I could not regain them.

I clung to the mane, and closed my eyes that I might not behold the fate that awaited me. How sweet was life in those precious moments which I thought my last! How all its joys, its affections, its last crowning love rose up before me! I thought of the pang that would rend Elliott's heart as he saw me lying mangled and dead, and then the thought would come that he was pursuing and trying to save me, even, as he had said, at the risk of life and limb.

I remembered no more. I felt a sudden shock, a fearful rushing through the air, and knew nothing until, days afterwards, I woke to a faint, weak semblance of life, in my room at home.

I never saw Elliott Tracy again. The last words I ever heard from his lips were those of knightly daring. The last act of his life, in connection with mine, was to follow in the train of frightened youths who rode after me, to contemplate the disaster from afar, and as soon as he saw me lifted from the shallow bed of the river into which I had been thrown when my frightened horse stopped suddenly on its bank, to ride hastily back to the village. That evening he sent to make inquiries, and learning that I was severely but it was hoped not fatally injured, he thenceforth contented himself with such tidings of my condition and improvement as could be gained from village rumours.

At last it was known that I would never recover entirely from the effects of my injury, and that very day Elliott Tracy departed suddenly from the village.

He made no attempt to see me, nor sent me any farewell. When I was once more about, and beginning to learn the lesson of patience and resignation that awaited me, I received a letter from him, in which he merely said that he presumed my own judgment had taught me that, in my altered circumstances, our engagement must be at an end; but to satisfy his own sense of honour (his honour?) he wrote to say that, while entertaining the highest respect for me, he desired a formal renunciation of my claim.

Writing at the bottom of this letter, "Let it be as you wish," I returned it to him at once, and thus ended my brief dream of a romantic love.

I had heard ere this of Elliott Tracy's cowardly conduct on that day, and now I first bethought me to inquire who had rescued me from imminent death.

Then I learnt that James Frazer, his arm already broken by the jerk with which Brown Bess tore away from him as he caught at her bridle, had ridden after me, and was the first to lift me from the water.

Many times daily he had made inquiries for me. His had been the hand that sent the rare flowers that decked my room. His were the books I read in the lingering days of convalescence, and his, now, was the arm that supported me as, slowly and painfully, I paced the garden walks.

I have been his wife for many a year. I have forgotten that he is not handsome, or rather he is beautiful to me, because I see his grand and lovely spirit shining through his plain features, and animating his awkward figure.

I have long since laid aside, as utterly untenable, my pet theory that beautiful spirits dwell only in lovely bodies.

It may be a providential compensation that, in denying physical perfection, the soul is not dwarfed or distorted, but shines the brighter that it is not marred by petty vanity or love of the world's praise.

E. Ashton.

Mr. Younghusband (reading from paper): "'Married—Blanche de Smythe to Walter Wellington Jones.' What old memories that name awakens!" Mrs. Y. (blushing): "I never imagined you knew of my engagement to Walter." Mr. Y. (chillingly): "I was alluding to Blanche."

He: "My dear cousin, I assure you I would never dare rob those sweet lips of a kiss." She: "Oh, you hypocrite! Didn't you make an attempt of that character the other day?" He: "Never. Far from having any intention of robbing you of a kiss, I was trying to give you one."

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The Diplomacy of Sir Dennis.

"What is the matter *now*?"

Sir Dennis Hawtrey laid down his book, and gazed with mild exasperation at the excited, tearful woman who had just burst into his study. The most peace-loving and easy-going of men, his hard fate had bestowed on him a restless, excitable, nervous wife, who did her best to worry his life out with constant petty grievances.

"It's Hilda," she exclaimed. "To think I have but the one child, and she such a trial, wilful, perverse, idiotic——"

"Compose yourself, my love," gently interposed Sir Dennis. "Your voice is rising to a scream. Pray don't prance about the room. Sit down quietly and tell me what is wrong. Some trifle, as usual, I suppose."

Lady Hawtrey gave a hysterical laugh, and coming to a halt opposite her husband, gasped out, in a voice intended to be calmly ironical, "Oh, yes, a mere trifle. Hilda has just informed me that she is engaged to, and means to marry, a man in a bicycle shop." Then she paused for the expected explosion. None came. Sir Dennis took off his glasses, rubbed them carefully, settled them once more upon his nose, looked placidly at his wife, and uttered a very unemotional "Dear me."

"Is *that* all you say?" cried Lady Hawtrey. "Hilda! not yet introduced—scarcely eighteen—our only child and heiress—proposes to marry a young man who teaches in a bicycle school, and all you say is, 'dear me.'"

"What did *you* say?" quietly asked Sir Dennis.

"I told her she was a silly child, and I should send her to a strict school at once, unless she promised to be more sensible. I forbade her to dream of such a thing, or ever to speak to the man again. But she is in open rebellion, says her life's happiness is at stake, and no one shall come between her and her choice. For once you must exert your authority, and act as her father and the head of the family."

"I will," responded Sir Dennis, rather to his wife's surprise. "I have always known the time would come when I should be obliged to take the reins altogether out of your hands, and drive the coach myself. That time has now come." Sir Dennis rose to his feet, and his gentle, weary voice took a commanding ring which was as new as it was disagreeable to his wife. "I forbid you—I repeat, I *forbid* you to say one harsh word to Hilda, or to have anything whatever to do with this affair. Leave it entirely to me. *I* will take Hilda in hand."

Lady Hawtrey had always considered her husband a weak, indolent man, who allowed her to govern partly because it saved him trouble, and partly because he recognised in her his superior. This latter idea she now feared was a mistake.

Hilda proved difficult to manage. She had her father's surface pliability with a strong will underneath. Like her father, she never wasted time or strength in argument. She now simply stated that she had fallen in love with Leonard Chandler, and intended to marry him, with or without her parents' consent.

"I have not refused my consent," her father observed. "Your happiness is my first object, and if marriage with this young man will secure it, I will certainly not put any obstacle in your way. Have you considered that the young man is not in your own rank of life?"

Hilda had considered it, but was no believer in rank. Leonard was quite as much of a gentleman as any of the men she had met; indeed, his manners were superior in suavity and courtly grace even to her father's. The distinctions of rank were now obsolete. One peer was a coal merchant, a countess had a shop, a tea-dealer was a baronet, and on quite intimate terms with royalty.

"There is much in what you say, Hilda," replied her father thoughtfully, "and I daresay your mother's prejudices are foolish. Best not discuss the matter with her. Write to Mr. Chandler, asking him to call on me to-morrow afternoon. Meantime, say no more to your mother on the subject."

Lady Hawtrey suffered agonies next day. Scold Hilda or nag her husband she dared not, keep her anger to herself she could not, so she found a safety valve in writing long letters to her dearest friends, hinting at terrible events about to take place in the family. She was thus occupied when her husband strolled into her boudoir, and sat down, remarking casually, "I've just seen young Chandler—Hilda's future husband—you know."

"What, has he *dared* to approach you?" Lady Hawtrey was beginning, when Sir Dennis interrupted her.

"Florence, if you cannot discuss this matter calmly, I shall not discuss it with you at all. Yes, I know you're her mother and all the rest of it," he added, anticipating the flood of words about to issue from her protesting mouth, "but you are also a tactless and indiscreet woman, and this is a matter which will want the nicest management, the keenest diplomacy to avert disaster. Hilda is difficult to manage, and if you interfere, you'll ruin everything."

Lady Hawtrey gave an indignant snort, but her husband went ruthlessly on: "This fellow is wonderfully handsome, well-educated, and gentlemanly. I don't altogether wonder that a romantic child like Hilda should idealise him into a fairy-prince, but if she's pulled up too sharply, she'll bolt. Chandler's father had a general shop, which the widow carries on, and they are well-to-do people for their station, but of course the lad knows he might as well propose for a royal princess as for Hilda. He spoke quite sensibly, and I could not help seeing that Hilda had—well, made the running, so to speak. He owns it's absurd on the face of it, but he says Hilda loves him, and he won't fail her, which of course means if she wants to run away with him, he's ready."

"Can't you buy him off?" burst in Lady Hawtrey. Her husband shook his head.

"No," he said placidly. "I shan't try. I've given my consent."

Lady Hawtrey gave a yell of dismay.

"Please don't make that disagreeable noise. Hang it all, Florence, you don't suppose I want a grocer's son in the family. Now, look here, I pointed out to him that his present position in life was undesirable, and offered to assist him to a better one."

Lady Hawtrey clasped her hands, and raised her eyes in mute appeal to Heaven.

"And, if he does well," continued Sir Dennis imperturbably, "the marriage will take place next summer—provided Hilda has not changed her mind."

"Changed her mind? *Hilda?* Why, she's as obstinate as a mule—or yourself."

"Precisely, and if I put this fólly down with a strong hand, there's no knowing what she may do. As it is, I've been so kind, so fatherly, so sympathetic, that they are both on honour to do nothing underhand. Chandler is to be received here, and I must ask you to be gracious to him—civil, at least. No doubt Hilda has confided to him your opinion of the matter, so he won't expect much."

The suggestion of a trip to the Paris Exhibition, which her father made a week later, and which would have delighted her in other circumstances, brought a mutinous little frown to Hilda's brow.

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"I don't want to leave Leonard," she said, looking defiantly from her mother's compressed lips and flashing eyes to her father's bland countenance. "And I am going to pay a visit this afternoon to Mrs. Chandler. She sent me a kind message by Leonard, saying she never paid visits—I suppose her health is not good—but hoped I would come and see her. And I shall."

"Quite right, my dear," cordially responded Sir Dennis. "And we can put off the Paris trip till you feel inclined for it, so you need not leave Leonard yet awhile."

"You shall *not* go and visit that woman," burst in Lady Hawtrey, looking dangerous.

"Nonsense, my love, why should not Hilda visit her future relatives?" mildly inquired Sir Dennis. "I will take you there this afternoon, Hilda, if you like."

"Oh, thank you, father; I shall like that!"

"We won't have the carriage, but go on the top of a 'bus, and I'll leave you at the door, and send the carriage for you later. Go and get ready now, dear," he added, as his wife began a furious tirade, addressed partly to Hilda and partly to himself. "Don't interfere, Florence!" he continued, as the door closed behind their daughter. "This visit will be the first shock to Hilda's illusions. The child hasn't an idea where or how these people live. She thinks they have a place like Harrods' Stores, and a private house somewhere. I've been to the shop. It's a mean little place in a dirty back street, and Mrs. Chandler matches it. Whether the mother and sisters are servile or familiar, they'll equally disgust Hilda. I've seen them."

Hilda reappeared, a dainty little figure in her simple but stylish costume, and father and daughter started off together. Hilda always enjoyed her father's society, and this afternoon he was more fascinating than ever, so it was not until they had alighted from the 'bus, and walked some little distance that she noticed her surroundings.

"This isn't at all a nice street!" she observed, looking round her with marked disfavour. Her father made no rejoinder, but chatted gaily on for another ten minutes, when he stopped before a small provision shop, with the remark, "Here we are, my dear!"

Hilda looked at the shop, and then at her father.

"*This?* This—it—it *can't* be!" she faltered.

"Yes, dear, it is. There's the name above the door. I see there's no private entrance, so you must go in through the shop. You had better invite the family to dinner. Settle it with Mrs. Chandler, and your mother shall fix a day. Good-bye, dear, the carriage will call for you in about an hour."

Lifting his hat, he walked airily away, leaving his daughter standing transfixed at the shop entrance, a strong perfume of onion, cheese and pickles, saluting her nostrils. As she entered the shop, there issued from the room beyond it a portly, very handsome woman, who came forward, wiping her mouth with her apron, and inquiring, "What might you please to want, miss?"

"I want to see Mrs. Chandler."

"That's me, miss," returned the woman, with a smile which gave her an appalling resemblance to her son.

"I'm—I'm—Hilda—Hilda Hawtrey!" faltered the girl, and her future mother-in-law instantly plunged round the counter at her, folded her in a warm, fat embrace, and said in a voice to match, "You're welcome, my dear, heartily welcome. Come into the parlour, and make acquaintance with the rest of us."

It was five o'clock, and the Chandler family had just sat down to tea, which with them was the chief meal of the day. The 'round table was laden with hot buttered toast, tea-cake, shrimps, ham, watercress, radish, and other good things.

"This is Hildar," said Mrs. Chandler, introducing her young visitor—"Leonard's young lady. These are my girls, dear, Beatrice, Adar, and Maud, and this is my youngest boy, Albert."

The girls, plain likenesses of Leonard, welcomed Hilda with warmth, and rather greasy kisses; Albert, a common-looking lad of eighteen, with a shrimpy, but cordial handshake

"Ain't this comfortable?" beamed Mrs. Chandler, in front of her stout brown tea-pot. "Here's your tea, dear. Pass the cake, Albert. And how's your mar, dear?"

"Very well, thank you," said Hilda mechanically.

"Leonard tells us she's against the match," pursued honest Mrs. Chandler, who was as worthy an old soul as ever served behind the counter, or went every Sunday to chapel; "and, you know, my dear, we can't wonder for you are far above us, though Leonard is a good, well-principled lad, which is better than gold. But our stations is very different, I know."

"Lor', mar!" cried the eldest girl, "how you do go on. Love levels all ranks, we know, and Hildar's got a young gentleman to be proud of. Adar's young gentleman is quite a toff—a clerk in a very big place of business, but he don't look down upon Adar because her mar's in a very small way."

"Well, now, Beatrice, that's quite different," replied the mother. "Trade is trade, whether large or small, but Hildar here is in quite a different spear. She is an aristocrat."

"'The rank is but a guinea stamp a man's a man for a' that!'" suddenly spouted Albert, so unexpectedly that Hilda, who sat next him, quite jumped.

"Yes, and Miss Evans, my teacher at school," chimed in Maud, a pert, plain girl of about fourteen, "says that distinctions of rank are quite obsolete now. It's only education that counts nowadays. An educated chimney sweep is the equal of a duke, Miss Evans says."

"Then Miss Evans is a fool!" broke in Ada, sharply. "Fancy a chimney sweep being my equal! No, but a lady *is* a lady; you can't be more than that. I'm a lady, and Hildar's a lady, so it's ridiculous to say we ain't equals!"

"I wish you'd stop talking nonsense, and leave this poor child in peace!" said the mother, whom Hilda regarded as the only person of common sense in the party. "Can't you find something pleasanter to talk about than Miss Evans and her silly ideas? Leonard will be home soon, now, dear," she added kindly to Hilda, "and then you shall have the best parlour to yourselves for a bit. You'll want to do some spooning, *I* know."

Hilda murmured something inarticulate, and the conversation went on round her full of jokes and allusions which were Greek to the girl from another world.

"I'm going to have a new dress, Hildar!" Beatrice suddenly called out. "Can you tell me what is being worn most just now?"

"This, I believe," faltered Hilda, indicating her own dress. Beatrice threw a scornful glance at her.

"That? Why, I call that downright dowdy!" she cried, and plunged into a discussion with her sisters upon the prevailing fashions. Hilda felt as if in a nightmare. How came she in this stuffy shop-parlour, with these common, vulgar girls, this underbred lad, this kind, but terribly cook-like old woman? Could she ever marry the son and brother of these people? The mere idea of ever meeting them again made her shiver, and she hailed the sound of carriage-wheels as a shipwrecked mariner might hail the sight of a sail.

It was a very meek, dejected little Hilda who entered her parents' presence an hour later, and went swiftly up to her father.

"Take me away, father," she said, in a low, repressed tone, "to Paris—anywhere. Say what you like to Leonard Chandler, only never let me see him or hear his name again. Promise me I shall not!"

And Sir Dennis carefully kept all signs of joy or triumph from face and voice as he gave the desired assurance.

Vera Serkoff.

"How I Chaperoned Belinda."

This is the title of a remarkable series of true Society stories, which commences in *Short Stories* on Tuesday, November 4th.

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A Cooking Secret.

Mr. E. Conomie: "Did you write to that man who advertises to show people how to make puddings without milk, and have them richer?" Mrs. E. Conomie: "Yes, and sent him the shilling." "What did he reply?" "Use cream."

He Found Her Dear too.

"Old fellow, I'm engaged to Miss Dashe. She's a dear girl." "She is so. She cost me about £100 the time I was engaged to her."

The Modern Engagement.

Young Man: "May I present myself as a suitor for your hand?" Maiden: "I am sorry to disappoint you, but the fact is, I betrothed myself to-day to another." Young Man: "Well, what about to-morrow?"

A Protection against Thieves.

A.: "Why, man, all your shop-girls are squint-eyed! Can't you manage to obtain a prettier set?" B.: "I have got these as a protection against shop-lifters. The scamps will never know where the girls are looking!"

A Case of Heredity.

Bertha: "Sometimes you appear really manly, and sometimes you are absolutely effeminate. How do you account for it?" Harold: "I suppose it is hereditary. Half my ancestors were males and the other half females."

Quite Unfair.

Mrs. Potts: "Just to think of you talking to me in such a style. You used to vow I was an angel." Mr. Potts: "Look here, my dear, that isn't fair; you know it isn't. What is the use of twitting a man about the lies he told fifteen years ago?"

A Pleasant Task.

He: "My dear Miss Golding, I should love to assist you in performing all the tasks that fall to your lot." She: "Oh, I have no tasks. I've nothing to do but sit and hold my hands." He: "Well, I should like to assist you in doing even that much."

A Difference of Years.

Miss Fourthseason: "Mr. Fledgely proposed to me last night." Miss Stinger: "Did you accept him?" Miss Fourthseason: "No, he is so young, I promised to wait a few years, however." Miss Stinger: "So nice of you, dear! He is younger than you, of course, now, but in a year or two he won't be."

Not even Cracked.

Clare was perched upon the fence-post, swinging her chubby legs and singing at the top of her sound little lungs. "Be careful, Clare," said I, as I passed; "you might fall and break your bones. I'm afraid you'll get hurt." "Oh, don't be 'fraid," she answered, reassuringly; "I did fall yesterday, and I never even cracked."

A Pleasure Lost.

Ethel: "What are you so angry about to-night?" Maud: "I've received a note from Jack saying that he's engaged to Clara Beachly." Ethel: "Well, I should think that would relieve your mind rather than make you angry. You were engaged to Tom Shore and intended to throw Jack over." Maud: "Yes, goosey, but do you think I wanted to lose the fun of throwing him over?"

What He Found.

Mr. Crossly: "I tell you before I go that I want beer for dinner, and when I get home what do I find?" Mrs. Crossly: "Fault, every time."

An Artful Miss.

She: "If you should attempt to kiss me I would call mamma." He: "And what would happen then?" She: "Oh, nothing, for mamma isn't at home."

Answered.

He: "If I should ask you to marry me, what would you say?" She: "Guess." He: "Well—er—what would it rhyme with?" She: "Guess."

Hope for Him.

He: "I shall never marry until I meet a woman who is my direct opposite." She (encouragingly): "Well, Mr. Duffer, there are numbers of intelligent girls in this neighbourhood."

How He Knew.

Arthur: "That's a newly married couple. He is always stepping on her dress." Bert: "What does that prove?" Arthur: "After he has been married some time, and found out what a dress costs, he will be more careful."

That Young Brother Again.

Little Johnny: "I'd a good deal rather have you callin' on sister than Mr. Nicefellow." Sister's Admirer (delighted): "Would you? Why?" Little Johnny: "'Cause whenever Mr. Nicefellow calls he stuffs up the keyhole."

No Need for Worry.

Mr. Nuwed (gloomily): "My salary has been cut down ten per cent." Mrs. Nuwed (cheerily): "Oh! don't worry about that, dear. Silk, Ribbon and Co. are advertising perfectly lovely things at a reduction of twenty per cent."

A Large Order.

Happy Bridegroom: "Waiter, I want a dinner for two." Waiter: "Vil ze lady and gentleman haf *table d'hôte* or *à la carte?*" Happy Bridegroom (generous to a fault, but weak in French): "Bring us some of both, and put lots of gravy on 'em."

Needed Lots of Support.

Father (sternly): "That is all very well, young man, but can you support my daughter?" Son-in-law: "Oh, yes, fairly well—that is to say, I can support her for an hour or two, but I begin to get tired after that. She's thundering heavy, you know."

But the Donkey didn't See it.

She: "You know, Reggie, that girls are being called by the names of the flowers now, and my sister suggested that I should be called Thistle." Reggie: "Oh, yes, I see; because you are so sharp?" She: "Oh, no; she said it was because a donkey loved me."

Pronunciation.

"George," said a girl the other night, "here's a piece in the paper headed 'Kismet.' What does Kismet mean?" "The word must be pronounced with the 't' silent, Nettie," replied George. "Why, that would be 'Kiss me,'" said Nettie. "With the greatest pleasure," replied George. And he did.

A Reformation Quelled.

"Look here," said the reforming husband, "we must have things arranged in this house so that we shall know just where everything is kept." "With all my heart," sweetly answered his wife, "and let us begin with your late hours, my love. I should dearly love to know where they are kept." He lets things run on as usual.

Her Code of Signals.

Caller: "Why are you waving your handkerchief so wildly?" Murilla: "Since papa has forbidden Jack the house we have arranged a code of signals." Caller: "What is it?" Murilla: "When he waves his handkerchief five times that means, 'Do you love me?' and when I wave frantically in reply it means, 'Yes, darling.'"

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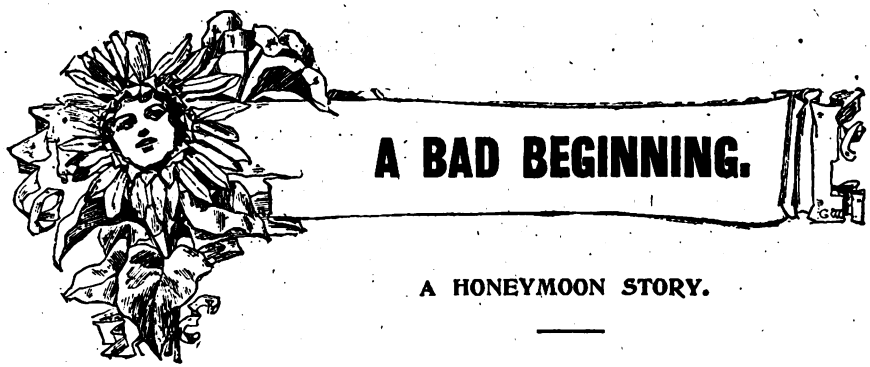

A BAD BEGINNING.

A HONEYMOON STORY.

"You'll be good to her, Spencer?"

"Good to Dora? Could I be anything else?"

"Yes, my dear boy, I believe you will, but you must forgive if a mother's feelings get the better of her on such an occasion as this, when her daughter—her only child—is going across the sea out of her sight."

"Of course! I quite understand. But look over there at Dora, saying good-bye to her bridesmaids; she doesn't look as if she had any fear for the future, does she?"

"No, I suppose she doesn't; and if she believes in you, so will I!"

"That's more like it," said Spencer Braithwaite, who, to tell the truth, was disposed to look upon his newly-acquired mother-in-law as a bit of a bore. "Dora and I will get along all right, for though I'd far rather live for her, I'd willingly die for her, if it would do her any good."

Spencer Braithwaite and Dora Drew had that morning been joined in the holy bonds of matrimony, and as the bridegroom's business interests demanded his immediate presence in Johannesburg, the happy pair had decided to regard the voyage to Cape Town in the light of a honeymoon.

Mrs. Drew, the four bridesmaids, and one or two personal friends of the bridegroom, had accompanied the couple to Southampton, whence the *Walmer Castle* was to sail at four o'clock.

Dora was one of those fragile little creatures, such as Dickens has made David Copperfield's first love. She adored her husband, mainly because he plainly let her see that he knew of her craving for the protection of a strong heart and arm, and would never let her lack it.

But it must be confessed that Spencer Braithwaite's claim to the possession of such strength, was, to say the least, problematical. He was—and he knew it—a highly nervous man, a man who, place him in a false position, would inevitably lose his head.

So long as he was a bachelor, this did not matter much; but with a wife to look after, who found it more than difficult to look after herself, there was evidently trouble in store for him.

The moment came for parting. "Strangers for the shore," sounded from end to end of the big liner, and the bridesmaids and Mrs. Drew only waited for the bridegroom's friends, who were having a "farewell" symposium in the saloon.

This was Dora's first experience of an ocean voyage, and it must be admitted that she looked forward to it with a certain amount of dread. Spencer did his best to allay her fears, and so far succeeded as to prevail upon her to keep the deck and watch the scenery.

He himself felt inclined for an adjournment to the smoke-room, for a restful cigar after the labours of the day.

She was disposed to be a little tearful at his implied desertion of her, but on his promise of a return after his first "weed," surrendered at discretion, and sought consolation in Marie Corelli's latest.

The trip was absolutely uneventful until Madeira was reached.

It is not usual for the African liners to stay long off the island, but, by a trick of fate, an accident to the screw shaft necessitated anchoring, and a delay of twelve hours or more.

"Will you come ashore for an hour or two, darling?" said Spencer.

"Oh, no, no!" replied Dora, with a pretty shriek. "I wouldn't go in one of those horrid little boats for anything, and I hope you won't, Spencer!"

"My darling! I don't want to cause you any anxiety on my account; but I've promised the doctor, and Captain Maskell (one of the passengers), to go and explore Funchal. Why won't you come? The boat is quite safe."

"It is very unkind of you to leave me, Spencer. How am I to know but that you may be stabbed, or something, by one of those dreadful-looking Portuguese!"

"Nonsense, my love! The boatmen are as harmless as—as I am."

"Well, I shall not have a minute's peace till you return, and I will not speak another word to Captain Maskell for the rest of the voyage."

It *was*, of course, very unkind of him, in his character of newly-married man, but what would you do? A bestowal of her in a cosy corner, a kiss, and a solemn declaration that he would be at her side again before she had finished half-a-dozen chapters of Marie Corelli, and he left her for the shore, fully intending to more than make up to her for the seeming neglect.

Except in the case of a stranger, there is not much to be seen in Funchal, therefore Spencer Braithwaite had but poor excuse for his dereliction from matrimonial duty. He knew it well, having often touched at Madeira in the course of his South African trips. During the late war, these expeditions had been suspended, so that he was glad to renew his acquaintance with the members of the British Club in Funchal.

Had this been all, everything would have been well.

"Ah, Braithwaite, glad to see you! Where have you been this age, old chap?"

Thus Arthur Ponsonby, Acting British-Consul, and an old friend of our new bridegroom.

A bottle of champagne; a brief explanation; and, on the announcement of the late wedding, profuse congratulations.

"Never thought you a marrying man, Braithwaite. Why didn't you bring Mrs. B. ashore with you?"

"She's nervous; very. Never been on the sea before; and she's frightened at the natives."

"That's bad; but I say, old fellow, do you remember the Señora?"

"The Señora? Oh, yes. She's married again, I suppose, by this time."

"Not a bit of it! Here, I'll tell you something. Do you know she's waiting for you. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Don't be idiotic, Ponsonby! Waiting for me. Why, what would Mrs. Braithwaite say if she heard you?"

"Oh! I expect you would have a sultry quarter of an hour, my boy! But seriously, old chap, she has delayed her return to Madrid, solely because of you."

"But it's too absurd."

"Would you like to see her?"

"Not for worlds!"

"Well, you saw me give that message to the waiter just after you came in, didn't you? I'm very sorry, but had I known of Mrs. Braithwaite's existence I wouldn't have done it—I really wouldn't!"

"What on earth do you mean?" queried Spencer, in a fever of apprehension.

"Why, I sent to tell her you were here."

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"You did?"

"Yes, and you may bet that, before many more minutes, she will be at the door inquiring for you."

Spencer Braithwaite was a fairly brave man, as men go; but this information completely took every ounce of spirit out of him.

"I haven't a minute to spare!" he gasped, as he consulted his watch. "I must get back to the ship!"

"But you have to wait here for the doctor, and your military friend!"

"I can't wait. I shall get on board at once! Why, that horrible Spanish woman would seize me and marry me in spite of myself! And what would become of—of Mrs. Braithwaite?"

"Very well, then, aboard it is. I'll come down to the landing-place, and see you safe on board the lugger."

In less than five minutes, the almost demented Braithwaite and his friend were within sight of the anchored liner.

"There's a boat pulling shorewards," said Ponsonby. "The passenger won't have much time ashore, I'm thinking."

Spencer was too occupied with his own affairs to worry about other folks, and never rested till he was safe in a boat and on his way to the *Walmer Castle*.

Springing up the side, the first thing he heard was the hoarse order to "up anchor."

"You're only just in time," said the doctor, who met him as he stepped on deck.

"Why, how long have you been aboard?" asked the bewildered Spencer.

"Half-an-hour; the repair has been done sooner than was expected, and I was signalled for. I hadn't time to let you know; in fact, thought your friend the Consul would tell you."

"Oh, well it doesn't matter, so long as I've caught her!"

"Caught her? Oh, the ship! I thought you meant Mrs. Braithwaite."

"Mrs. Braithwaite?"

"Yes. Don't you know?"

"Know what, in Heaven's name?"

"Why, that Mrs. Braithwaite, out of her mind almost because you did not seem likely to be back before the ship sailed, took a boat which happened to be alongside, and——"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Went ashore after you."

Spencer Braithwaite sank down on the nearest deck-chair, and for a space was speechless. When he could collect himself a bit it was to find that the *Walmer Castle* was leaving Madeira well behind at the rate of a good sixteen knots an hour.

The Captain and the doctor tried their best to comfort him, assuring him that his wife would without doubt seek the Consul's aid to get sent on by the next steamer, which would be in a few days.

"But she's like a child!" groaned the wretched husband, "she has no more idea of getting on without me than a baby."

"Oh, come, come!" said the skipper. "Mrs. Braithwaite will pull through all night."

"You'll get a cable from her as soon as we make Simon's Bay, depend upon it."

He was obliged to be content with this cold consolation, and could only pray that Ponsonby, if, as she probably would, she applied to him for assistance in her extremity, would not drop a whisper even of Señora Ajanda.

Possessing his soul, therefore, with the best patience he could until they were in sight of Table Mountain, Spencer stood fixed by the gangway watching the snorting little steam pinnace making its way to the steamer with letters and news.

He was the first to speak to the official as he touched the deck.

"My name's Braithwaite—Spencer Braithwaite—have you a cable message for me?"

"One moment, sir, please; if you'll come to the saloon, I'll see."

Hardly able to control himself, Spencer followed the speaker to the saloon, and waited.

"Yes, sir, a cable message, as you say," handing it to the eagerly expectant man.

Tearing it open, he read that which turned him into stone.

"*Am staying with the Señora Ajanda till next steamer sails. You are a bad man. My heart is nearly broken.*"

"I'll kill Ponsonby!" were his first words when he came to himself.

She knew it all! His former flirtation with the Señora! But what could the two be concocting together? He felt his brain would go, if he thought much more about it.

* * * * *

It was a wreck of a man that wandered restlessly about the quay at Cape Town on the day when the next boat was expected.

Every suspicion of smoke in the distance made him shake as with ague.

He was in the dark with regard to much, but knew quite enough to cause him to fear the worst.

Should he go out to meet the steamer? Yes, he would, and as at that moment she was signalled, he made arrangements with the harbour-master, an old friend, to allow him to go in the medical officer's boat, which was then getting up steam.

How he made that journey he doesn't know to this day. He only knows that, when within hail of the liner, he saw by the rail on the hurricane deck a little face, and a little hand waving a tiny pocket handkerchief, that he felt, somehow, that hope was not quite dead for him.

"Spencer! I'm up here!" cried a joyous little voice, as he sprang on the deck.

Up the companion he tore, and, oblivious of passengers and deck-hands, received into his arms his Dora.

"But I know why you were so long gone," she said, with a mock frown, and pushing him away from her.

"You know?"

"Yes, the Señora told me."

"The Señora told you."

"Yes. You sent to say you had arrived for an hour, and would like to see her."

"I will certainly kill Ponsonby," muttered Spencer.

"And"—here she glanced mischievously at him—"I am not surprised, for I think she is about the very nicest woman I ever met in my life."

At this moment the Señora came up.

"Señor Braithwaite," she said, holding out her hand, "I only made this journey in order to see your little wife safe into your hands. But I am very glad to see *you*."

He didn't know what to say, beyond pressing the Señora to come and pass a week with them in Cape Town before they started for Johannesburg.

"No, no! I go back to-morrow by the *Walmer Castle*, to Madeira first, and then to Spain. You two will have much to talk about and to explain."

They could not persuade her, and were bound, on the whole, to admit that she was right.

"You must never be so foolish again, darling," he said after dinner that evening.

"Well, I don't think it was exactly foolish, dear," she answered him, "because if I had not been left behind you would, and then——"

"Well?"

"I should never have known the Señora."

Ralph Enderby.

Mrs. Wickwire: "From the happy expression you had when Mrs. Potts was singing one might imagine that you enjoyed that sort of thing. You don't break out into happy smiles over my singing." Mr. Wickwire: "I wasn't smiling over her singing. I was just thinking how lucky I was that she belonged to Potts instead of myself."

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The . . . Plan that Went Agley.

An Old-World Story of the Time of King Charles.

"So your father wishes to marry you to this new Court star!" cried Miss Betty Mance, to her cousin, the Lady Susan Whitley. "You must tell me all about it, cousin."

The Lady Susan frowned slightly.

"Sir Reginald Moscombe met our King during a hunt in the northern country, and King Charles took a liking to him and invited him to Court. He has won praise on all hands since he has been in the capital, and my father thinks he would be a good match. The King let fall some words to this effect while speaking to my father. I have, so far, run counter to the wishes of my respected parent, by declining the suitors he has put forward, and I doubt me that this time it will be the same!"

"You have the reputation of being——" began Miss Betty; but a little cough seized her very conveniently, and instead of adding "a coquette," she substituted, "hard to please."

"I should like to have speech with this Sir Reginald without his knowing that 'twas I," observed the Lady Susan thoughtfully. "A mere whim, perhaps, but one that I would fain gratify! Is it a possibility, cousin? You are ever ready with suggestions."

Miss Betty Mance, thus flattered, assumed a thoughtful expression.

"I have it!" she cried, after a pause. "You are going to the Duchess' masked ball at the Gardens, and 'tis certain that he will be there. Contrive that he shall wear a bow that you will recognise, and let it be known to him that you will be dressed in certain fashion, and will wear a rose near the left shoulder. Then get someone to dress like you; that someone will wear the rose, but you will have the same dress and no rose. 'Twill be easy for you to have speech of him; he may think that you have forgotten the rose or have taken it off, and you can arrange with your double to hand the rose to you during the evening if you find that he is agreeable, this Sir Reginald, and you desire more of his society."

"Yes!" exclaimed Lady Susan, pleased with the suggestion. "Your plan lacks detail, but I can arrange that. But who is to play the double? You are not going to the ball, and others are either not near enough to my build, or might decline the exchange of parts and seek to captivate him for themselves."

"Would that much matter?" inquired Miss Betty demurely, although inwardly she was vastly amused at this unexpected turn. It would be amusing to see the coquette caught or worsted by another woman!

"Send your new serving maid, Sophie," suggested her cousin.

"Sophie is a jade who requires to be humbled!" declared the Lady Susan spitefully. "She might try the effect of her child's face on him, though, as she must have done on Lord Cathcart when he called to see me, or he would not have attempted to kiss her."

"I thought that Sophie resisted, and struck him for what she called his insolence. A fine word to address to your betters, I must say!" said Miss Betty. "It shows that her present position has not brought her to a proper and respectful frame of mind."

"Her resistance was feigned!" said the Lady Susan decisively, and with a malicious ring in her voice. "Feigned because I saw the little play! Yet I like the notion of sending her! She could act the part well, for she was a somebody before her father's estates were confiscated and he had to flee the country! It would serve to humble her—to be among the gentlefolks as she once was in the north, and yet to remember that she is but a servant. I'll do it!"

As Miss Betty Mance quitted her uncle's mansion she felt just a touch of pity for Sophie Carlton. She knew her cousin's jealous, spiteful nature, and she knew that Sophie's face was far prettier than her mistress'. Lord Cathcart had been regarded as an eligible, and the Lady Susan had favoured his suit in a lofty manner till the nobleman, struck by the charm and beauty of the maid's face, had forgotten his dignity and honour and had endeavoured to kiss Sophie. The Lady Susan could have pardoned a step from the right path such as the kissing of a maid, for the times were not so decorous then, but she could not forgive either him or Sophie for the superior beauty of the maid. She dismissed Lord Cathcart, but she retained Sophie in her service that she might make her punishment more lasting.

The Lady Susan sat for a time in silence developing the plan. Sophie would not allow her face to be seen—that was a great relief, so that Sir Reginald, if he were inclined to be led away, would not have the temptation. Finally she summoned her maid.

Sophie Carlton entered demurely. Her sweet countenance wore a somewhat sad expression and the rosy lips were compressed. Yet it was a face that could be full of vivacity under happier conditions; the eyes could be sympathetically soft or could blaze with anger. There was a grace about her movements that attracted one's attention immediately. The Lady Susan's face grew hard as she looked at the girl; there was only three years difference in their ages, yet Sophie was so fresh of complexion compared with her mistress that the latter had to stifle the thought that arose in her mind—Sophie was the superior of the two!

Briefly, and in a tone of command, the Lady Susan told the girl what she desired to have done, giving all details save the name of the man, who would, in all probability, address her as Lady Susan Whitley. All that Sophie was permitted to know was that he was a Court favourite.

"You will answer him very briefly, so that you do not betray yourself, and you will watch me for the signal to leave. Your part will be a short one, for he will come to me on missing you; and I can have speech with him while he is trying to discover whether I am the Lady Susan and have lost my rose. And if he does not please me, I can pretend—— Yes, that will do!"

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Sophie Carlton demurred to taking part in the scheme; but her faint protest raised such a storm that she decided to yield.

Once outside the apartment, she burst into tears.

"Why is Fate so cruel to me that my father is unjustly suspected of treason, and I am reduced to the necessity of serving this woman as a maid?" she sobbed. "She is continually subjecting me to indignities; and yet, if I leave her, who will take me? To save myself from starvation I should see myself compelled to marry some rough, vulgar retainer. Oh, no! I must bear it yet awhile, and perhaps justice will come!"

She dried her eyes and went about her work. After all, she would be doing no harm by acting as her mistress' double, and that was no worse, regarded as work, than she had to do every day!

The night of the masked ball arrived and the Gardens were filled with a gay crowd of men and women, all intent on enjoyment. The King was there, it was whispered, and a certain figure was pointed out as that of the ruler called the Merry Monarch, but who was, in more private life, a somewhat sad man. Sophie was set down at the Gardens by one of the family coaches and conducted into the Gardens by Lord Whitley, who had reluctantly agreed to his daughter's proposition. The Lady Susan was to arrive later.

Sophie Carlton felt strangely out of place, and shrank from the remarks addressed to her by certain revellers; but she mustered her courage on Lord Whitley's leaving her, and walked straight to the spot where she understood, the unknown gallant would be found. She thought she espied him, and then she pretended to be going in another direction, according to instructions. She was trembling with suppressed agitation, and nearly uttered a nervous cry when a hand was placed on her arm.

"May I have the honour and pleasure of escorting the Lady Susan Whitley through the Gardens and claiming a dance with her?" asked the unknown in a melodious voice.

Sophie started, and her head seemed to swim. Her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth, and she could not speak. That voice! She had just sufficient presence of mind to bow, and the stranger offered his arm. Sophie was glad of the support.

The young baronet was somewhat at a loss to account for the silence of Lady Susan. He had heard so much about her that he was prepared for a different reception. He had not wished to accept the honour of being the companion of this young Court dame, but he had been persuaded into it. The King had thrown out a hint, and he should act upon it.

"It is an honour to be so favoured!" he remarked gallantly. He said it tamely; he felt that he was not accustomed to make use of Court flattery; and, moreover, he feared that the Lady Susan would compare him with others, to his disadvantage. "Would you rather join the gay throng?"

"No, no! I would rather keep away from them!" the girl cried hurriedly. "Oh, what have I done?" she murmured inaudibly. "I have betrayed myself!"

At the sound of her voice, altered as it was by agitation, Sir Reginald Moscombe started and stopped short in his walk. Grasping her tightly by the arm, he stood directly in front of her, his eyes fixed on her mask as though he would try to see beneath it.

"Who is it? The voice is that of the woman I have been seeking for months!" he declared, his breath coming quick and fast with excitement. "It is not the Lady Susan Whitley. Sophie, it is you!"

No answer. The masked face near his own was turned downwards, as if to avoid his ardent gaze.

"Come with me!" His voice was slightly hoarse with emotion. "Come into the shadow!"

She could not resist. He took her to a secluded spot within a clump of trees, lighted by the full moon which was shining gloriously above them.

"Sophie, I have found you! Remove your mask and let me gaze on your sweet face once more. See!" He removed his own mask, revealing his handsome features. "It is I—Reginald!"

(*Continued on next page.*)

When Should a Woman do Her Shopping?

Should a woman do her shopping, in the morning, during the afternoon, or should it be delayed till the lamps are lighted, and the evening shadows have merged into the blackness of night? Sometimes the latter course is the only one available on account of illness; but Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness will save women this inconvenience, because they have the power to restore you to health, as they did Mrs. M. A. Jones, of 35 Trafford Street, Hulme.

"My weakness after an attack of influenza," she said to a Manchester Chronicle reporter, "was inconceivable, being increased, no doubt, by my years. I had little appetite for anything. I tried all sorts of nourishment, but I made no progress. I was compelled to move about with the greatest care lest faintness overtook me as a result of the exhaustion. My knees were weak, and I felt perfectly miserable. I suffered terribly from sleeplessness, and with such a succession of weary, restless nights, there was a very remote chance of my strength returning. Many days I was so done up that I could not stir out to do my shopping till eventide. My case seemed hopeless. Being a member of the Radnor Street Wesleyan Chapel, I had a large number of friends coming to see me, and they together with the pastor, gave me up and said I should not pull through.

"I remained in that pitiable plight until I heard of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. I went in for a course. The result was amazing! First of all, I began to get more sleep, and on a morning awoke thoroughly refreshed. Throughout the day I did not experience any more of that tired, weary feeling I used to have, and ever since I have been a stranger to it. The weakness left my knees, and instead of hobbling about, I was soon able to move with comfort. In fact, after a little while, I was quite cured. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness are unequalled for sleeplessness, debility, indigestion, headache, dizziness, constipation, piles, liver and kidney troubles, anæmia, female ailments, colds, chills, rheumatism, and as a preventative of influenza. All chemists sell Bile Beans, or they may be obtained post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co, 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., for prices one and three-halfpence, or two and nine.

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EXTRA CREAM TOFFEE

TURN AT ONCE TO THE SERIAL COMPETITION ON PAGE 527 AND WIN A GRAMOPHONE.

Her head drooped, and she made no effort to take off the mask. With deft fingers he performed the task for her, and raised her downcast face to his.

"It is my own Sophie!" he cried rapturously. "Found at last!" He kissed the rosy lips passionately. "What, tears? Tears of joy, I doubt not! But why have you hidden your sweet face from me for all these months?"

She was in his arms, and, unmindful of the fact that others might approach, she yielded to her emotions and allowed him to strain her to his breast and kiss her again and again.

"Dry those tears, my sweet Sophie, and tell me how it is that you fled from me and why I find you here in the character of the Lady Susan Whitley. There is some mystery which you must explain. We must assume our masks once more and move among the throng. There is to be a dance and we will dance together again as we did in the old home!"

"When my father was unjustly accused, all his friends seem to have thought him guilty and turned coldly from me. His estates confiscated, where could I go? You were away, and I feared that you would share the general opinion. Your prolonged absence confirmed my fear. Even if you held a different opinion, you would not care to marry the daughter of a supposed traitor, lest you were condemned as an accomplice. So I fled to London—oh, the horror of the journey!—and I entered the service of the Lady Susan Whitley as a—as a serving maid!"

They were just leaving the shadow of the trees, but Sir Reginald caught her in his arms compassionately and kissed her.

Encouraged by his sympathy, she told him of her life with the Lady Susan, the indignities she had to bear, and the command of her mistress that she should impersonate the Lady Susan. And then a touch of jealousy seized her.

"I did not know 'twas you whom I had to meet," she said, with a strange quiver. "I fear that I am not to be compared with the Lady Susan, and that I have spoilt your pleasure, for you are——"

"Sophie!" The tone was so full of reproach that she cried for forgiveness at once. "I came against my will, because they said that the King had hinted something," he continued. "I have sought you since my return to England, but could find no clue. I took the opportunity to come to London, because it was rumoured that you had come to this great city, but I could not find you. I have taken advantage of a show of favour from the King to plead for your father, and, I hope, with some chance of success. Thus have I shown my love for you. Do you doubt me?"

"Oh, no! Forgive me! I was so miserable, I have been so unhappy!"

He stopped as though he would embrace her again, but they were now in full view and he was forced to renounce the intention.

"Let us have a dance. See, they are forming couples on the platform!" he cried, hurrying her forward.

They passed close to a group of men and women, and one of the latter touched Sophie as she passed and uttered the injunction "Leave!" It was the Lady Susan.

"I cannot dance with you, Reginald!" said Sophie anxiously. "The Lady Susan has just whispered that I must leave!"

"I noticed a figure dressed like yourself," said the baronet calmly. "Well, she must wait! She played a trick on me and also on you, and now we will repay her! Yet we ought to be grateful, for by her plotting she has brought us together! Come, the dance is beginning! Forget the past and be happy—with me!"

"You will fall into disgrace if you are known to dance with me, a traitor's daughter!" faltered Sophie.

"Tut, tut! Does love care for that? I will marry you whatever befall!"

He swung her along, and in a moment they were whirling round in the midst of the dancers to the strains of a fashionable dance of the period. Sophie forgot all her misery in the delights of that dance with her lover, and both the young people were oblivious of the malignant glances cast at them by the Lady Susan, who was beside herself with rage at the disobedience of her maid.

"May I claim the honour of the next dance with the Lady Susan Whitley?" asked a voice by her side.

"Mr. Downes!" she exclaimed. "How fortunate that you recognised me and that you are here! Betty has told you about it? You can help me?"

"I am at your service!" was the reply.

"I wish to separate those two, you know whom I mean! Take me to them when the dance is finished and engage her!"

"You might think it a pity to part them if you had seen and heard what I saw and heard yonder!" he asserted, with a malicious twinkle in his eyes which she could not see.

He related to the Lady Susan some portion of the scene within the clump of trees, and his companion was furious.

"I knew not that she was the daughter of a traitor!" she cried. "These small plots do not always come to our knowledge when they are hatched in the provinces; they are kept secret for reasons of State. Now, you must help me!" she continued imperiously. "She will soon go to my carriage in order to return. You must arrange that she be carried off and sent away. Keep her anywhere out of his reach and marry her, if it please you, to some varlet. As for him, we will upset him! He will be accused of conspiring through her with her father, and her disappearance will confirm the suspicion. That will be the end of his career as a Court favourite!"

"The plan falls in with my views," observed Mr. Downes, "provided that *I* reap some benefit! I do not see any provision for my benefit in your scheme yet, my lady!"

"I will ask my father to help you, if you require some mark of favour!"

"Good!" he responded. "A knighthood! Betty longs for a title, and she may e'en marry another if I do but get one. It is a bargain!"

At the conclusion of the dance, however, the plotters missed their prey. They sought the lovers for some minutes before making their way to the entrance. Lady Susan had an idea that Sophie would get Reginald to conduct her to the Lady Susan's carriage. Mr. Downes ascertained that the Whitley carriage was still waiting and returned to tell the Lady Susan this important fact.

He had left her with some others who had made themselves known, and on returning he found her with the man whom he knew to be Sir Reginald Moscombe.

"I fear that someone has been playing a sorry joke on you, Sir Reginald, during the past hour!" she declared, "and you have been attentive to an impostor." She spoke sweetly, and Downes understood that she had given up the original plan of having a chat with Sir Reginald without his being aware of her identity.

"She is bent on her plot!" muttered Downes. "She can be a demon if she likes, and I should not like to fall into her clutches. I doubt me if it is safe to aid her, and yet the knighthood is worth a little risk!" Approaching her, he contrived to whisper in her ear that Sophie had not yet left the Gardens.

"Watch for her!" was the whispered reply, while Sir Reginald was looking aside. "Don't fail me!"

Downes returned to the entrance and requisitioned the services of four men on whom he could rely. The coachman knew him and was prepared to do his bidding. Then he waited for the figure to appear.

The coach had been sent a short distance away, so that the would-be rider would have to look for it. It was an hour later before Downes observed the masked figure emerge and look about; she wore no rose, and he chuckled.

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A Famous Specialist on the Permanent Cure of Obesity.

Just as the name of some great physician or surgeon springs to the mind when some particular disease or class of disease is mentioned, so when the word "Corpulency" is uttered, the name of Mr. F. Cecil Russell comes to mind on the instant. Not that that well-known authority looks upon obesity as a disease, however; but his name, as that of the most successful of specialists in the treatment of obesity, is inseparately connected with that branch of the curative art.

If any of our stout readers wish to know what Mr. Russell has accomplished in this direction, and by what particular methods, let that reader at once write him at Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. (enclosing three penny stamps), for a copy of the nineteenth edition of his standard work, entitled "Corpulency and the Cure," an admirably lucid treatise of 256 pages. Our reader's effort in making the application will be amply rewarded.

"Corpulency and the Cure"* goes at once to the root of the matter and tells all about the various causes of obesity. It then deals *in extenso* with its cure, and explains the radical differences between the "Russell" treatment and the many other treatments, British and Continental, which have met with but partial success where they have not failed altogether. As an indisputable proof of the harmlessness of the treatment, Mr. Russell publishes the receipt of the liquid vegetable compound upon which he chiefly relies as a reductive agent. By this, also, it will be seen that the purely herbal ingredients of the mixture are quite innocuous. By Mr. Russell's method it is clearly proved that a person, however stout, may regain normal dimensions and weight with ease and safety, and without any racking and exhausting purgatives or any needlessly severe exercise. Only a little prudence and care is required, and the decrease of fat goes on naturally but perceptibly at the rate of from ½lb. to 2lb. daily until the desired condition is reached, when the treatment may be set aside with no fear of a recurrence of obesity if only ordinary hygienic rules are observed. This most important feature of the treatment stands out very prominently in the hundreds of extracts from patients' letters which the author has thought fit to incorporate in his book. Moreover, whenever the matter of general health is mentioned the patient is usually enthusiastic. The truth is that the "Russell" treatment—or rather the principal compound employed—is a splendid tonic, improving appetite and aiding the organs of digestion and assimilation, so that a larger amount of wholesome food is required and taken and new muscular tissue is formed in place of the unhealthy adipose which is being steadily destroyed and eliminated. However looked upon, the system is sound and admirable, and "Corpulency and the Cure," with its mass of well-arranged facts and figures must of necessity appeal to any reader possessing the logical faculty.

** A Copy of "Corpulency and the Cure" will be sent under plain sealed envelope to readers of "Short Stories," who will forward their address, with three penny stamps, to the Author,*

F. CECIL RUSSELL,

Woburn House, Store St., Bedford Square, London, W.C.

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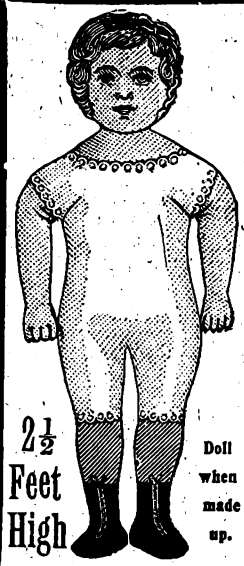

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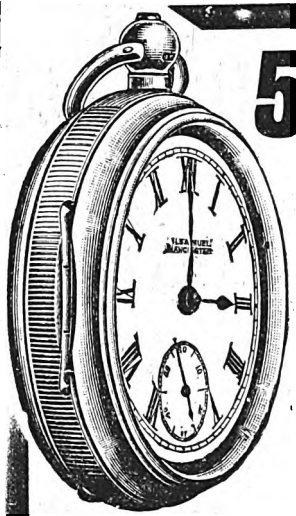

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"This way!" he said softly, "the carriage is here, ready."

She entered the coach, Downes made signs to the coachman and his four rascals, and the coach was driven off at a great speed.

On the following morning there was a great to-do, for both the Lady Susan and her maid were missing. Lord Whitley made all investigations that were possible, and gradually he learnt part of the truth.

Downes furnished the first clue by telling how he had caused the maid to be carried off by the Lady Susan's orders. He was unable to trace her ladyship on returning to the gardens.

Then the coachman came home without the coach, and told his story. He thought he was helping to abduct a maid, but before he had gone far he heard his mistress' voice, calling to him to stop.

He tried to pull up, but the four men knocked him about and left him by the roadside while they went off with the coach and the lady. They knew what they had to do, they told him.

Downes' consternation may be imagined. By some mischance, the Lady Susan had been abducted instead of the maid!

Luckily the abducted woman was to be taken to a certain spot and kept there until he arrived, so he and Lord Whitley went off at once and rescued the Lady Susan from her plight.

She had been preoccupied on leaving the Gardens, and, thinking that Downes had had Sophie carried off and had brought another coach for her, as arranged, had entered the vehicle quite unsuspectingly and had become a victim to her own plot.

And what had become of Sophie?

Her lover had insisted on sending her to the house of one of his friends in London, where she would be treated as a lady and have the companionship of his daughters till Reginald could marry her.

He had taken her straight to a coach after that dance, and had seen that she was in safe hands. It was after he re-entered the Gardens, alone, that he had met the Lady Susan and had resolved to play with her as she had played with him. She was so mortified, however, at what Downes had told her, that she was in no mood for the festivities or for further companionship with Sir Reginald, and stayed only long enough (as she thought) to enable Downes to carry out the latest plot.

The rage and mortification of the Lady Susan were equalled only by the joy experienced by the lovers at being reunited after their separation for so many months. Their joy was increased by the knowledge that the King, in an interview for which Reginald had boldly asked, had expressed his suspicions that Sophie's father was not the real culprit in connection with the attempt against his life in the north, but that the blame had been thrown on him by the guilty parties in a very skilful manner.

"I am not sure who the criminals are," the King had said, "but I will grant your request that Carlton may be pardoned and have his estates restored to him. So you intend to marry his daughter, anyhow? You are over-bold, methinks, but yet I like a bold man and I will send you a gift for the bride on her wedding day. But that must not be till her father returns, eh?"

With characteristic generosity, the King issued the pardon at once, and he was present at the marriage ceremony, a month later.

While Sophie was being led to the altar by the man she loved, thus realising the height of her happiness, the Lady Susan was living in retirement to avoid the laughter and scoffing of those who had learnt of the failure of her precious schemes.

She is now extremely careful never to engage a maid who could for one moment be called either a beauty or a lady.

George Day.

"WILL you be mine, Miss Bullion?" asked George. "No, George. I don't want to be anybody's mine," replied the lady, with a rich, wary smile. And then George called a meeting of his creditors and effected a compromise for sixpence in the pound.

JACK: "Maud wants to know why you shun her company now." Tom: "Well, the fact is, I'm hard up." Jack: "I'll tell her, and you needn't shun her any more." Tom (brightening up): "By Jove, do you think so?" Jack: "Yes. She'll shun you."

MAUD: "How do you like that young Mr. Peduncle?" Irene: "I don't like him at all. He's either very stupid or he's an impudent upstart. I said to him at the party last night that I didn't feel like eating anything, and he said: 'Why, Miss Squires, you certainly look well enough to eat.'" "Well, what of that?" "Why, he should have said I looked good enough to eat."

LITTLE JIMMY visited his father's office, and after examining the typewriting machine, observed to his mother: "What do they take those to the theatre for?" "My boy," replied his mother, "they do not take them to the theatre." "Well, it's mighty funny then. Pa was telling that gentleman he took his typewriter to the thea——" "James," said his father sternly, "I will see you in the stable after we get home."

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Advice Misinterpreted.

In a recent issue I said "I have heard of cases when a wife, exasperated by neglect on the part of her husband, has left him altogether to go and live with relatives." A correspondent, who does not appear to be blessed with an over-supply of good manners, especially in writing to those with whom he is unacquainted, interprets this as advising a wife to desert her husband. Having uttered this tremendous piece of misinterpretation, he is good enough to refer to my advice as a danger, and also trash. Myself he designates as a "type of conceited womanhood."

* * * * *

Thank you, my amiable friend, I am very sorry to have thus incurred your displeasure. However, I can only say that I am constantly receiving letters from my clients themselves in which I hear that the advice given has put an end to the troubles, and as those principally concerned seem to be satisfied, I do not know that the opinion of even an abusive third party is of very much value. As to "conceited womanhood," perhaps my readers will not regard it as a greater evil than ill-mannered manhood, which, when unable to agree with the opinions of others, has recourse to abuse. As to your point itself, nobody of average intelligence could possibly interpret my remarks on the occasion in question as "advice to a wife to desert her husband." Anyone who has even carelessly glanced at this page in the past will know that such advice would be quite foreign to the principles on which I deal with questions submitted to me.

❦❦❦

A Changed Lover.

"Agatha" is engaged to Leonard, who is twenty-two years of age. Until six months ago there appeared to be no obstacle to their marriage. Then he was sent abroad for six months, and has travelled a great deal. She now notices a change in his manner. He no longer seems to look on her as the one thing in life, but has developed a love for all sorts of pleasures never before apparent in him, and which she could not share. To put it bluntly, he shows signs of wishing to back out of the engagement, though, of course, by mutual consent.

* * * *

I think I should give Leonard a rest for a while. People who have just completed a trip abroad do very often develop all sorts of odd fancies, which, however, seldom last. Leonard is evidently going through a phase common to most young men of his age. If he really devotedly loved you before, be assured his change is only imaginary. He will come back to you. Meanwhile, let him go his way, and bide the time of his return. It is no use forcing a man to remain entangled, if the desire on his part has for the time being departed.

❦❦❦

How to Talk to a Man.

What should a woman talk about to a man when she meets him out? "Margaret" does not know. Quite often young men call on her people, and sometimes they have not very much to say for themselves. Perhaps, thinks "Margaret," they are a trifle nervous in her society. How can she bring them out?

* * * *

Talk to a man about his own work, pleasures, hobbies, books, and such things. Every young man likes to think that his life is of some interest to a girl. When you have found out what most interests him, talk on that subject as often as you can. In this way men get sooner or later to discover what good and sensible friends girls make in times of trouble, and the reflection sometimes develops to such an extent that proposals of marriage may result. For a man who is doubtful about his relations with the opposite sex, a girl cannot use better means of satisfying him than by proving herself to be interested in his life and able to help him in the event of trouble.

❦❦❦

The Summer Girl.

"Theo" met a girl at the seaside last summer, and was very attentive to her. They went to picnics and so on, and he thought she really had taken a great fancy to him. Now he has met her in town, and finds that she appears to care very little for him, in fact, she is not the same girl. He professes to be very fond of her, but would like to see some return on her part.

* * * *

Perhaps she is a girl who likes a man in summer but not at other times. You know that kind of flirt. On a holiday, girls will make themselves very agreeable to the young man who can take them for picnics, drives, and other enjoyable excursions, but when brought face to face with them under the dull surroundings of town life, may alter their minds. "Theo" had better give the matter three months' trial, and if after that time, he finds she shows no signs of reviving their summer intimacy, he had better come to the conclusion that she is a "summer girl" simply, and has no use for a man under the ordinary routine of life. Such a girl, of course, is not to be considered seriously as a future wife, as in married life it is the humdrum which really tests affection.

❦❦❦

How to Start a Courtship.

How should a man start a courtship? "A.S." is about to make his first experiment, and asks me for a few general hints. He has met a girl who attracts him, but of course cannot yet say he is in love with her, as that can only be proved by subsequent meetings. He wants, however, to get on to fairly intimate terms with her, and beyond the ordinary commonplace relationship, so as to make up his mind. What help can I give him in making the first overtures?

* * * *

Well, "A.S.," a woman is generally won over and prejudiced in a man's favour by a compliment. Don't tell her right away she is the most beautiful woman you have ever seen, and so on, as that only embarrasses her. Congratulate her on simpler things, such as the way she plays the piano, or her good taste in wearing hats, or selecting patterns for dresses. Anyhow, show yourself appreciative of some trait of her character. This softens her, and inclines her to hear more from you—provided the flattery is judiciously given. When you have thus softened your relationship, talk as friend to friend, and you will soon discover whether or not you are in love with her. Love, in fact, generally discovers itself, and if, after a while, it does not in your case, let the affair pass and do not bother your head about it any more.

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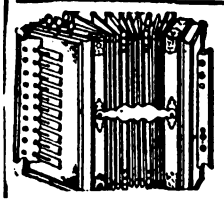

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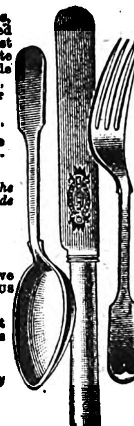

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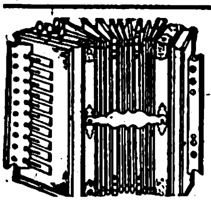

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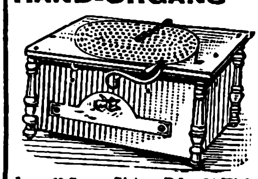

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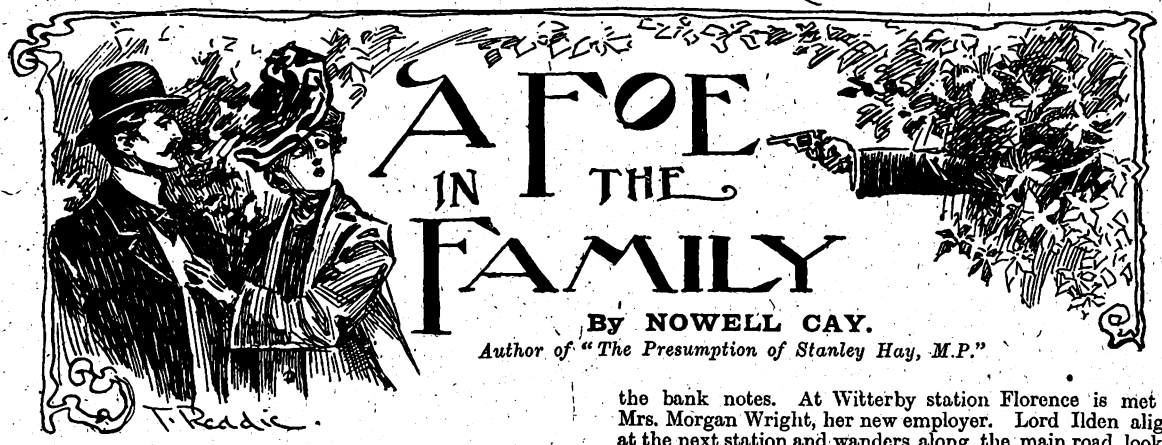

A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

Five Abortive Attempts on a Peer's Life.

WHILE returning one evening to Pennybrook Hall, the residence of his uncle Jasper, Lord Ilden discovers a young girl in great distress at having lost two five pound notes, the whole of her wages for six months as a country governess. Together they search for the missing money; but as it is getting dusk, and Lord Ilden wants to get rid of his pretty companion, who turns out to be the sister of one of his old college chums, he manages to substitute two of his own notes and return them to her. She goes away overflowing with gratitude.

When she disappeared, however, Lord Ilden continues the search. He fails to find the money, but instead discovers an envelope addressed to himself, the contents of which he has never seen. The envelope, addressed in a girl's handwriting, is postmarked "Lallerton." Pocketing his find, Lord Ilden is lighting a cigarette, when the report of a rifle suddenly breaks the stillness of the evening, and a bullet whizzes just past him and buries itself in a tree behind.

"That," mutters Lord Ilden, "is the third attempt which has been made on my life during my stay at Pennybrook Hall."

On his return to his uncle's, he tells his cousin, Catherine Hay, of his adventure, and, feeling assured that the attempts are being made by some member of the family, many of whom would profit considerably by his death, proposes marriage to her as a means of reducing the value of his own death to his enemies. Cathie, however, refuses.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden has discovered that it is his cousin Percival who opened the post-bag and extracted the letter addressed to himself, the envelope of which he found in the coppice.

That same evening Lord Ilden's valet discovers a large quantity of poison in his master's flask. This makes the fourth attempt.

Upon receiving the news, Lord Ilden considers it wisest to leave Pennybrook Hall at once. He is driving to the station with Cathie when they overtake a man who appears to take a great interest in them. Ilden's suspicions are instantly aroused, especially so as the man takes a short cut across the fields, and is waiting at the station when they arrive.

Ilden's suspicions, however, are speedily allayed, but his curiosity considerably excited when he discovers this gentleman in one of the carriages in the train he is about to enter, in animated conversation with Florence Courthorpe, the lady of

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the bank notes. At Witterby station Florence is met by Mrs. Morgan Wright, her new employer. Lord Ilden alights at the next station and wanders along the main road, looking for a quiet inn where he could stay for a time. All unconsciously he walks back towards Witterby and settles down at the "Black Bull," exactly opposite Florence's new home. Florence, however, sees him, and that same night, after all in the house had gone to bed, sits at her window gazing abstractedly across the street. Suddenly a man in a slouch hat is silhouetted against Ilden's bedroom window. He carries a revolver—his purpose being easily discernible. Fortunately Ilden is not in his room, and, taking advantage of the few minutes' grace thus allowed, Florence slips on a dressing gown, quietly leaves her room and the house, and runs across to the "Black Bull" to give the alarm. But the would-be murderer has escaped. Florence then returns to her house, only, however, to meet her scandalised employer on the stairs. She is instantly dismissed.

The next day, Lord Ilden decides to leave Witterby and find the girl at Lallerton who wrote to him. Arrived at the station, he finds Florence, who tells him of her dismissal and of her intention to stay with friends at Lallerton. They go together but find that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left the village.

Taking Florence to an inn, Ilden makes inquiries in the village regarding the Despards. Failing in his quest, he is returning when he picks up a message, directed to himself, warning him to leave Lallerton immediately. He returns to the inn, and as the easiest way to baulk the designs of his enemy, proposes marriage to Florence.

(*The above is a short summary of the opening chapters.*)

"Will You be My Wife?"

SHE glanced at him timidly with half-frightened eyes, but her first instinctive doubt was met by the seriousness of his face. He was in earnest, and a crimson flush succeeded the pallor of her cheeks. Her startled eyes were suddenly downcast. But her voice kept itself steady.

"No, I could not be that, Lord Ilden."

The calm note of decision chilled him. He had scarcely dared to hope that she would consent—at first. But then—well, he had expected her to hesitate, and consider the proposal.

"You care for somebody?" he asked, with the sharpness of disappointment in his tone. It made her answer quickly.

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"Oh! no, I never cared for anybody—in that way. I——"

She stopped in a little confusion.

Ilden smiled persuasively. Her words had taken a load off his mind, and he was self-contained and at his ease again.

"Then, if there is nobody else, why won't you be my wife? I think I can promise that I would make you a good husband. Of course, you know very little of me."

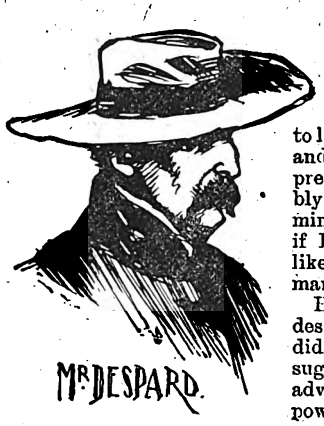
"It is not *that*," she interrupted quickly. "I knew before I ever saw you how good and kind you are. You are the most generous man in the world, but——" she helped herself out with a little laugh—"I could not think of letting you marry me through generosity, Lord Ilden."

Ilden looked shocked at the suggestion, and tried to feel that he was quite honest in his protest.

"Please do not shame me by talking of my generosity. I am only wondering whether I ought to ask anybody to share my lot when my object is such a selfish one. But I must try in some way to save my life and upset this plot against me. And I see no way to do it except by marrying. You see, there can only be one motive for these attempts on my life. They must be the work of somebody who is directly or indirectly interested in the succession to my property or title, and the number of people who would think themselves gainers if I died unmarried is, unfortunately, a pretty large one. Their activity is not likely to grow less so long as my life alone stands between them and the satisfaction of their ambition. Of course it is scarcely fair for me to ask any lady to marry me under the circumstances. It is halving my own danger by asking her to share it. But you have shown yourself so sympathetic, so willing to help me that I have dared to hope you would even accept this danger for me."

His voice had all the humility of a devoted and diffident lover, and Florence, sitting with downcast eyes, twisted her slender fingers nervously. If she could only believe that it was possible for her to help him and lessen his danger by sharing it! If she could only believe that this was not merely a generous disguise of the fact that he was offering her the protection of his name through pity, through a quixotic sense of responsibility for the hopeless position into which she had been thrown by serving him. The incident of the bank-notes came back to make her more doubtful and uncertain. She could not possibly accept an offer so generously unselfish. But even as she decided hopelessly to close her eyes to the wonderful dream which his words had opened out to her, the thought of his danger came back to check the answer on her lips.

How she had longed to remain with him, ever vigilant and protective. The hour or two in which he had been out of her sight had been full of torturing fears, a foretaste of what her thoughts would be if they parted. And of course this was the only way in which they could remain together.



"I ought not to disguise the fact that your own life might be in danger," Ilden was continuing. "For the first year at least we should be obliged to live in the utmost seclusion, and in anxiety as great as the present, your life being probably as much in danger as mine. They would know that if I lost you I should not be likely to try the experiment of marriage again."

He spoke honestly in the desire to be quite fair. He did not know that every suggestion of danger or disadvantage for her was an overpowering argument urging her to accept the happiness which had offered itself to her as something too great and wonderful to be taken.

"I want to share your danger," she said, speaking impulsively at last, "but how can you wish me to be your wife when you know me so little."

"And yet I seem to know you better than anyone else," he said smiling. "Every hour that we have been together has added to my respect and admiration for you. You are brave and sympathetic and unselfish. You have shown yourself a good ally. And——" he hesitated with a touch of boyish diffidence, for he had never been a man to pay compliments, and felt that he was expressing himself bluntly—"and you are very beautiful. I thought when I met you in the coppice that evening that your face was the most beautiful I had ever seen. It made you different from all other women at once. And the more I see you the more beautiful you seem to me. I shall never forget the picture you made last night. I want to see you again with your wonderful hair unfastened."

Her heart beat rapidly. It is sweet to every woman to hear her beauty praised by the man she admires. And yet how could he really admire her when he must know so many women more beautiful than she. She wanted to protest still, but when she tried words failed her and tears came instead.

Ilden no longer resisted the impulse with which they inspired him.

He clasped her in his arms.

"Don't cry, dear," he said, speaking as tenderly as he would have spoken to a child, and he knew that the contract was settled when she buried her face on his breast to sob unrestrainedly.

A pleasant sense of possession thrilled him as he passed his hand soothingly over her hair, waiting till her passion of tears exhausted itself.

Then he lifted her face and kissed her on the lips, and as he did so the passive inertness with which she had rested in his arms seemed to leave her, and she startled him by the intensity with which her arms clasped round his neck and her lips met his.

There was a grave light in his eyes.

"She loves me," he said to himself, almost with misgiving. The arrangement which had been so convenient for both had somehow become less fair.

A Notice in "The Times."

"On the 3rd inst., at St. Agatha's, Fulham, by the vicar, George FitzHenry Stewart Ilden, Baron, of Ilden Castle, Yorks, to Florence Estelle, only daughter of the late Charles Courthorpe, Esq. No cards."

This was the announcement which, appearing in all the principal papers, startled Society on the morning of the 4th.

Ilden himself, who had launched his thunderbolt with much satisfaction, would have been surprised if he could have known into how many families of marriageable daughters and matchmaking mothers, it carried disappointment and chagrin. It caused a profound sensation in the homes of ladies differing as widely in social importance as the Marchioness of Dalmenay and Mrs. Morgan Wright, the country practitioner's wife.

At Pennybrook Hall the Honourable Jasper was the first to come across the paragraph as he glanced through *The Times* over breakfast, and he drew the attention of the table with his exclamation of surprise. Then, as they all looked up, he read it aloud without comment.

After which, as nobody spoke, he broke the complete silence which had fallen on the room with an amused chuckle.

"Well, there is a sly young dog, for you. To leave us without a word of *this*."

His wife had grown crimson. Her passion had been vainly seeking an outlet and found it in her husband's inane laugh. Her fine eye flashed upon him wrathfully.

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"And is that all you have to say? I call it outrageous. To eat our bread and make a pretence of friendship, and then to spring this upon us. He has treated us infamously. But, of course, *you* don't care. You think it clever when he treats you with no more respect than if you were an enemy instead of his kith and kin."

The master of Pennybrook Hall was, as usual, amiably indifferent to her tirade.

"You would not have liked it a bit better, my dear," he said with cynical truthfulness, "if George had invited us to the wedding."

"But who is this Florence Estelle Courthorpe?" interrupted Catherine, unable to restrain her inquisitive wonder any longer. "He has never mentioned her name to me."

The question served to divert Mrs. Jasper's wrath into another channel.

"Yes, that creature of all people in the world," she cried hotly. "The designing minx! If I had only guessed that George was such a poor, weak creature I would have taken care that he never came here. I knew well enough from Mrs. Haydon what a designing minx she is, but one did not even know that he had met her. Oh, she knew what she was about, keeping it so quiet."

"But who is she?" cried Catherine impatiently, and the question was echoed round the table.

Mrs. Jasper calmed herself a little to answer it.

"A little blue-eyed, yellow-haired governess, if you please. Mrs. Haydon at the Rectory employed her out of charity when the girl's father died a bankrupt, and she rewarded her by setting her cap at young Haydon. She had to give her notice, and of course, now we come to think of it, George left the very same day that she did. We ought to have suspected it, and tried to save him, poor young idiot. Grant, you saw George off at the station, didn't you? Wasn't the girl with him?"

The poet answered in the negative, absently. He was absorbed in watching Catherine's face, with a fierce feeling of jealousy for the pained dismay which he saw there.

The pain and dismay were not due to his imagination. To Catherine the news of her cousin's hasty marriage had come as a great shock, filling her mind with misgivings. She had never met the governess at the Rectory, and it never occurred to her to question how much of Mrs. Jasper Ilden's description of her was due to unmerited prejudice. The very fact that she had jumped into Ilden's arms, as she must surely have done, to permit of him marrying her almost within a week of his proposal to Catherine herself—served to confirm the character which Mrs. Jasper had given her.

And Catherine's heart grew sick with the thought that her cousin had thrown himself away on a worthless woman, and that the responsibility was partly her own. She found herself asking whether she had not neglected her duty in refusing to marry George when he asked her, since he had found the step so necessary that he must needs, in default of her, marry the first girl he met.

She had not a romantic love for him; but, as George himself had said, they had always been good friends, and Catherine felt that she would have made him a better wife than this adventuress could ever do. Had she neglected her duty for a foolish fancy—a fancy which seemed destined to lead to nothing?

Unconsciously her eyes turned to Grant Ilden's handsome Byronic face, and she lost her pallor suddenly as she found him watching her with moody eyes that seemed to read her thoughts.

But Jane was addressing her. The baronet's wife felt personally aggrieved by her cousin's marriage. It was a relief to twit somebody whom she imagined to be feeling more aggrieved still.

"Is it possible that Cousin George gave you no more idea of what he was going to do than he gave the rest of us, Miss Hay?" she asked, with an acid smile. "I imagined that you were quite in his confidence."

Catherine's composure came back, as she answered easily that the news was as much a surprise to her as to the others.

"I have been expecting to hear from Cousin George," she added. "He promised to write when he went away."

"But has apparently been otherwise engaged," said Jane, with an unpleasant laugh. Her brother scowled at her.

"He would not even promise to write to *you*, would he, Janey. I heard you begging him to."

It pleased Grant to think that he had done Catherine a service when his sister subsided at the thrust.

"But what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Jasper was crying plaintively, and turned angrily on her husband again because he had resumed his breakfast.

"You go on eating just as if nothing had happened," she cried.

And Mr. Ilden answered with his mouth full:

"No, dear, I go on eating because something *has* happened. George is married, and it is too late for us to say whether we give our consent. For my part I don't blame him. He has certainly saved himself a good deal of worry by marrying first and taking our opinion afterwards. What do you say, Rupert?"

"I hope George will be happy," said the Honourable Rupert, rousing himself apparently from a fit of abstraction.

Mrs. Jasper laughed derisively.

"Happy? How can he be if we let him fall into the hands of a girl like that? We must do something. If he cannot get the marriage annulled, he ought at least to arrange a separation."

"But on what grounds?" asked Jane with sympathetic interest.

"Oh, they would be found easily enough in connection with a girl of that sort. It would only be necessary to show her to George in her true light, and if Jasper had any respect for the honour of the family he would do it. I only wish that Percival was here. He would soon find out sufficient about the lady to cure Ilden's infatuation."

"He would no doubt have a good try," said Grant cynically, "but it strikes me that Ilden has taken precautions. At present none of us knows where he is, and I do not expect that he will enlighten us until we have had time to reconcile ourselves to his marriage. That is if we want reconciling. For my part I am glad to hear that it is settled."

Mrs. Jasper glared at him contemptuously, and wished more earnestly than ever that his brother was in his house. Percival at least would not abandon without a struggle the hopes and ambitions which they had both nursed for more than twenty years.

She left the table to write to him, pointing out—for similarity of interests had made the two very confidential and outspoken—that an apparent misfortune might be turned into a blessing, if Lord Ilden while remaining bound to his wife, found it impossible to live with her.

She had barely dispatched it when Mrs. Haydon was announced, and came in flushed and important.

"I felt that I must come at once and show you a letter my friend Mrs. Morgan Wright has just sent me," she said impressively, "because it concerns your nephew, Lord Ilden, I am sorry to say as well as Florence Courthorpe."

Mrs. Jasper flung out her hands.

"Oh! I have heard. It is in to-day's *Times*." The rector's wife was startled.

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"In the *Times*? Then it has become an open scandal as my friend feared that it would."

It was Mrs. Jasper's turn to stare.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Lord Ilden followed that girl to Witterby and—but let me read you Mrs. Morgan Wright's letter. The girl's conduct seems to have been positively appalling."

"With Ilden or others?" asked Mrs. Jasper eagerly, and her momentary interest faded when the rector's wife answered primly:

"With your nephew, I am sorry to say. But what does the account in the papers refer to?"

"Their marriage," said Mrs. Jasper hopelessly. "It was celebrated at some wretched little London church yesterday."

"Married!" gasped her visitor, and her face changed strangely.

"Yes. There is a reward for intrigue and trickery, if you like."

Mrs. Haydon's voice had grown more deliberate.

"I do not think that I ever accused Lady Ilden of trickery exactly," she said as if weighing the word. "Of course it would not have done for her to marry Sidney, when his future is so unassured; but for a man like his lordship I could understand her making a very suitable wife. She comes, of course, of a good family. It is not as though she were born a governess, and—well, I hope she will not be ungrateful for the kindness I have shown her, now that it may be in her power to repay a little of it. I must go home and write to Mrs. Wright. This will quite set her mind at rest."

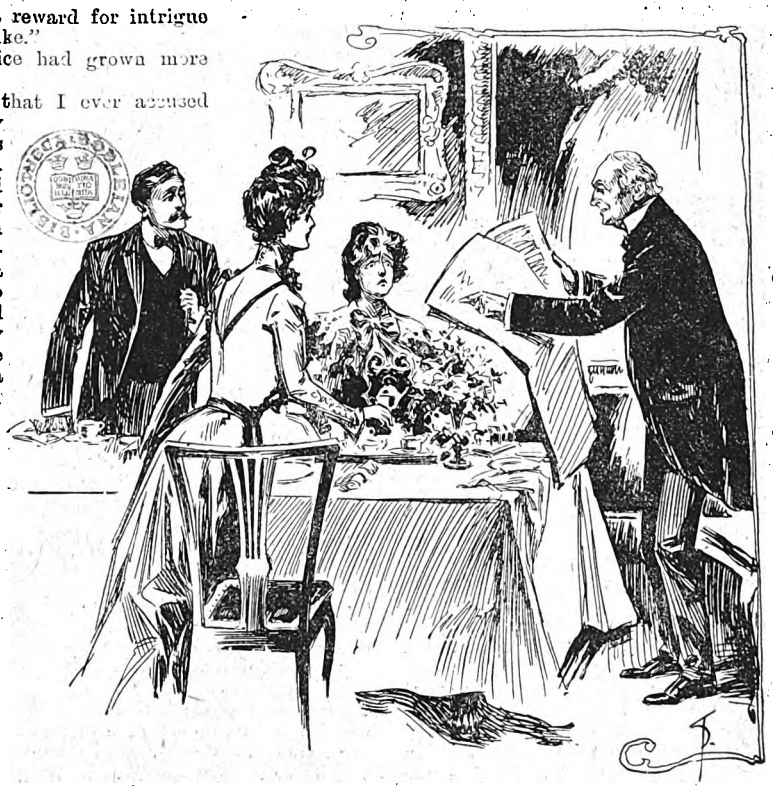
She was quite anxious to tell the rector the astonishing news and inquire the value of the living which was in Lord Ilden's gift.

On the terrace she passed Grant, who was striding up and down moodily. He had been through the grounds in search of Catherine, who had wandered away to ponder over the news alone; but he had discovered her only to turn back without attracting her attention, for Catherine was in tears.

"What a fool Ilden is," he said to himself. "He deserves to be shot."

And he marched up and down the terrace, pondering on the irony of Fate, which only gives its gifts to those who do not want them, until the figure of his aunt appeared at the window of the morning-room beckoning him towards her.

"Your father has gone back to bed, complaining of illness," she said. "I wish that you would persuade him to let us send for a doctor."



The Hon. Jasper was the first to come across the parag aph announcing Ilden's marriage in *The Times*.

A Call from Pennybrook.

THE news that his uncle Rupert was dangerously ill and was anxious to see him, probably for the last time, reached Ilden in the first week of an unconventional honeymoon spent in an unfashionable suburb of London. It had been Florence's idea that they should remain in England, and her belief that the London suburbs are the best place in the world in which to hide had been justified so far completely. At Fulham they had been able to pass under their own names and marry openly without the least sign of pursuit, and when the announcement of their marriage, which Ilden was depending upon as the first signal blow at his unknown enemy, made it advisable for them to leave the neighbourhood where it had taken place, they had found a refuge to all appearances as safe at Sydenham.

But though no single sign of discovery obtruded itself into the quietude of their retreat there, the expectation of it served to make every day exciting. Every walk that they took together was an adventure, when in each passer-by they were prepared to find either an assassin or a spy. And their common danger served as a tie keeping them more closely together than any personal attraction. If Ilden went for the shortest of strolls by himself, he could not return without a certain sense of uneasiness as to what might have happened in his absence. He could only justify himself for allowing Florence to share his danger, he told himself, by keeping constant guard over her. As for her, she was in torture every moment that he was out of her sight. She would receive him on his return with a passionate relief which showed how great her anxiety had been.

And Ilden was a little surprised to find that this more than ordinary closeness of intercourse did not at present pall upon him in the least. He had always been a little afraid of marriage, as indeed he was still. The virtual pledge that he would always take pleasure in the society of any particular woman seemed too heavy a one to give, when a promise was such a serious matter with him.

When he had asked Florence Courthorpe to be his wife, as when he had asked Catherine Hay, he had taken it for granted that the pledge was not understood. For he had spoken to neither of love.

With Florence especially the arrangement had seemed to him a perfectly fair one without it. He was offering her a position, the advantages of which, in her friendless position, must certainly be worth the risks which it entailed.

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He had felt quite safe in promising that her life should be a happier one than that of a friendless governess. He knew that he would never be tempted to treat her with discourtesy, just as he was sure that with her beauty and refinement she would never offend his somewhat fastidious taste, or make him regret that he had given her his name.

But he had realised when it was too late that Florence had taken it all differently. Her first kiss of betrothal had told him that she had given him her whole heart in the perfect belief that he had given her his. The pledge, which he thought too serious to take, had been accepted without the making.

Because he had praised her beauty quite truthfully, she had taken it for granted that they were all in all to each other, the sharers of a perfectly romantic love story, and the fact rendered him vaguely uncomfortable. Without intending it, he seemed to have committed himself to play the part of the ardent lover.

Not that he found any difficulty in it at present, when his least smile or kindly word seemed to give his wife such complete happiness, when their joint anxiety for each other made it necessary for them always to be together, with no need of asking whether he desired it. And she was very charming, more charming than he had imagined. Each day revealed to him some new, subtle prettiness of thought or expression or gesture. After keeping himself jealously aloof from women, it was a delicious and novel sensation to feel that he possessed one, all his own, to study and admire. She surprised him every hour by making him feel his importance to her, and the feeling, although it made him serious, made him more important in his own eyes.

It was the thought of her possible disillusionment that frightened him. Already he felt that he would rather cut off his hand than tell her the truth, and say, "I have never claimed to love you. I only suggested our marriage as a matter of mutual convenience, because I owed you a debt and could thwart my enemies by discharging it; because Fate threw you in my path just when I needed you—a woman who did not offend my taste, and at the same time was so circumstanced that she did not complain of the conditions under which I must marry."

He could not disillusionise her like this, and so he played the lover cheerfully, and was still surprised to find pleasure in it, when the letter arrived, begging him to return to Pennybrook.

It was written to Percival Ilden, who had been summoned back to Yorkshire by the news of his father's serious illness, from the dictation of the sick man himself, and had been addressed to Ilden Castle in the hope that it would be forwarded to Ilden, wherever he might be.

It had been sent on with others by the faithful Jardine, who remained there to serve as a medium of communication between Ilden and his friends. The valet was the only person to whom the secret of his whereabouts had been disclosed. The promised letter to Catherine was still to be written. He was telling himself, as he postponed it from day to day, that it was too early as yet to boast of a settled address. The next hour might set them journeying again; but in his heart of hearts he was conscious that the duty of writing had become an undesirable one. His cousin's sympathy had become strangely unimportant to him, and she would expect him to give her some explanation of his marriage. He shrank from the task of putting his motives and emotions into black and white. Of the former he was feeling a little ashamed.

The latter he did not understand clearly himself; and it seemed to him that his exact relationship to his wife was a matter sacred to themselves. And yet he could not write to Catherine without mentioning his marriage, nor could he mention it without offering her some explanation of it. And so the latter had been put off from day to day until he understood himself better, and now it seemed that he was likely to give his first explanation to Catherine by word of mouth.

The letter had come while they were at lunch together, and he read it aloud without comment.

Florence's face grew white as she listened.

"And you have decided to go," she said, reading his thoughts from his face as she had learnt to do without any need of words. She knew better than he knew himself that his decision was already taken, and her heart sank. This then was the end of her dream which from the first had seemed too wonderfully beautiful to endure. He would go back to Pennybrook and be killed, and she would never see him again.

"Yes, I suppose I ought to go," he said thoughtfully. "Uncle Rupert told me when I saw him last that he was fonder of me than of his own sons, and one cannot disregard the wishes of a dying man. I should feel like a coward if I ignored it through fear."

"You do not think that it is a trick intended only to take you back?" she asked timidly. "It is written by the cousin you distrust."

The idea had not occurred to him, and she impressed him again pleasantly, as she was always doing, with a sense of her value as an ally.

But in this case he scarcely suspected intrigue. The motive was one which would not have suggested itself to Percival as likely to succeed, and he said so.

"Besides, if it were a trick, their object could only be to discover where we are," he continued, "and I shall be very careful."

The fact that his decision was fully taken showed itself more clearly than ever in his voice, and with a passionate gesture she flung her arms round his neck.

"Darling love, if you must go, will you not let me go with you?"

The tears that had gathered in her pleading eyes made him stoop and kiss her as he answered, telling her that it was impossible.

"You must remain here as my hostage, little one," he said gently. "Only the fact that I leave you hidden makes it safe for me to expose myself. I am only half a person now, and nobody would think it worth while to kill one without the other. So long as you keep your whereabouts unknown, you will know that you are protecting me from attack."

This was the thought which made him almost eager to leave his retreat. So far as the plot against his life was concerned, it seemed to him that his marriage had been a masterly move, and he wanted to test its efficacy, and enjoy the triumph which it gave him.

By going back to Pennybrook openly, he would be saying in effect to his unknown enemy: Here I am. Shoot me now, if you think it worth the risk.

The spice of audacity in the challenge pleased him, and he steeled himself against the pathetic fear in his young wife's face. The necessity of which he had always been conscious when a serious problem suggested itself to his mind, to be alone and think it over in solitude, made the idea of leaving her in a way a relief, and he was uncertain of his own sincerity when he assured her that it would be a wrench to tear himself away.

The assertion seemed demanded of him, and he made it warmly, but it was just this question of his own sincerity that he wanted to think out without the distraction of her presence. A day or two by himself would enable him to understand himself, and if he still kept his girl-wife happy, as he must do, with love-words and caresses, he would at least be saved this disturbing uncertainty as to whether they were genuine or

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only the outcome of the part which he had unintentionally committed himself to play.

Florence had already accepted the inevitable, and was making an effort to accept it bravely. There would be time when he had gone for tears. At present she must not distress him or add to his anxieties by showing how tragically she felt and feared the parting.

"You will be starting at once, dear?" she asked, with only the slightest tremor in her voice to show how much the effort of self-control cost her.

Ilden was already consulting a time-table.

"Yes, little-one. The sooner I start the sooner I shall be back with you. I shall catch the express to York if I am lucky and go at once."

And so the parting, which to her seemed almost as serious as the parting of death, came with little preparation. It seemed to her only a few minutes from the time when she had been perfectly happy in her dream elysium before she found herself alone, crying her eyes out in an abandonment of grief, and feeling that the end of all happiness had come.

She was conquering a mad impulse to hasten after him before it was too late, and beg him to return for her sake, as she knew that he would if she only spoke the word, to tell him that to know that he was going out into danger alone was more than she could bear.

But she conquered it resolutely. She had married him to help him, not to be a drag upon him, and no pity for her own weak fears should stand in the way of an action which he thought generous and right.

In a fit of hopeless agony she buried her face in her arms.

"Oh! my love, my love," she sobbed, "come back to me safely. I cannot lose you now."

She raised her head hastily as a knock sounded at the door, and the landlady of the house entered looking a little embarrassed by the sight of the grief on which she had obtruded.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," she said, "but a young person has called who says that she *must* see you."

Uncle Rupert Dies.

ILDEN seized the opportunity offered by his passage through London to call on his lawyer and sign a new will, hurriedly drawn up while he waited. He had paid a similar visit immediately after his marriage, and disturbed the usual humdrum routine of the office by demanding that important alterations should be made in the disposal of his personal fortune, for him to sign on the spot.

But this time the lawyer's duties were more simple, for the new will left everything which it lay in his lordship's power to bequeath *en bloc* to his wife.

In the will which he had signed on his wedding day, Ilden had contented himself with leaving Florence a modest competence, sufficient to provide her against want if he died. He had felt that his marriage to a virtual stranger, for their mutual benefit, ought not to interfere seriously with the claims of friends and relatives—chiefly on his mother's side—whom he had intended to benefit.

But the week at Sydenham had changed his views. His marriage had become a much more serious thing; for, in whatever light he looked upon it himself, there was no doubt that Florence regarded him as her husband, in heart as well as in fact, and regarded their tie as purely the outcome of mutual affection, as if the other motives were merely accidental incentives of their love. She had given herself to him, heart and soul.

She was his real wife, and, beside that tie, those of friendship and blood became insignificant. He was ashamed to think that he had treated her in his first will almost on a par with his cousin, Catherine, and breathed more freely when the injustice was remedied.

The fact that the newly-signed will would leave her, if he died, as wealthy and influential as his widow ought to find herself, served as solace for certain scruples he was beginning to feel about leaving her at all. Her pathetic face haunted him.

The knowledge that his life had become of the utmost importance to somebody besides himself gave to his adventure a gravity which made it exciting. A new sense of responsibility forbade him to risk a single unnecessary danger, and kept his vigilance throughout the long journey more thoroughly awake than a purely selfish concern for himself had ever been able to do.

But the utmost vigilance failed to discover any sign that he was recognised or followed.

At Rickerby Junction, where he had to change for Pennybrook, his mind was well on the alert. For he was in the midst now of the neighbourhood which he had found so full of danger. The lines branching north, east and west, pointed not only to his destination but to Ilden Market, Lallerton, and Witterby. After the peaceful fortnight he seemed to be once more in the midst of mystery and intrigue.

But the return to the old excitement found him wanting zest for it. He had been conscious all the way of something lacking, and he realised more clearly now that it was the company of his wife. Alone and without an ally, his adventure seemed a dull affair. With Florence at his side it had been a romance.

The platform at Rickerby brought it all back. He recognised with something of surprise how much more interesting life had become since that morning when they travelled together from Witterby to Lallerton. He wondered that he had been so unconscious of its dulness before. What interest had he found at Pennybrook that had made him look forward cheerfully to his visit when a month ago he found himself at Rickerby on his way there. He had to justify himself for coming at all by reminding himself that it was a duty he owed to a dying man.

Even the thought that he had outwitted his unknown enemy seemed of little moment, and the ever-present sense of his duty to his wife made him glad that, so far, no danger had suggested itself to lessen the monotony of the journey.

He had been the only passenger to enter the Pennybrook train at the junction, and he was the only passenger to leave it when the end of his journey came.

He had thought it prudent to give no hint of his arrival, and he reached the Hall on foot without an incident of any sort on the way.

The sight of the place, dreary and forbidding in the darkness, struck him with a sense of foreboding. Perhaps after all it had been foolish of him to come back for a sick man's whim.

He was entering the house now, and Catherine met him in the hall.

Her face filled with consternation.

"Oh! George, why have you come?" she cried.

"To see Uncle Rupert. I could not refuse when I received his letter."

"But that was sent three days ago, and he died the next morning. You have come too late, and only placed your life in danger again."

[What Lord Ilden's danger was will be told next Tuesday.]

Woman's Wit v. Woman's Wit.

WHEN a woman has to guide a beautiful, young, rash, wealthy, and romantic girl through the troublous waters of the matrimonial sea, she is pretty certain to find that her path is beset with any number of difficulties. This is what Lady Peggy Carstairs had to do for Belinda North, and the lovely Belinda led her into some remarkable and desperately exciting adventures. We have secured Lady Peggy Carstairs for readers of *Short Stories*, and she will tell of her adventures in a striking series of articles which commence next week, entitled: "How I Chaperoned Belinda." You must not miss them!

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The Plot that Failed.

A Story of Land and Sea.

"Mercy, Michael!—the last man I'd have thought of seeing in Liverpool. Where have you been all these years?"

"Where have *you* been, Dick? I haven't roamed very far from Tat's Corner, but you!—why, nobody's heard a breath of you for the last six years or more."

Dick Corbett laughed recklessly, and looked at his one-time chum, Michael Fenwick, in—as the latter thought—a peculiarly defiant way.

"No; they haven't; but, as that is my business, and not anybody's, just be content, my son, to know that I've been 'sailoring' in nearly every sea, and that now, I'm chief mate of the fastest little fruit steam 'tramp' that trades between Liverpool and the Spanish ports."

"Have you a vacancy for a 'forrad hand'?"

"Who for—for you? Why!—what's pretty little Kitty about that she's letting you go to sea?"

"Never mind Kitty, Dick!—I'm going to sea again, because things have been a bit rough round about Tat's Corner lately."

He spoke as if any reference to his sweetheart by the other, was distasteful to him; for he saw clearly that Dick Corbett, since he had seen him last, was changed, and for the worse; he was no longer the "good fellow" of old days.

For the moment Dick was inclined to resent Michael Fenwick's evident disinclination to bring Kitty Hazell's name into the conversation, but thinking better of it, he brought his hand suddenly down upon Michael's shoulder.

"Look here, old chap!" he said, with a show of good-natured heartiness, that quite deceived the other, "I don't want to poke my nose into your love affairs; I've lived out my soft side, and don't care a 'rope-yarn-end' for the trimmest petticoat that walks the earth. If you want a berth on the *Erl King*, you can have it—I'm going aboard now; come along, and you can sign on, and finish the business."

The two men were standing by the high wall which bounds the Albert Dock, and but a few yards from the dock gates.

"When do you sail?" asked Michael, as he went up the *Erl King's* gangway.

"Day after to-morrow," returned the mate, over his shoulder.

"Time enough to send a letter to Tat's Corner and get a reply."

"Yes," muttered Dick Corbett as he unlocked the door of his cabin in the alleyway opposite the engine-room hatch.

"You can write your letter here," he continued, "before you sign on. After that, for the sake of discipline, I can't say anything to you much in the daytime—but at night, middle-watch sometimes, we'll have a chance for a 'palaver'."

Michael Fenwick's letter was to Kitty Hazell. It was not a long one; just saying that "she must not think badly of him for leaving her in this way, and that an unexpected meeting with Dick Corbett had made things easier, and the future more hopeful."

He was addressing the envelope, when Dick, who had left him for ten minutes, returned.

The mate's eyes gleamed viciously as he caught sight of the superscription over the other's shoulder.

"Shall I post it for you?" he said.

"No, Dick!—or Mr. Corbett, I suppose I ought to say—No, thanks, I've got to go after my 'duds,' to the boarding-house."

The other tried hard not to appear disappointed, and so far succeeded as to awaken no suspicion in Michael's mind of any desire to tamper with the letter.

The new A. B. then signed on; agreed to be on board the following afternoon, and left the ship.

Had he but turned round as he went down the gangway, he would not have failed to see such an expression on Dick Corbett's face, as the latter stood watching, with his arms on the rail, as would have set him thinking that the easiness of things, and the hopefulness of the future, were not quite so substantial as they appeared to be.

So he posted the letter in the first pillar-box and the play went on.

Tat's Corner was a quaint little old-world fishing village on the west coast, where, seven years before, Dick Corbett and Michael Fenwick idled as inseparable cronies.

Kitty Hazell, then a girl of sixteen only, was pretty and sweet enough to turn the heads of more than one young fellow in the place. But from the first, Michael made the running.

One thing he did not know; that his friend was, behind his back, scheming to supplant him in Kitty's affection; using as his principal tool, the girl's own father, Joshua Hazell; the drunkenest fisherman in all the fleet that sailed out of the little harbour of Tat's Corner.

Kitty's would-be lover played upon the old fisherman's weakness to such an extent, that in a short time, things seemed ripe for a declaration on his—Corbett's part.

Fortunately, however, for Michael and his sweetheart, though disastrously for old Joshua, a storm, that swept the whole of the west coast, was the means of defeating, for the time being, at any rate, Dick Corbett's mean and dastardly betrayal of his friend.

Old Hazell with many another deep-sea fisherman, was drowned, almost within sight of land.

In him Corbett lost the only ally who could have influenced Kitty; though she herself declares to-day, that not even her father could have shaken her faith in Michael Fenwick.

Hard times then came to Kitty, and at the date of Dick Corbett's disappearance, she was earning a scanty living, as one of the many net-menders to the fishing fleet.

By-and-by, the fishing industry declined so, owing to the overwhelming increase in steam trawling, that Michael found it impossible to make a living even, while his prospects of marrying Kitty seemed more remote than ever.

Then it was that he determined to go to sea for a year or two, leaving Tat's Corner with that object, without saying a word to Kitty; or, indeed, to anyone.

Kitty's only mistake was, that she had not told Michael that she had guessed that Dick Corbett loved her; her excuse to herself being, that no word had actually been spoken.

There were thus faults on both sides, the consequences of which might, with a little mutual confidence, have been averted.

* * * * *

The *Erl King* was preparing to warp out of dock, and Michael Fenwick, sick with disappointment at not having had a reply from Kitty, was listlessly coiling up a rope on the fo'castle head.

The chief mate was standing by the break-rail, shouting orders to the man in charge of the steam-winch, when, casting his eyes for a moment quaywards, he saw a girl's tearful face looking up at that part of the ship.

He could not take advantage of her proximity to speak to her; besides, Michael was too close for that action to be quite prudent—so he made a virtue of necessity, and called his subordinate's attention to his sweetheart's presence on the quay.

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It would have been rank insubordination to leave the ship, even for five minutes, so all Michael could do was to lean over the rail and speak to her.

"You shouldn't have come!" he said, first looking round to see that there were not immediate listeners. "We shall cast off in less than ten minutes."

"I couldn't let you go without saying good-bye, Michael."

"Yes, I know; it was wrong of me to leave you without a word; but I did it for the best, Kitty."

"Don't say anything more about that, Michael!—I just want you to promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Promise me you'll do what I've asked you in *this!*"

As she spoke the last word she threw on board a piece of paper wrapped round something hard. It fell at his feet, and he picked it up on the instant, and put it in his pocket.

"You mustn't remain any longer, Kit!" (even then the ship had begun to move away from the quay), "I'll remember. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, dear!"

At that moment Corbett called him to do something, and when he looked round again the steamer was a hundred yards from the quay; all he could see being a little figure, waving a white handkerchief.

When they were well in the Mersey, and fairly on their way seawards, he took out and read Kitty's last little note of appeal.

It was not really a letter; it was just a request in one sentence.

"For your own safety's sake, dear, and for love of me, beware of Dick Corbett."

Nothing more; and Michael knew, for the first time, that his sometime friend had not only been false to him, but that he had also to fear his present enmity, and perhaps violence.

* * * * *

Owing to bad weather, the *Erl King* had to put in to Brest, on the third day after, they made another attempt to reach Cadiz, though it was known that, outside in the "Bay," a fierce gale was still blowing.

Somewhere abreast of Cape Finisterre, it came on to blow harder than ever, and Michael, who was at the wheel, had as much as he could do to keep the spokes from jumping out of his hands.

The night had drawn in intensely dark and cold, and a rough Biscay swell was running mountain-high from the west, to break furiously, with a cloud-mist of hissing spray, on the rocky coast of Portugal.

At six bells, first watch, Michael was relieved, and before descending to the fo'castle, stood leaning on the rail, looking at the seething, rushing water.

Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder. It was the mate, Dick Corbett.

"Cold to-night, Michael!" he said.

"Ay!—it is that."

"Makes you think of—of firesides, and Kitty—our Kitty—eh, Michael?"

"Let Kitty's name alone!"

"No offence, mate. But she's not yours yet."

"As good as mine. Only this one contract, and then——"

"You may never finish this one, my son; the *Erl King* isn't much of a boat; she's old and cranky, while seas are rough and winds high."

"Well, if we go, we go; but if Kitty can't be mine, she shan't be another man's."

"Sure of that?"

"Sure as death!"

"Hope you're right, my boy! Hope you're right—but—I have my doubts."

"Of Kitty?" queried Michael fiercely.

"I don't know! Let's change the subject. Come down to my cabin and have a tot—there's no one about."

Never one to harbour malice or hard thoughts, Michael assented, and the two men went below to the mate's cabin.

Up above the roaring of the elements; down below, the doing of devil's work.

Michael's lips were no sooner put to the glass of spirits and water, than he was conscious of something uncanny about it.

There was no delay in its effect. Seeming to madden and burn like vitrol, it produced an instant sense of suffocation, but fortunately not of blank unconsciousness.

Except the "look-out" in the bows, and the man at the wheel, aft, there was not a soul to see Dick Corbett stagger on to the poop deck with the inert body of Michael over his shoulders.

The crazy steamer rolled and pitched in the swell, so that more than once, man and burden were in danger of falling in a heap to leeward. Arrived at the lee quarter boat, Corbett, using all his strength, tried to heave the insensible man into the stern sheets.

Michael, however, roused back to a sense of his position by reason of the motion during his journey on deck on Corbett's shoulders, managed to shake himself free of his intended murderer, grasping him resolutely by the throat.

Corbett, alive to the fact that the easy accomplishment of his design was now impossible, fought with the desperation of a madman.

Then, Michael, gathering himself together for one big effort, dealt his opponent a terrific blow between the eyes, and felled him senseless to the deck.

Knowing that he was within five miles at most of the Portuguese coast, he sprang to the davits, let go the tackles of the lee quarter boat, jumped into her, and when the rail kissed the water, let the boat down with a run into the boiling sea.

* * * * *

At Tat's Corner Kitty Hazell sits, under the lee of some rocks on the beach, wearily mending her nets.

There are half a score of other women, young and old, working around her, but she speaks to no one; and, with the sympathy of their kind, they leave her severely alone.

By and by, the old man who performs the duties of letter-carrier and general postal official in Tat's Corner, and its neighbourhood, is seen to be hobbling towards the beach.

"What be owd Maartin a doin' 'ere now, I wunner?" said an old dame sitting close by Kitty.

The remark was sufficient to make the girl raise her head.

As she did so, the old postman saw her looking at him, and waved something above his head.

"Kitty Hazzell, it's a message for 'ee," he said, putting the orange-coloured envelope into her trembling hand.

With feverish eagerness she tore it open.

It was from the house-surgeon of a large Liverpool hospital.

"Michael Fenwick brought here on landing from Braga, Portugal. Is seriously ill. Wishes to see you."

* * * * *

"Kit," said Michael, sobbing, in his weakness like a child, "you will never forgive me for not keeping my promise."

"Yes, dear, I forgive you, for you have suffered most."

"One more question, Kit."

"Well, Michael?"

"Dick Corbett—what of him?"

He tried to raise himself in the bed to listen to her answer.

"Tell me," he said again, excitedly. "Is that fiend, who tried to drop me over a ship's side, on a dark and stormy night—is he to escape justice?"

"What do you consider justice, Michael?"

"Death!—nothing short of death!"

"Well, dear, the doctor has just told me, that the *Erl King*, with all hands, is reported as having foundered on the same night that you drifted in that small boat to the Portuguese port. Dick Corbett, therefore, has received justice, and you and I have no more to say."

Michael Fenwick went no more to sea, for his case, having enlisted public sympathy, a few wealthy gentlemen in Liverpool, subscribed to buy him a fishing boat of his own, which he works by deputy.

A little while after the new vessel arrived round at Tat's Corner, he and Kitty were married, and so far as report has it, with the happiest results.

Ralph Enderby.

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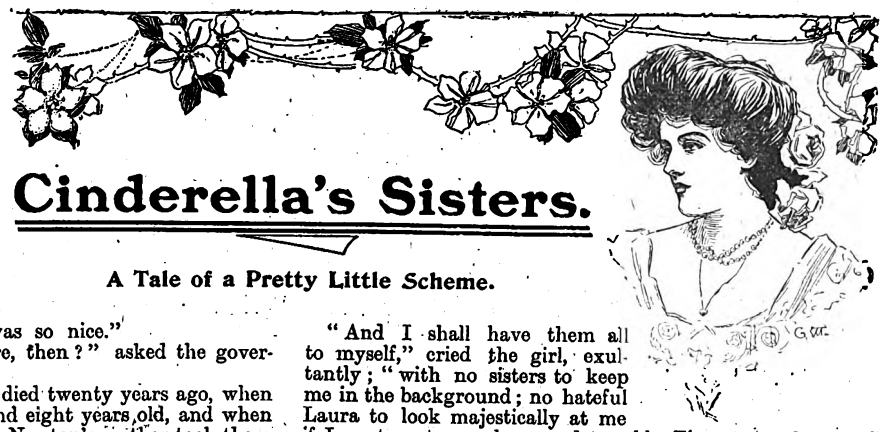

Cinderella's Sisters.

A Tale of a Pretty Little Scheme.

"If ever there were two disagreeable, hateful, tyrannical old maids on earth, those two are my step-sisters, and you know it, Miss Reade."

Miss Reade looked uncomfortable.

"As your governess, you know, Ella, I ought not to listen to your remarks on your sisters——" she began, nervously.

"Step-sisters, please," snapped Ella. "Oh, Miss Reade, if you had only been here before they came. It was so nice."

"Didn't they always live here, then?" asked the governess.

"Oh, *dear*, no. Their father died twenty years ago, when Laura and Theodora were six and eight years old, and when mother married a year later, Mr. Newton's mother took them to live with her. Then mother died two years ago, and father said I wasn't old enough to take charge, though I was fifteen. So as old Mrs. Newton had died a year or so before, and Laura and Theo were staying with their father's sister, father wrote and asked them to come here. They've done nothing but interfere with me ever since they came. You haven't been long enough here to find it out yet, but you will soon. The idea of taking that book away from me!"

"Well, you know, Ella, dear, it is not quite a book for young girls; but hush—I hear Miss Newton's voice. Do go on practising."

The door opened, and a tall, graceful girl entered. She looked as much younger than her real age as Ella looked older, and no one would have guessed her to be more than twenty-three or four. She looked very pale, and there were tears in her eyes and a quiver in her voice as she addressed the governess.

"Miss Reade, I have just had a telegram to tell me that my aunt has had a paralytic stroke. My sister and I are going to her with the next train. Will you kindly take charge here? I will give you all directions if you will come to my room. Ella, you will explain to father, dear, and be kind to the little ones."

All was bustle and confusion for the next two hours, and then the sisters drove off to catch their train from the junction.

"It's *too* annoying," cried Major Leigh, when he arrived later in the afternoon, and was met in the hall by Ella, eager to tell him the news. "Just exactly my luck. Why couldn't their aunt take ill at some other time? What on earth shall I do? Write and put them off, I suppose."

"Put who off? Have you asked anybody down?" asked Ella, who was accustomed to her parent's incoherent style of conversation.

"I met two friends in town to-day," explained her father, "whom I haven't seen for six or seven years, and I asked them down for some shooting. I suppose I must put them off."

"No need for that," answered Ella, with a toss of her head. "There are plenty of good servants, and Miss Reade can order dinner, and chaperon me. Who are your friends, father? I suppose they are quite old."

"*They* don't think so," said the Major with a grin, "though no doubt you will. They are some years younger than myself, both on the sunny side of forty. It's too bad of the girls," went on the major, absently, and half forgetting his auditor. "I always thought there was something between Dot and Ashby, and it would do very well now that he has come into his uncle's property. And Courtenay's always talking about his ideal woman. I wonder what he'd think of Laura. Run away, Ella; I wasn't talking to you. Go and tell Miss Reade I want her."

Miss Reade was a weak and foolish woman, who, being incapable of exercising any control over her strong-willed pupil, managed her by means of gross flattery and unlimited indulgence. She was writing in her own room when Ella ran in to tell her of the expected visitors.

"And I shall have them all to myself," cried the girl, exultantly; "with no sisters to keep me in the background; no hateful Laura to look majestically at me if I venture to speak; no detestable Theo to snub me. I look quite grown up, don't I, Miss Reade?"

"You *are* grown up, dear," replied the judicious governess. "You look quite twenty. And seventeen is a marriageable age, you know. Wouldn't it be fun to steal a march on your sisters, and get married to one of these gentlemen?"

"Wouldn't it? And the point is, Miss Reade, that I believe father asked these men down to meet Laura and Theodora—I *won't* call her Dot; so absurd to keep up baby names when she is so old. I mean to have some fun with these men. Wouldn't it be jolly if I were to marry one?"

"It would indeed," Miss Reade assented.

"It is a distinct leading of Providence that the sisters are away," laughed Ella. "If they were at home I shouldn't have a chance. I should be kept in the background; and besides Laura is handsome, and Theo really lovely."

"But you have the charm of youth, and your artless ways are more winning than the finished manners of older women."

Ella did not answer. She stood looking absently at the window.

"What is my Cinderella thinking of?" asked Miss Reade, after a pause.

"Of—Cinderella," answered the girl, with a little gleeful laugh. "I have a plan, Miss Reade, and if you help me, I'll take you to live with me when I am married. I'm going to act a little comedy. I am Cinderella; ill-treated by my step-sisters, who are old, ugly, and jealous, but I am too noble to complain; I am resigned, gentle, ever obliging."

"I see. 'Pity is akin to love,' and you think you can interest these men by playing Cinderella. Well, it is not a bad idea. But how can I help you?"

"I'll tell you later. Meantime you had better go to father. I quite forgot to tell you he wants to see you."

Colonel Ashby arrived next evening. Sir George Courtenay was not expected for a day or two, and Ella felt rather relieved. One man was enough to begin with. The Major mentioned casually at dinner that his elder daughters were from home, and Ernest Ashby felt a pang of disappointment. He had hoped to meet Dot, for he had heard of the death of her mother and of the sisters having gone to live with their step-father. His brief love-story had been played out one autumn in a country house where Dot had been visiting alone. Ashby had fallen violently in love with Dot, but although she had returned his affection, their engagement was never announced, for they had quarrelled almost at once, and Ashby had gone abroad in a fit of temper.

As soon as the Major had fallen asleep over his wine, Ashby made his way to the drawing-room, where he found Miss Reade at the piano, and Ella prettily posed in a window recess. He quickly joined the latter, and began to make conversation.

"You have sisters, haven't you?" he asked, after a time.

"Step-sisters, and three darling little brothers."

"Your sisters are from home just now?"

"Oh, yes," with an arch smile, "or I shouldn't be here."

"Shouldn't you? Why not?"

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"Oh, well"—a pause. "You see, I am rather young, and my sisters keep me in the schoolroom. They are very good and kind, but being quite old, they think me a child."

"Quite old!" he exclaimed. "Why, they cannot be. At least the one I knew cannot be much over twenty."

Ella bit her lip in annoyance at her blunder. She had forgotten that Ashby had known Dot.

"Well, they seem rather old to me," she said, with sweet innocence. "Laura is thirty-five, and Theo is only a year younger."

"Theo!" he repeated. "Then there must be a third very much younger. Dot must be about twenty-four or twenty-five. When I knew her, she looked about eighteen. Where is Dot?"

Ella hesitated a moment, then risked a daring step.

"Darling Dot," she murmured. "Ah, Colonel Ashby, did you not know? Dot died two years ago."

"Dot dead!" he cried, in a voice of anguish. It was over then; his dream of reconciliation. He could never ask forgiveness now; never explain away his harsh words, never hear her dear voice whisper pardon. "I am sorry to have distressed you," he said, wearily, after a pause. "I had not heard of—of your sister's death."

Ella smiled through her tears like an April morn.

"I can't quite talk of darling Dot yet," she said, unsteadily. "We were so much to each other, and I am so lonely now she's *gone*."

"You must be," he answered, almost tenderly. "You must miss her terribly."

"Oh, I *do*," cried Ella, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, and there was a long silence. At last Ella looked up. "I must say good-night now, Colonel Ashby," she said with a sad little smile.

"Already?" he remonstrated. "Why, it's very early. Don't go yet."

"Oh but I have such a lot to do to-night," she answered simply.

"Do you still do lessons, then?"

"Oh, *no*," cried Ella, earnestly. "I am going to the nursery. Baby Bertie won't let anybody else put him to bed. And then, my sisters have left me things to do."

"Tasks?" asked Ashby.

"Mending, and things like that. They have taken their maid with them, you see."

"Rather hard lines on you. Don't they ever take you out with them?"

"Oh, they are very kind," said Ella, "and they have promised to take me somewhere some day, when the boys are old enough to be at school, and I am not so much needed at home."

"Rather a distant prospect," remarked Ashby. "I'm afraid it's a case of Cinderella and the cruel step-sisters."

"Oh, don't say that," cried the girl, with sweet eagerness. "My sisters are very kind and good to me, and I love them. Good-night, Colonel Ashby."

And she ran off to her room to eat sweets and read a novel lent her by Miss Reade. That lady, meantime, took advantage of the major's prolonged slumbers to nobly second her pupil, representing her to Colonel Ashby as a second Cinderella in very deed, a patient, gentle, loving, little drudge.

Ella rather forgot her part next day. Her father was laid up with a sudden fit of gout, and Miss Reade was kept busy looking after household affairs, and subduing a mutiny in the nursery. Ella sauntered round the grounds with the Colonel, chatting gaily, and then insisted on rowing about on the pond, as unlike a household drudge as possible. This occurring to her very forcibly, she made an effort to resume her *rôle*.

"What a nice holiday I'm having!" she remarked, accordingly, resting on her oars, and fixing gleeful eyes on him. "That dear Miss Reade has undertaken all my duties this week that I may have a complete rest. Isn't it sweet of her?"

"Very," assented Ashby, thinking what a pretty picture she made in her white frock, with the sunlight flickering through the trees upon her.

"I daresay I do want a rest," she went on plaintively. "I'm not very strong." She looked very fragile in her girlish slenderness, and Ashby looked tenderly at her.

"Poor little woman," he rejoined—they were on quite familiar terms now—"it's a shame you should be so overworked, and I shall tell your father so."

"Oh, no, you mustn't," cried Ella, in quick alarm. "I can't have dear father worried, especially now he is ill. You mustn't think I'm complaining. My sisters are very good to me. Promise me you won't say anything; please promise me."

"I promise, I promise," he soothed her. "I won't say a word, you loyal little soul. It's hard lines just now, Cinderella, but remember how the fairy-tale ends, and this may end sooner than you think."

"How? What do you mean?" asked the child, with wide, innocent eyes, and Ashby hastily changed the subject, resolving to say nothing more to disturb her "Heavenly innocence."

The days went on. The major was confined to his room, and Cinderella, mistress of the field, was making the most of her time, and a very complete fool of Colonel Ashby. Her only trouble was that he persisted in talking of Dot, and dwelling fondly on the bygone days when he had been engaged to the sister whom Ella had so dearly loved.

"I may as well own it to you, little one," he said, one afternoon, as they strolled on the lawn, "I was engaged to your sister. It was rather a hopeless affair, for I was wretchedly poor, so we kept it to ourselves. But a secret engagement is an awfully trying thing, and I was a jealous fool. We quarrelled, and parted, and so—and so—I lost her."

Ella was silent.

"I was too proud to make any advances," went on Ashby, "and now that things are different and I would gladly beg her forgiveness, she is gone. I need not fear to bore you, Ella, by talking of her, for you loved her too. You would never have been Cinderella had she lived. You have a look of her too, at times." And he looked kindly at her.

Ella had to turn her head aside in pretended emotion, for a laugh quivered on her mouth as a vision of her extremely alive and energetic sister came before her.

As soon as Sir George Courtenay arrived, Ella turned her attention to him. He, at least, could not bore her about the defunct Dot. Ella really was a clever girl, and she knew that simple pathos becomes wearisome in time, so without abandoning her *rôle* of Cinderella, she kept it rather in the background, and prattled so happily and even wittily that both men were amused and fascinated by her. So skilfully did she play her part (developing histrionic talent in a way that quite dazzled Miss Reade) that by the end of a week her success had far outstripped her wildest hopes. Both men had resolved to propose for her. Ella had determined to accept Courtenay. If she chose Ashby, he must inevitably discover her deception about Dot, but Courtenay had never met her sisters and could not hold her responsible for any discrepancies he might notice between her description of them and reality.

It was evening, and tea had been brought out on the lawn. Ella's pretty fingers were busy with the cups, while she prattled merrily to the guests. Miss Reade cut cake, and put in a judicious word now and then.

"Well, you do a lot for those sisters of yours," Courtenay remarked, as Ella concluded an amusing little fancy sketch of the difficulties of getting her sisters up for a ball. "It's a regular shame."

"Oh, I *like* it," cried the child prettily. "And then, think how sad it must be to be getting old and—and not pretty. It's no wonder they are sometimes just a little bit cross."

"Are they very ugly then?"

"Oh, no; Laura is quite nice-looking—for thirty-five," answered the young lady, forgetting in her excitement her resolve to avoid dangerous details. "Only she has grown dreadfully stout. She has a lovely complexion, though; far better than mine," said Miss Ella, conscious that both gentlemen involuntarily glanced at the blush-rose face before

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them. "But that brilliant complexion generally goes with red hair."

"And the other sister?" pursued Courtenay.

"Theo is painfully thin, and she—well—*laces* too tightly. It makes her nose red, poor dear. Now I must go, and see how father is, and if he'll take some tea."

When she was gone, Courtenay fell into conversation with Miss Reade, and Ashby went indoors. Running upstairs, he stumbled over a bundle which, on investigation, turned out to be a sobbing child of tender years.

"What's wrong, little one?" he asked, picking it up carefully.

"Ella slapped baby," sobbed the child.

"Ella did? Where is Ella, then?"

"Don't *want* Ella," wailed the baby so heartbrokenly that Ashby felt quite touched. He was trying to console it when to his relief the nurse appeared with a flood of apologies."

"I'm so sorry, sir, but I had to go downstairs for something, and Master Bertie ran after me. We're all at sixes and sevens just now, sir, for the young ladies being away makes such a difference."

Baby burst into renewed sobs, wailing, "me no want nursie; me want Dot. Oh, me do so want Dot."

"Ah, poor little man! I too 'do so want Dot,'" sighed Ashby.

That evening the major received a letter from Laura, informing him that her aunt was better, and she and Dot would return the following afternoon. He kept this to himself, intending a pleasant surprise, and had himself established on the lawn next day at tea-time. Ella made such a pretty picture of filial love as she hung about her father's chair, that Courtenay made up his mind to delay no longer, but to ask her at once to submit to be trained—after marriage—into his ideal woman. So he presently asked her to come for a stroll round the lawn, and Ella, reading his purpose in his face, rose with alacrity. But, alas! in the very act of raising the costly cup to her lips it was dashed to the ground. At this very moment there appeared two ladies, hastening from the house across the lawn to join the party round the tea-table. Ella turned white. Her father held out welcoming hands.

"The girls!" he exclaimed joyously. "Welcome home, dears."

At this moment—whence, no one could tell—three children dashed across the lawn, and up to the new-comers, uttering shouts of welcome.

"Oh, sisters, we're so glad you're back," cried the eldest. "Ella's been horrid. She's made us live in the nursery, and never come downstairs."

The two guests had been looking on, mystified, but as the ladies came nearer, Ashby fairly gasped for breath. For the lady round whose neck baby was clinging was no other than his lost Dot. As for Courtenay, he was stricken speechless by Laura's calm loveliness. Here—at least in appearance—was his ideal woman.

"Don't you know my daughter, Ashby?" asked the major. "Dot, I mean."

"It can't be," gasped Ashby hoarsely. "It isn't possible. Dot is dead. Ella told me she died two years ago."

"Dot dead?" repeated the major, stupefied. "What—on—*earth* do you mean?"

"But—there must be—some awful mistake. Ella told me," faltered Ashby, and then Dot raised her eyes to his, and said: "Ernest!" and he had no more doubts.

Ella, meantime, had most judiciously disappeared, and her mystified father postponed inquiries till next day. Then, however, her little brothers, who had hung about the gardens many an evening and been unsuspected witnesses to tender scenes and pathetic plaints, told enough to reveal to the astonished and wrathful major Cinderella's little plot.

Some months later, a double wedding took place in the village church. The bridegrooms were Colonel Ashby and Sir George Courtenay, and the brides were Cinderella's sisters.

Vera Serkoff.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

October 28.—Those whose birthday occurs to-day will have an unsettled year; opposition in business concerns; not a good time to make changes.

Girls will receive attentions from married men, and those not free to marry.

The day is not good for travelling, dealing with foreigners, or buying property.

A child born here will be rather ambitious, active, and fond of the opposite sex. Should keep in the employ of others.

October 29.—A year of change and travel is indicated for those who celebrate their birthdays to-day. Business, health, and general concerns are favoured. Make use of friends.

Young girls will find love matters quiet and slow.

The day is good to speculate, buy, sell, and make changes.

A child born to-day will be fortunate in life. The mind will be very quick, clever and inventive. Would make a successful stockbroker.

October 30.—Not favourable for business for to-day's children; some sickness and anxiety. Landlords and farmers meet with misfortune.

Girls will find love affairs run smooth; those born near four p.m. become engaged and marry.

The day is not good for buying in the early morning, better from ten a.m. to four p.m.; good for visiting and pleasure then.

A child born here will be unfortunate; should keep in employ. In disposition cautious, but cheerful and kind.

October 31.—A doubtful time is shown. Do not speculate, and be cautious with friends. More fortunate for those in employ.

Girls born between nine and ten p.m. find love affairs interesting, but need some caution and prudence.

The day is good for dealing with doctors, military men, and shipping agents. Ask favours near five p.m.

A child born this day will be proud, active and daring; not very fortunate.

November 1.—A quiet and steady year for business. More favourable for elderly people.

Love affairs go much as usual.

The day is good for dealing with property, land, and coal merchants. Travel and write letters here.

A child born to-day will be steady and plodding. More fortunate in the employ of others than for itself.

November 2.—Go steady this year or some loss is promised. Insure against fires and have a care of mishap and law.

Girls will receive attentions and marry if now engaged.

A child born here will be improvident, rash, and headstrong. Of a cheerful disposition and fond of the opposite sex.

November 3.—A year of change and travel. Avoid intrigues and go quietly.

Girls will have many strange experiences in love affairs and need some extra caution.

The day is not good for new ventures, marriage, or visiting. Defer travelling and making changes.

A child born here will be of an unsettled disposition.

Asturel

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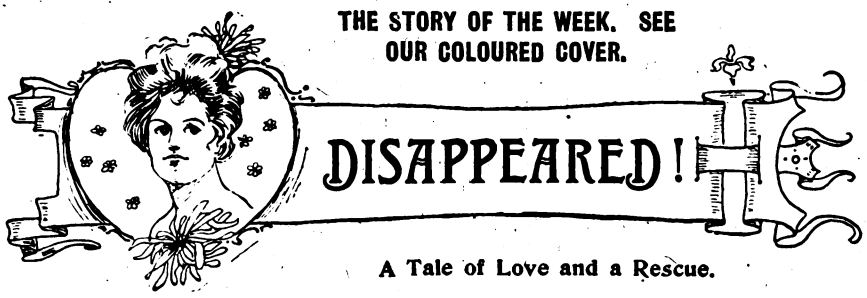
THE STORY OF THE WEEK. SEE OUR COLOURED COVER.



DISAPPEARED!

A Tale of Love and a Rescue.

A GIRL went singing down a Surrey lane, her hat swung from her hand, her face was uplifted to the blue of the June sky; the sunlight, falling across the tall hedgerows, turned her hair into a halo of golden glory about her shapely head.

"He is coming home to-day," she sang, and at the moment, unseen by her, a woman's face peered down at her between the interlaced boughs of the hawthorns on the steep bank, and a voice murmured softly, but in accents of passionate bitterness:

"Ah! he is coming home to-day, is he! And he might have been mine—mine—mine, but for yonder white-faced fool! Surely Reginald will help me to baffle them both!" And whilst the girl's clear voice died away in the distance, and her form turned round a bend in the lane and disappeared, the watching woman stole from her place amongst the hawthorns and made her way rapidly across the meadows to a big white house that stood back from the lane, and quite concealed from its surrounding trees.

"Reginald is wild about her; surely he and I can find a way!" the woman murmured once more as she hastened up the drive that led to the white house, and vanished within the open front door. Meanwhile, the girl who had gone singing down the lane paused at last beside a tiny wicket gate leading into a copse, where the ground was a carpet of bluebells, and the hazels hung out yellow flowers amongst which the bees hummed softly.

A man stood beside the gate; a man who, at sight of the girl with her happy face and shining hair, made two quick steps forward and caught her in his arms with an eager exclamation of love.

"At last, my darling, at last!" he cried, kissing her tenderly on lips and cheek and brow, and softly caressing the luxuriant masses of her hair. "The minutes have seemed like hours, and the days I have been away like months and years! It is good to see you again, sweetheart."

She nestled closer into his arms and lifted her radiant, blushing face to his.

"If it has seemed long to you, what has it seemed to me, waiting here without you? Ah, Maurice, the one who is left behind always feels the waiting most!"

"Yes, I know," and again he smoothed back her soft hair, as they paced the hazel copse side by side; "but, Doris, it will not be long now before I can claim you for my own. In a few weeks, my darling, the little house will be ready—the house which is to be yours and mine—our home together! Shall you loathe grimy old London after this?" And he waved his hand towards the budding hazels over their heads, the carpet of blue at their feet.

"I shall love the home I share with you, wherever that home is," she answered simply; "what does the place matter so long as we are there together?"

"We shall not be rich," he said slowly. "I wonder if you realise, Doris, that I am only a struggling artist, and that you are doing badly, very badly for yourself, from a worldly point of view; you would do better——"

"If I married that horrible Mr. Reginald Dunbar?, Aunt Clara is for ever telling me I am a fool to have rejected him. Are you telling me the same thing?"

She uttered a happy little laugh, but a dark frown crossed her lover's face. "Dunbar is a beast!" he said, with more force than elegance. "I cannot bear to hear you speak of him!" he shuddered slightly, "his sister, Miss Dunbar, is pleasant enough, but——"

"I don't know why it is," Doris answered, "but Miss Dunbar always gives me the same kind of feeling that a snake does, and yet—she is very civil to me. Both she and her brother are most kind to aunt Clara and me. Aunt Clara's cottage is close to their park gates——"

"I wish it were miles away!" another frown puckered the young man's brow. "I hate that fellow Dunbar, with his handsome, evil face and his wealth and villainous ways."

"Why do you speak of him so bitterly?"

"Because I hate him! If his sister gives you a feeling of repulsion, he gives me the same sensation. He is a reptile—I feel it, I know it! He would stop at nothing to gain his vile ends."

"Don't let us talk of the Dunbars any more," the girl whispered. "What are they to us? And I hear so much of them from Aunt Clara, who adores them both, that I don't want even to speak of them myself. Tell me of our little house—of the studio and the future that is to make your name."

They wandered on through the soft June weather of the radiant afternoon, talking of the cloudless future that awaited them, of their love and their happiness, until at last Doris said with a sigh:

"I must go home now. Aunt Clara will be vexed with me for meeting you here, and will ask me why I do not bring you to the cottage. But I never feel we are alone there. Aunt Clara seems to spy upon us; and I don't know why, but I feel that she is too friendly with the Dunbars. I—I wish our wedding was over, Maurice. I have a strange presentiment that——"

"Nonsense, my darling, nonsense!" he said lightly; "you are over-wrought, tired. I love our meeting-place here! It is far better than the cottage and your aunt's coldness and evident dislike of me. I must return to town to-night. Wright expects me, and to-morrow I have a hard day before me. A millionaire is coming to have his portrait painted. There! Sweetheart, a successful portrait of a rich man may be the beginning of our fortune."

"Come again soon," she said wistfully looking up at him with troubled eyes. "I am frightened when you are not near; when I am with you all is well."

By this time they had left the copse and were strolling up the lane down which Doris had come, in the direction of the cottage where she and her aunt lived together.

Just at the bend in the lane where, three hours before, the woman's face had watched Doris through the hedge the lovers now parted, in a long, clinging farewell, and then Maurice Ransome walked quickly in the direction of the railway station, whilst Doris walked slowly home, the song no longer on her lips, her face downbent and troubled.

She could not account, even to herself, for the strange feeling of desolation and misery that haunted her as she passed up the lane down which she had gone so gaily only such a little time before. A weight lay upon her heart, yet she could not discover any reason for its presence. To be sure, her aunt—Miss Clara Browne, with whom she lived—did not approve of her marriage with the rising young artist, Maurice Ransome. But the disapproval was based only on worldly grounds, and now that the wedding was actually fixed to take place three weeks hence, Doris felt that her forebodings were ridiculous and unreasonable.

She and Maurice had met for the first time only a few months before, when he had been staying in the neighbourhood, and their love had sprung into being on that very first occasion.

In spite of Miss Browne's strenuous opposition the young people had not allowed the grass to grow under their feet;

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their engagement was soon announced, and now Doris's busy fingers had already made many of the gowns that she would wear as Maurice's wife. She entered her aunt's cottage on that June evening with lagging steps, and her heart beat in odd, frightened beats when from the drawing-room she caught the sound of a voice that always had a strange power of stirring her to an incomprehensible fear and repulsion. The voice was a little raised, Doris plainly heard the words, "My brother is a very determined man. He is mad about your niece—quite *mad*; he intends——"

The speech did not end, for Doris flung open the door and walked into the drawing-room with head uplifted and eyes blazing brilliantly. Her aunt, a small, mean-looking woman with close-set eyes and a hard mouth, sat by the window; and opposite to her was a tall woman whose dark, handsome face might have compelled reluctant admiration, but whose sparkling eyes and thin lips gave one also a dim feeling of repulsion.

"Good evening, Miss Dunbar," Doris said coldly, "I am afraid I am interrupting an interesting discussion?" and she looked with a little smile from the visitor's handsome, evil face to her aunt's embarrassed countenance.

"Not at all, Miss Maitland," Miss Dunbar answered smoothly. "I was having a friendly chat with your aunt. You have been rambling in the lanes, no doubt?" Her keen eyes looked sharply into Doris's indignant ones.

"I have been with my betrothed, Mr. Ransome," the girl said quietly, "he comes down from town every now and then to see me."

Miss Dunbar's eyes flashed, an evil smile showed on her thin lips. "Your wedding day is fixed, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes, it is fixed for the 14th of July."

"And will Mr. Ransome still work in the studio of his friend, Mr. Wright? They are both friends of ours, you know."

The visitor's eyes seemed as though they were trying to penetrate to the very thoughts in Doris' brain, but the girl's face and voice were calm.

"Yes, I fancy that your friend Maurice and Mr. Wright have found a house with a studio; he will only be with Mr. Wright until we are married."

At the last words a kind of spasm swept over the elder woman's face; a look of such jealous anger shot into her dark eyes as made Doris recoil a step, all her sick repulsion to this woman rising up afresh. At that moment the visitor rose to go, but in spite of her suave manner, Doris instinctively realised that for some reason she could not divine, Marian Dunbar hated her, and would do her an injury if it were possible. "But it is not possible!" her heart cried out, "Maurice and I love each other; we shall soon be together for always, no one can harm us now; and yet why did I hear that hateful woman telling my aunt of her brother's mad infatuation for me—why?"

* * * * *

"With me you shall have all that your heart can desire; with him you will be in poverty and want!"

"But I love him! we are betrothed—our wedding day is fixed—how dare——"

"I dare do a great deal—for your sake. Listen to me, Doris, listen and heed."

"I will not hear another word—not another word!" and the girl tried to tear her hands from the rough grasp of the man who held them; a man with a dark, handsome face and gleaming eyes. "Why do you torment me?" A low laugh broke from the man who stood beside Doris in the lane beyond her aunt's cottage; a low laugh full of meaning.

"Look in your glass and you will understand," he said; "and remember—when you look—that the love of a man like Reginald Dunbar is resistless as a flood. Nothing can stay it, nothing *shall* get in its way. I shall win you yet!" And, flinging her hand from him, the man who had spoken turned away and strode down the lane.

* * * * *

"Do you know Ransome's whereabouts, he has disappeared from the Studio for two days—missing several appointments?" "WRIGHT."

The above telegram was put into Doris Maitland's hand a week before her wedding-day, and she read it through several times, her face grown white and rigid before its full meaning broke upon her.

Then, with a wild look in her eyes she looked at her aunt, who sat in the corner of the drawing-room, knitting and watching Doris furtively.

"Read that!" the girl cried hoarsely, "I must go to look for him at once—at once! My God! What can have happened to him?" And she wrung her hands together in frenzied misery.

"What *should* have happened?" answered her aunt, folding up the telegram, and glancing coldly at her niece, "You are absurdly agitated over nothing, Doris. Mr. Ransome is no doubt making the most of his last days of bachelordom. Why should Mr. Wright expect him at the Studio?"

"Why?—Because it is Maurice's working place. Because he is there regularly, he makes his appointments there, he paints his sitters there! Cannot you see that he has missed appointments by remaining away? What can it mean? Ah, what *can* it mean?"

And Doris paced the room with hurried, uneven steps.

"Bless my soul, what a fuss you make over a most ordinary occurrence!" Miss Browne said snappishly. "Surely a man may stay away from work for two days when he is going to be married. I always considered Mr. Ransome a very doubtful character—as you know. My suspicions are verified; it is perfectly plain that he is forgetting work and duty in a whirl of dissipation and excess. It——"

"Be silent!" Doris exclaimed passionately, "Maurice is the soul of goodness and honour. Duty is ever his first thought! His heart was in his work, his work was for me and for our home, he would never neglect it for dissipation or—— I shall go to town at once," she broke off suddenly.

"And pray why?"

"To look for Maurice," the girl cried, "I cannot rest here, when he may be in danger—in difficulty. I shall go at once."

"My dear Doris—it is impossible—the proprieties——"

"The *proprieties!*" Doris's voice rang with scorn, "What do I care for Mrs. Grundy if the man I love is in danger? I must go and find Maurice—I tell you I must go and find Maurice, for without him my life is a howling wilderness!"

A few hours later Doris stood in the big studio shared by her lover and his friend Mr. Wright, and the latter, whilst telling his story, was wishing from the bottom of his heart that he could find any girl so beautiful and strong and single-minded as this one, to love him as Doris loved Maurice.

"I am fairly puzzled," he was saying, as his respectfully admiring glance fell on the girl's lovely troubled face, "Two nights ago Ransome went out to see our mutual friend Digby. He was coming back here to share my diggings, as he has been doing lately, till his house is ready. When by midnight he was not in, I concluded he was stopping at Digby's, but when the next day came and went and there was no sign or word from Ransome, I grew uneasy, more especially so because he had two good appointments for that morning—two important sitters, both of whom went away very annoyed. That night Ransome never came back, nor did I hear word of or from him yesterday, and at last, growing thoroughly alarmed, I telegraphed to you this morning. You have heard nothing either?"

"Nothing!" Doris' voice shook with anxiety. "I had not expected a letter, knowing he was busy. My last news of him was three days ago, when he wrote a full account of his work, of his prospective sitters, and of our future."

"He had no anxiety or worry?"

"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA" COMMENCES NEXT WEEK.

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"None that I know of. Oh, I am sure he had none—we were so happy!" She said the words with such pathos that Wright gulped down a lump in his throat.

"I've been round to the police," he said, presently, "and they laugh at me and declare he will turn up, that he is having a lark, and so on. But you and I know Ransome better than that, Miss Maitland."

"Yes—we know him better than that," she repeated slowly, "I am sure some harm has befallen him. There is foul play somewhere."

"I have thought so myself," said Wright, with some hesitation, "but then—why—who——"

"I do not know," Doris replied, her brows drawn together in earnest thought, "I cannot explain to you, while I feel so certain of what I say, but I say it again—there is foul play somewhere, and—I will never rest till I have found Maurice—I know he is good and true; I know he is in danger, I feel it, I am positive of it." Her eyes glowed with a strange fire, and Wright watched her in awestruck silence till she spoke again.

"I shall remain in London," she said, "I have a friend with whom I can stay, and I will leave no stone unturned to find the man I love," and her eyes looked straight into those of the young man with a glance of such high courage as made him say in his heart—"Ransome is the luckiest chap I know."

Despite many protesting letters from Miss Browne, Doris carried out her intention of remaining in London, and her boxes were sent to her there with a frigid note from her aunt assuring her that she was wasting both time and strength in looking for "a dissipated wretch who ardently wished to remain hidden."

Doris smiled sadly but proudly, because her faith in Maurice remained as ever firm and unshaken, even though the long days as they dragged by brought no news of the missing man. The police, alert at last, declared themselves baffled and puzzled, so entirely had Maurice Ransome disappeared as it seemed, from the very face of the earth, leaving no shadow or trace behind him, and each day Doris' face grew more lined and white with misery, whilst her eyes that had been so blue and radiant had grown dim with much watching and many tears.

The day that should have been her wedding-day came and went, and yet there were no tidings of Maurice. It was as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up, so completely was every trace of him wiped away.

It was on the 16th of July that Mrs. Court, the lady with whom Doris was staying, urged the girl to go with her that evening to a big reception at the house of a friend, and though Doris at first entirely refused, saying that she had neither the heart nor the courage to go to such entertainments just now, her natural unselfishness at length made her yield to Mrs. Court's pleading. "Do come, Doris," that lady said earnestly, "my husband cannot go, and it is so lonely to go by myself. Do come."

Thus it was that Doris that night found herself walking into a brilliantly lighted room in Mrs. Court's wake, feeling in no mood for gaiety, starting intently when she caught sight in the glass of a tall girl in a red gown whose face wore so haggard a look that for a moment she could hardly believe it was her own reflection.

DON'T MISS THE CRAMOPHONE COMPETITION ON PAGE 584.

At the same instant a voice beside her said smoothly—

"What an unexpected pleasure, Miss Maitland," and turning, she found herself face to face with the man she hated, Reginald Dunbar. He pressed her hand, and whispered in the caressing voice that always made her shiver:

"You are in sore trouble, I hear. My heart has ached for you."

Was it fancy, Doris wondered, or was there really a gleam of triumphant malice in his dark eyes?

"I am in terrible trouble," she answered with quivering lips, "please do not speak of it I——"

"You have my deep sympathy," he replied, and again his eyes gleamed oddly. "I fear there is little hope——"

"Little hope?" she spoke fiercely, "I will never give up hoping—never, never."

Then she turned from him, and, with a swish of her scarlet gown, mingled in the crowd.

It was nearly an hour later when, seated at one of the tables with the stranger who had brought her down to supper, she saw this man fire his eyes suddenly on Dunbar, who sat a few tables away.

"Queer chap that," the stranger said, "I heard a queer story about him to-day. A friend of mine lives next door to him, and says he keeps a sort of lunatic in his house, in an upper room, and that the poor fellow is always out on the balcony at the back, declaring it's all a mistake or something, and that his wedding is waiting—the way the lunatics always——"

"Hush!" Doris exclaimed, an extraordinary conviction suddenly seizing her, "don't say anything, don't seem to notice what I am going to do. I—it's all right—I am not mad too, only tell me—tell me quickly, what is Mr. Dunbar's address?"

The young man stammered out the street and number, watching the girl with fascinated eyes as she rose from the table, and whispered—"Don't move, don't attract attention, but—Oh, God, give time!" and before the astonished man could speak or move, she had glided softly from the room.

Not even waiting to put on her cloak, she bade the servant summon a cab, and ordered it to drive from the door in the direction of the Park. She had forgotten Mrs. Court, she could think of nothing but the strange, overwhelming certainty with which her mind was filled, that she was on the way to find her lover.

After going a short distance she bade the cabman drive her to Mr. Dunbar's house, and having reached it, she descended from the vehicle, and bade the cabman do the same.

"What I am doing seems strange to you," she said, noting the surprise in the man's face, "but I have reason to think a gentleman is being wrongfully detained in this house. I am going in—will you come with me and help me, you shall be liberally paid—it may be a matter of life and death."

Her earnest pleading, her beautiful face, influenced the driver to accede to what seemed a very strange request, and summoning a passing man to hold his horse, he followed the young lady in her trailing scarlet gown up the steps.

The pealing notes of the bell she pulled clanged noisily through the house, and it was many minutes before shuffling feet sounded in the hall, and the door was cautiously opened. The man who looked out had a singularly repellant face, but Doris instantly saw that he was light and small, and that the cabman was large and burly—she stepped into the hall without a word, brushing the man haughtily aside.

"I have come to fetch the mad gentleman," she said, "I have just seen Mr. Dunbar."

"Mad gentleman? There ain't no mad gentleman here," the man answered blusteringly, but Doris saw by his face that he was lying.

"Yes there is," she said sternly, "upstairs, and I have come to fetch him away."

"Hoity toity, we'll see about that," the man began insolently, but Doris turned to her cabman friend.

"Lock him in the dining-room," she said, "and follow me upstairs." And without another word she ran swiftly up the broad staircase, followed in a very few seconds by the sturdy cabman, and by the oaths and cries of the man immured in the dining-room.

The house was a luxurious one, on the soft carpets their footsteps made no sound, and the top of the house was reached in safety. On this top landing three doors faced Doris and her faithful attendant, and Doris paused to listen for any sounds from within either room. In two of them all was silent, but from the third came sounds of heavy, stertorous breathing, and Doris heard a woman's voice say, in tones of agony—

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"Reginald is a devil—a devil! I never intended that he should be injured, I——"

Without a second's delay, Doris flung open the door, and surveyed a strange scene. In the dim light she could make out that the room was a large bedroom, and as the door opened a woman sprang from a kneeling position beside an armchair in the corner and confronted the two intruders.

Her face was pale as ashes, but her eyes blazed fiercely.

"You, Miss Maitland, and *here*? How dare you come into my brother's house uninvited, unannounced? How dare——"

Doris did not speak. Pushing the other woman aside with a strength born of desperation, she rushed to the armchair in which lay the inanimate form of Maurice Ransome, his eyes closed, his face of a deathly pallor, terrible stertorous breathing issuing from his lips.

"Maurice, my dear, my dear," the girl cried in anguish. "Oh, what have they done to you?" And covering his unconscious face with kisses, she sank down by his side for a moment in despairing misery.

"You cannot stay here," Miss Dunbar's voice snarled in her ear, "you——"

"I shall go at once, and I shall take with me the man you have injured—perhaps murdered," Doris cried. "Take that woman," she went on, addressing the cabman, who by this time was thoroughly enjoying himself, "lock her in one of these rooms, then come and help me."

Marian Dunbar was helpless in the hands of the burly gentleman, who with exceeding promptitude stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth, deposited her in an empty room next door, and locked her in, returning instantly to Doris's assistance.

Her efforts to restore Maurice to consciousness were unavailing, but she implored the cabman so earnestly to help her get her lover from the house that the good man realised the importance of immediate action. He and Doris, with the utmost difficulty pulled Maurice to his feet, but he was a dead weight upon them, and it was only by dint of dragging him along as though he were a log of wood, that they drew him to the head of the stairs.

The descent of the staircase was a matter of difficulty, not unaccompanied by danger, and had it not been for the cabman's unusual height and strength, that descent never could have been made. But at last, after what seemed to Doris interminable ages, they reached the hall, where by now, two female servants stood amazed and appalled by the loud cries of the man locked in the dining-room. They did not dare offer any resistance to the cabman, who scowled at them ferociously, and also by dint of alternately dragging and pulling, and greatly assisted by Doris' strong, loving arms, at length succeeded in getting Maurice to the pavement outside the house.

With the help of the loafer who held the horse, the still unconscious man was hoisted into the cab, and Doris turned to speak to her friend, and a sight met her eyes that drove the blood from her cheeks.

At the far end of the street, clearly outlined under a gas lamp, she saw Dunbar, hatless, and in his evening clothes, racing along the pavement at top speed, calling and gesticulating to the little party at his door.

"Stop him, stop him, for God's sake!" the girl cried to the cabman; "keep him away, do not let him catch us. Ah, God help me, he must not catch us!" And uttering the words, she dashed like lightning towards the cab, and before the astonished owner could remonstrate or protest, she had climbed to the driver's seat, seized the reins, whipped up the horse, and driven off at a pace calculated to upset the equanimity of any constable in the kingdom.

The cabman gasped, and then broke into a laugh and a loud exclamation:

"She's a good plucked 'un, if ever there was one," he cried, "and now for the gentleman."

Dunbar at that very instant drew near to the doorsteps. His face was convulsed with rage, his eyes glared, he swore roundly at the cabman, who made a dash in his direction; but though his strength had enabled the latter to be of use to Doris before, his agility was not equal to Dunbar's. In the twinkling of an eye the latter had raced past him, still reviling hideously, and vanished round the corner in the direction taken by the cab.

On and on tore the vehicle with the inanimate man inside it, and the girl in her scarlet gown on the box, whilst behind it a man in evening dress raced as though a fiend were at his heels.

Well was it for Doris that from her earliest childhood to drive a horse had been as easy to her as to walk or run, and she threaded her way with a dexterity little short of marvellous considering the pace at which she drove.

On and on they flew, unheeding of protesting policemen, unstopped even in the more crowded thoroughfare. On and on through the night, till the man in pursuit, panting, breathless, with beating heart and starting eyes, was perforce obliged to surrender the chase.

"Doin' it for a wager, I suppose?" asked a policeman. "'Taint usual to see ladies in evenin' dress drivin' a cab."

"A wager? No, confound her!" panted the luckless Dunbar. "I vowed I would conquer her and she has conquered me."

"Somethin' like a wager, after all," mused the policeman, as he went his way, inwardly thinking that the gentleman speaking to him looked as pretty a villain as he had seen in many a long day.

Somewhere after midnight, Mr. Wright was roused from meditation at his open window by the astounding sight of a a cab driven by a lady in evening dress, stopping at the studio door, and his amazement on discovering the identity, both of the driver and occupant of that cab, may be better imagined than described.

Kindly hands speedily carried Maurice indoors. A doctor and two policemen were sent for, and one of the latter was dispatched to Dunbar's house, whilst the other took charge of the empty cab. In the doctor's hands, after a while, Maurice recovered consciousness, but it was many days before he was well enough to give an account of all that had happened to him.

It then transpired that on the very evening he was first missed, as he was leaving his friend's house, a man came up to him, giving him an urgent note from Miss Dunbar, who begged him to come and see her at once on business. He had always been on friendly terms with the lady, though totally unaware of her mad passion for him, and he instantly obeyed the summons.

On arriving at the Dunbars' dwelling, he had, to his great surprise, been shown into a room at the very top of the house, where Miss Dunbar greeted him pleasantly, begged him to be seated, and began to tell him a long, somewhat incoherent story of a picture she wished him to paint.

She then left the room for a moment, and no sooner was she gone than Maurice heard a stealthy step behind him, felt something wet and cold upon his face, and sank into unconsciousness. When he awoke from this, he found himself a prisoner, and totally unable to escape from the hands of Dunbar, who taunted him with being a lunatic kept him as a rule chained to a chair or to a railing in the balcony, and when he became too violent, drugged him heavily.

Maurice said that the wretched man had sworn over and over again that he would keep him in durance vile until Doris consented to be his wife, or until death set the prisoner free.

Dunbar suffered the due penalty of his deeds, and his sister discreetly vanished from polite society; but Maurice and his wife are radiantly happy and prosperous, and no one is more popular than the distinguished artist who, for those short and fateful days of anguish and terror—disappeared.

L. G. Moberly.

"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA" COMMENCES NEXT WEEK.

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Frances Norton: Adventuress.

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

For a moment my cousin made no answer. Then, with a quick breath, she stooped over me, bringing her face close to mine.

"And if I did," she said, "what then? No," as I tried to interrupt. "You shall hear me out before you speak. You know what difficulties I have had to overcome, the plots and schemes I have had to combat to bring about this marriage. You know just what is at stake, what it will mean to me if Kinross should take fright and throw me over. I have let nothing stand in my way, *nothing!* Is it likely that at the last moment I should let Fluffy's jealousy defeat me? I've feared him all along in my heart of hearts, and when I read his threats on board the yacht I was horribly frightened.

But after the first shock I took courage, and when he suddenly appeared in Guernsey I resolved to fight him to the last. I went to meet him this morning determined that, come what might, I would ensure his silence. I would appeal to him, plead with all the force of fascination I could summon. But my words left him untouched; nothing that I could say would move him. He stood there silent, still, listening with a smile on his smooth lips—a smile that maddened me. And at the thought of what this sleek, smooth coward could do, at the thought that he could keep from me all that would make my life worth living, fierce, unreasoning passion gripped me. The world grew dizzy; the sea, the sky were blurred before my eyes, the ground rocked beneath my feet, a voice louder and louder yet cried within me, saying, '*Kill!*' He stood before me close to the brink and the smile never left his face, not even when I threw myself upon him. He was strong, so strong that I dreaded he would escape me. I panted, straining, struggling with every nerve, every muscle of my body. Of a sudden he stumbled, slipped, lost his footing, and——"

She paused. "When next I looked," she said in a hoarse whisper, "he was lying halfway down the shaft on a ledge in the stone. His face, his sneering, smiling face was white and still, and his wide eyes stared unseeing at the sky. And yet, and yet he was not dead. Child"—she caught me by the arm—"why do you look at me like that? Do you think I should be on my knees weeping with joy that he is still alive? He, the man who wishes to ruin me? You can't understand a woman such as I am. For me and those like me there can be no looking back; our only chance is to go on without regret, without remorse, fighting until the last."

"But he," I stammered, heedless of anything but Fluffy's danger, "have you heard how he is?"

"Not yet," she answered.

"Then I must find out," I cried, "now, at once! I will not say a word of what you have told me, Frankie, but I must know how he is. His face, white and still, haunts me. He is alone with nobody to help him, nobody to do him a kindness; and it is you—you that he loved so much—who has done this thing. Don't try to stop me, to hinder me. I will not listen to you. I must go!"

My cousin smiled contemptuously. "Where?" she said. "You forget we are at sea."

I fell back on the pillows with a sob. Whenever I set my will against my cousin, whenever I strove imperfectly and weakly but sincerely to combat her decision, circumstances always seemed against me.

"Don't cry, Cynthia, you won't have long to wait. We shall put into Weymouth by the afternoon. Three hours will see us on shore. Then you can run with all speed both to the post office and the police station. At one you can send a wire inquiring about Fluffy, at the other you can lodge information against me."

My cousin spoke bitterly. Time had been when at her words, her tone, I should have given way, and, anxious only for her, have put all other considerations from me. But now—and for the first time—I put another before Frankie. I loved her always, I was fond of her, proud of her; in my eyes circumstances and not my cousin had always been to blame.

But now with the remembrance of poor Fluffy strong upon me, I could not forgive, could not excuse her.

She read my thoughts, and, kneeling by my side, laid her head next to mine upon the pillow.

"You're going to give me away, Cynthia," she whispered. "I'm a heartless, wicked woman, you think, who doesn't deserve the least consideration. All true, my dear. All true, and yet I haven't been so bad to you. I've loved my little cousin very dearly. If I've been unkind or cross, I never meant it. I——" She paused, her voice shook, there were tears in her eyes. *Tears* from Frankie!

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"No, no!" I cried in a passion of grief. "You've never been unkind, and you're not wicked, only—only——" She drew my head on to her shoulder and smoothed my hair.

"I'm not quite the paragon you thought me, eh?" she said; "and you're disappointed. Never mind, dearie, you'll meet a woman after your own heart some day. But you won't love her, and she'll bore you to death! Be patient just a little longer, Cynthia, until I'm married, and then I promise I won't puzzle or perplex you any more—I'll be good, good as gold."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked sadly.

"Nothing very much. Be silent as to Fluffy, that is all. Don't mention his name, if you can help it, and if you're asked any questions, say you don't know anything about him. As for his sufferings, I don't suppose he's much hurt. He's sure to have plenty of money, so you may be sure he'll be treated with all kindness and consideration. You shall wire to the Hotel Poolin directly we get to Weymouth, if it will make your mind easier. But whatever the answer may be promise you will say nothing?"

"Even——" I paused. I could not put into words the awful thought, if he were dead!

Frankie looked at me long and fixedly. "No matter what the answer, you must promise to say nothing. *Promise!*" Her eyes upon mine, her hands clasping mine, her will strong and implacable, beat down my resistance.

"I promise!" I said, and as the words left my lips a dead weight seemed to settle on my heart.

Frankie kissed me, patted my cheek, and seemed to think the matter ended.

"It's just on twelve," she said. "We're due at Weymouth about three. If you feel well enough I think you'd better try and dress."

"Frankie," I cried, my mind suddenly recalled from Fluffy to myself, "who pulled me out of the water?"

"Need you ask? Do you suppose Chesterton would have allowed anyone to do it but himself? It's the special prerogative of a lover to rescue his lady from a watery grave. You were pretty bad when he fished you out, Cynthia—white as a sheet and quite unconscious. Chesterton's been knocking at your door a hundred times at least in the last half hour. Shall I tell him you're better?"

"Please," I answered.

As a matter of fact I felt horribly bad; the fright and the anxiety had given me a shock from which it was not easy to rally. Somehow or other I dressed myself and got on deck. Chesterton regarded me with much concern. I tried to thank him for his courage, but the words would not come. I was within an ace of breaking down, when Mrs. Venables appeared upon the scene.

"She's not fit to be spoken to," said the kindly little woman, "or even looked at. Come and sit here, Cynthia, by me. Nobody shall disturb you."

She placed me in a comfortable deck-chair, and there, sheltered from the sun by an awning, I closed my eyes and tried to seem at peace—peace that I was so far from feeling. My heart beat, my pulses throbbed, the swish of the waters made me catch my breath in terror. Each wave that we surmounted, each landmark that we passed shortened our journey, shortened the time of my respite, hastened the hour when I should know, must know, the full extent of Frankie's guilt. Perhaps the news would be good, perhaps I should hear he was better? The wash of the waves seemed to echo my words, the swish of the water against the yacht seemed to reply to them. I could almost hear the words, "Dead; he is dead!"

The sunshine glinted on the waters, gleaming like gold; but my eyes were blind, I could only see my cousin and poor Fluffy.

Frankie stood by Lord Kinross, her smile brilliant, her laugh sweet, as calm and as controlled as though the events of the morning had never been. Could she not feel, this beautiful, cold-hearted woman? Did she know no fear, no pity, no remorse? Was she callous or a marvel of self-command, feeling yet hiding all she felt?

The yacht raced home the last few miles, the coast came nearer and nearer, my anxiety and my apprehension grew to fever height.

I barely waited to be safely set on shore, but started off, trembling, for the post office.

"She's not got over her accident yet, poor child!" I heard my cousin say. "She feels weak and hysterical, and is afraid of breaking down before you all. Leave her to me, Lord Chesterton, she'll be all right directly. I'll take her to a chemist and get a draught. We'll come on after to the hotel—perhaps get there as soon as you."

Frankie linked her arm in mine and guided me through devious streets and thoroughfares until I grew quieter, more composed.

"Will you have some brandy?" she asked me, as we reached the post office. "There's an hotel close by, if you like. No? Well, then we'll come and send the wire. But remember," her fingers closed tightly on my arm—"remember whatever happens, you have promised to keep silence."

"I promised," I said, with dry lips, "and I will keep my word."

I watched my cousin rapidly fill up the form asking for particulars as to Fluffy's condition. She directed it to the manager of the hotel, and signed it "Cynthia Hamilton."

"Now," she said quietly, "there will be just an hour or more to wait. You had better come and have something to eat."

I shook my head. "I can do nothing, nothing till we get the answer." I leant wearily against the desk and listened to the tap-tap of the instrument, spelling out the message. I would wait till the same instrument clicked forth its sentence of life or death.

"You'll faint in a minute," said Frankie anxiously. "Come, like a good girl, and have some dinner; you shall be back in time, I promise you."

But for once I was obstinate. I insisted on remaining. Frankie managed to get a chair for me, and placed it near the door. I watched the people—holiday-makers for the most part—and envied their bright smiles, their happy faces. Frankie stood by me, tall and slim, in a nautical costume of pale blue and cream serge. I counted the buttons on her coat and studied their pattern—an arabesque of pearls and gold—so intently that I could draw one from memory even now. I noticed how white and delicate her skin gleamed against her frock, and the sun shone on her hair tingeing it with gold.

And then from momentary oblivion the click of the telegraph aroused me to sudden and sickening remembrance. It beat into my brain, it kept time with my heart. When—when would the answer come?

At last one of the clerks held up an envelope to Frankie. "Yours, I think," she said, "addressed to 'Cynthia Hamilton.'"

My cousin smiled and took the wire. Her hands never trembled, the colour did not leave her cheeks. Quietly, deliberately she drew out the slip of paper—that thin pink slip that has spelt defeat or victory, sorrow or gladness to how many?

With beating heart I started to my feet, and looking over her shoulder eagerly read. And as I read the tears streamed from my eyes, tears of relief—I was so glad, so thankful!

"Frankie," I cried, and clasped her hand.

She made no answer; she did not, I think, hear me. Her face was white, her mouth was drawn; with eyes wide with fear, dark with terror, she stared before her.

Thus ran the telegram, it was from Fluffy's doctor:

"Patient has recovered consciousness. Sprained ankle, but no serious injury. Doing well."

Doing well! And there were yet three days to pass before my cousin's wedding day.

* * * * * * *

We arrived at Cromer late that evening. Frankie went straight to her room, and sent word to Lady Fairbain—Hartland's aunt—that she was too tired to reappear. Kinross went over to the hotel where he and Chesterton were going to put up. I took refuge with my old friend Lady Paula.

Early the next morning Frankie came to my room. She

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looked ill, almost haggard; there were dark shadows under her eyes, which were feverishly bright. As she sat there in the grey light of the early morning I realised what yesterday in my joy for Fluffy's safety I had overlooked. If Fluffy were able to travel before Frankie's wedding day that wedding would not take place. As for writing or wiring—I sat up wide awake at the thought.

"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA." NEXT WEEK.

"Suppose Fluffy wires to Hartland and tells him what has happened," I stammered.

"He will never say what took place at the quarry," said Frankie. "I know him well enough to be sure of that, and of the other things he has to tell Lord Kinross he would not wire."

"But he may send a letter?"

"Yes, I must guard against that. Hartland must not, shall not have a letter from him."

"How can you prevent it, Frankie?"

"Leave that to me, it will not be so very difficult. Fluffy will have his letter addressed here to Kinross, not knowing he is at the hotel. You will help me, Cynthia?"

"Yes," I answered, with a shiver, "I will help you."

"Very well, do as I tell you, and——" She paused, the words familiar to her lips at every crisis of her life, her favourite and defiant phrase, "I shall get through," seemed difficult to speak. She was playing her last game, and the stakes were heavy. For the last time she set her teeth and clenched her hands, for the last time she threw out her challenge bold and defiant, "That which I will—I do."

She was fighting against time; could she hold her own for the matter of two days and the half of a third, she would win a title, an income, a dazzling position, an assured future. Did she lose, she would leave the gaming table of Society, bankrupt of honour, of love, of happiness, of fair repute. Brilliant and beautiful, she would fall from the height of her proud ambitions to the depths of failure, bitter, irretrievable.

"I want you to dress quickly, Cynthia, and go into the garden," she explained. "When you see the postman coming down the drive go and meet him a little distance from the house. If there are any letters for Hartland slip them into your pocket until you can hand them to me. Don't make a mistake, and——" she broke off with a short, sharp sigh, "I can't stand much more of this; I wish it were over one way or the other," she said wearily.

It was yet early when I took up my station in the garden. Lady Fairbain's place was a beautiful house, set in a frame of leafy oaks, the same tall trees skirted the drive on either side.

Lady Paula saw me from her bedroom window and called out a cheery greeting. She found me some few minutes later, and commenced an elaborate description of our bridesmaids' dresses, Clairette's last creation. They had arrived the previous day with various huge chests containing Frankie's trousseau.

I did not pay much attention to her, my thoughts were fixed on the white drive down which the mail must come.

"There's the postman," Lady Paula cried at last. "I'll go and meet him."

She was off before I had time to start. I flew after her, and panting, suggested we should race to meet the man.

"Bet you a pair of gloves I'm there before you," she cried.

"All right," I gasped, and then raced for my very life, leaving Paula far behind.

"Letters—give them me, please, for the Hall." I stretched out my hands, and grasped the pile, and ran them over, hoping to complete my scrutiny before Paula reached me. Letters for Lady Fairbain, Frankie, Paula—but nothing for Lord Kinross.

In triumph I returned upstairs to my cousin.

"Thank goodness, I can take breathing time," she said. "The next post from Guernsey comes in the evening. Until then I am safe."

The evening mail, cleverly intercepted by my cousin, brought no word from Fluffy, nor was there any letter the following morning, Wednesday, the day before the wedding. That afternoon Frankie wired to the doctor at Guernsey for news of Fluffy. She sent a telegram from London, through Clairette, who was used to manipulating her clients' correspondence. There was no chance of a reply till late that evening. Meantime my cousin smiled and talked, and made herself more popular than ever with the men and women staying at the Hall.

Lady Fairbain had invited ever so many people for her nephew's wedding. It was to be a very notable function, and the Hall was filled to overflowing.

Frankie's presents were magnificent; she had sufficient plate to supply two dinner parties at the same time, and her jewellery was exquisite. Mary Vernon wrote a beautiful letter, accompanied by a pair of diamond earrings. My cousin threw them on the table with a little shudder.

"I wish she hadn't sent them," she muttered. "It's like an omen." Then with a shrug she swept the jewels into her case, and asked me angrily if I could not look a little more cheerful. "Your face literally haunts me, Cynthia. People will think that I ill-treat you."

I made no answer, but avoided my cousin until after dinner, when she sent for me.

"The post's in," she said, "no letter from Guernsey. And——" she paused, "I've heard from Clairette; she wired the doctor's answer on to me. Fluffy's had a relapse, he's delirious. Well," as I stood silent and trembling before her, "have you nothing to say? Is that man's safety more to you than mine? He will get well, sure enough. But not, thank Heaven, till I am married. At last, at last I am safe!" She laughed joyously, clasping her arms above her head she swayed to and fro in a ecstasy of triumph.

That night she was more beautiful, more irresistible than I had seen her. Everybody was enchanted with the fascinating Mrs. Norton. Late in the evening Pettigrew, quite unexpectedly, turned up. He was very smiling, but I thought a little strange.

"I do congratulate you, Mrs. Norton," he remarked. "You've had a hard fight, but you deserve to win, upon my word you do."

Frankie flashed a look of inquiry, his remark called for explanation. He gave none, however, but handed her a string of pearls, his wedding gift.

"Your secretary, will he be here?" asked Frankie, when she had thanked him for his present.

Hiram, however, made no answer, apparently he did not hear.

Everyone sat up late that night, Kinross did not leave till past one in the morning. He drew Frankie out into the garden to say good-bye. I watched them from the porch."

"Good-night, my love," he whispered. "To-morrow——" he stooped and took her in his arms.

She stood and watched him out of sight, a tall figure in the moonlight.

"To-morrow," she said, and caught her breath, "to-morrow!"

* * * * * * *

The morning dawned fair and fresh, the morning of Frankie's wedding day! I dressed myself early, and went to see if I could help my cousin. The marriage was to take place at two o'clock. Frankie would have liked it earlier, eleven, ten, or nine, if it could have been managed. Lady Fairbain, however, decreed against such unfashionable hours, two was the earliest time she would allow.

By one Frankie was dressed. They said she looked very beautiful in her satin gown, veiled with rich lace and picture hat of plumes, but for myself I do not know. From the earliest dawn my eyes had turned towards the clock, hoping, praying that the hour of her marriage would pass in safety. I could think of nothing else. My fear for Fluffy was lost in sudden apprehension that even now he would contrive to stop my cousin's wedding. And yet, stretched on a bed of sickness, delirious with pain—what could he do?

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Again and yet again I told myself there was no cause for fear. And yet, and yet I feared.

When she was dressed Frankie dismissed her maid. Together we watched the hands of the timepiece drawing nearer, and yet nearer to the hour. Her lips were dry, her eyes hard and bright. Her agitation and excitement terrible to see.

Half-past one! Kinross would just be leaving the hotel for the church. In another quarter of an hour Frankie herself would start. And then——

Just as the clock chimed the half hour a maid rushed breathlessly upstairs.

"Lord Kinross, ma'am," she exclaimed, "he says he must see you for a moment."

"I will come," said Frankie quietly. She closed the door, and leant against the mantelpiece, panting for breath.

"My God!" she gasped, "has it come at last." She put her handkerchief to her mouth, her strong, white teeth bit at the lace and tore it. But the next minute she was herself again. Calmly, proudly, she swept downstairs, across the hall into the drawing-room where Hartland waited. She signed to me to follow.

"My darling, I was bound to come to you," were his first words. "I wanted to give you your bouquet myself. *Dearest*," he kissed her passionately—over his shoulder her dark eyes watched the clock.

"You will be late, Hartland; it is ridiculous of you to come here now. Go at once, you should be at the church by this time."

She pushed him from her playfully but firmly. Yet he still lingered, lingered with the boyish disregard of custom and conventionality that occasionally distinguished him.

Laughing, she drew him to the door. For a moment they stood together on the threshold. Then, as he bent to take another, and a last kiss from her lips, there came the sound of wheels, and the sharp gallop of a horse along the drive.

"Some one's in a hurry," said Kinross laughing, "it's a case of haste to the wedding. Who is it, I wonder?"

I knew intuitively who it was. Nearer the wheels came, and nearer, they grew slower, gradually stopped.

"Don't wait," I screamed, "Hartland, don't wait."

Even as I spoke there was a slight commotion in the hall. And then a figure, limping, bandaged, his face white as death, but set in a look of grim determination, passed through the guests and on to where Lord Kinross and my cousin stood.

Frankie gave a sharp cry. All her scheming and her plots, all her intrigues and her selfishness had come to naught. The telegram we had received had been a false one. Fluffy had come himself.

"I have come here, Lord Kinross," he said quietly, "to stop your marriage with Mrs. Norton. Am I in time?"

As he spoke he entered the room; Kinross, dazed and bewildered, followed, with Frankie at his side. And the door shut behind them.

Instantly there was a hubbub of comment. Women discussed the situation with shrill voices and unkind intent, and the men gathered in groups and whispered gloomily. Throughout the stir I crouched against the door, my heart torn with the thought of Frankie. I could hear no word of what was happening, yet I stayed; I did not seem to have the strength to move.

"Come away, Cynthia, come away, little girl," said Pettigrew softly. "I've cleared off the women; look, the hall is quite empty. No one will see or speak to you. Run upstairs, you can do no good. No one can help your cousin—now."

At that my courage came back to me.

"I can help her," I answered, "and I will." I opened the door—the scene rises before me now.

Kinross was sitting in a chair, his head buried in his hands. Facing him stood Fluffy, gazing with cold, calm eyes at the woman who stood between them—a woman whose fierce determination and high spirit cowed before the power in the plain face of the man she had played with, the man she had mocked and derided, the man she called *Fluffy!*

"I can't take it in," said Kinross, raising his head. "I can't understand or comprehend it. Either you lie, or she"—he pointed with an eloquent gesture to my cousin—"she is—Oh, God, it can't be true!"

Fluffy leant forward and touched him on the arm.

"Listen," he said, in his cold and pitiless tone. "Mrs. Norton stole Mary Vernon's diamonds. Partly for the sake of the jewels, partly to prejudice you against Mary in her favour. Proof?" He smiled. "Here," he pointed to my cousin, "look at these pins!" With a deft movement he drew the pins swiftly from her hat. "These are Miss Vernon's earrings differently set. I know it because I arranged the affair. I got the earrings copied in paste, from a photograph, as your cousin, Percival Hope, surmised. A photograph Mrs. Norton stole, as she stole the notes from Hiram Pettigrew's pocket-book, which she placed in her cousin's box. See, here it is, Cynthia herself gave it me," and he drew out the memorable book of silver and green leather. "Proofs? What, have you not heard enough? Look then at this letter, in which Mrs. Norton tells me she has managed to get rid of some of Pettigrew's notes; and this, in which she says she has successfully changed the diamonds; and this, warning me that Hope has traced some of the missing securities. More? Certainly if you wish." He paused.

Kinross, with an attempt, perhaps, to parry the attack, asked in a high-pitched voice, "Why Fluffy told him these things?"

"You're incriminating yourself," he said. "If what you say is true, you are as guilty as the woman you accuse." Kinross drew himself up as he spoke, the dazed look left him, the import of what was happening struck home to him at last.

"Why do I tell you?" answered Fluffy. "To stop you marrying her. Why, again to that?" He paused, a heavy flush stole over his white, pasty-looking skin, and his eyes were brilliant. "She shall not marry you," he said, "nor any other man, because she's mine. *Mine*, I tell you, mine, though she deny me, and defy me to the end. Rather than see her your wife I am ready to proclaim her and myself guilty of theft, of swindling, of——"

Frankie suddenly interrupted.

"Don't listen to him, Hartland. He's mad, mad with jealousy. He does not know what he's saying"—she broke off suddenly.

With a grim smile Fluffy had handed Kinross the pile of letters.

"Don't look at them, dear, don't read them," she pleaded. "They don't count—nothing counts, but that I love you, Hartland!" She sprang to him and put her arms about his neck. But with a gesture of contempt, a look almost of revulsion, he stepped back.

"No," he said hoarsely, "not that."

Then he took up the letters Fluffy had given him, and read them one by one. His face grew cold, and hard, and set, until all trace of softness and of boyishness had gone. When he had finished reading he turned towards my cousin.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked coldly.

With the forlorn hope of softening him, Frankie clung to his arm. He shook her off, not roughly, but with a contempt that stung. She gave a low cry and staggered, then, catching her foot in her long draperies, with a crash she fell, striking her head against the corner of the fender. And as I saw her lying there, her fair head bowed, her pride for ever shattered, as I saw her lying at the feet of the man who, but a little while ago had vowed to love her, to protect her always, something seemed to snap at my heart. I gave a great cry of agony.

The room seemed suddenly full of people. Lady Fairbain, Paula, and a crowd of women, and at the last Pettigrew, and, yes, Percival Hope!

And then darkness, and the whole world blank.

* * * *

Some days elapsed before I woke again to life. My first question was of *her*, but the nurse sighed and shook her head.

"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA." NEXT WEEK.

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Fluffy, I learnt, had left after a stormy scene. I have never seen nor heard of him since. I asked for Paula, but she and her brother, I was told, had gone from the Hall. Lady Fairbain did not wish to see me. Pettigrew had also gone. There were left only Lord Chesterton and Percival Hope. Percival wished earnestly to see me, but I felt I could not. He had not been kind to Frankie—my poor Frankie, who had sinned so greatly, who had suffered so sorely.

I dressed myself with difficulty and sent for Chesterton. He was kind and good—how good I can never forget.

"Your cousin's gone away, dear," he said softly. "None of us know where. She was taken to her room, she had hurt her head, you know, and it was thought she was asleep. Late in the evening her room was found to be empty, she had gone, leaving no trace behind."

"No message for me, no note?"

He hesitated.

"She left a letter for me," he commenced softly, "about you. She said what I knew without any telling, that you were good and sweet as a woman could be, and that she left you to my care. So," he put his arm tenderly about my shoulders, "you belong to me now, Cynthia."

I shook my head,

"Not now," I answered, "I can never marry you now."

He tried hard to combat my decision, but at last consented to abide by it, for a time at least.

"I'll leave you alone for a bit, little girl. Then I shall make you change your mind. Meanwhile, I shall send you to stay with my sister."

I did not dispute further, but wished him "good night." He had arranged for me to leave the Hall next day, but late that night when all were sleeping, I stole out of the house. As my cousin had gone, so I went also, friendless and alone, into the world. I had said good-bye for ever to the Smart Set.

My struggles since then I will not enter into—they form no part of these "Confessions." I had a bad time, but at last I have reached some degree of comfort, mainly through the publication of these articles.

I am told that several of those who have read this series, have asked kindly after me, and have wanted to know what I am doing in the present, hope to do in the future.

To these I say that I am waiting for my cousin, waiting for the time—and it will surely come—when she will turn to me. The door of my heart is ever open for her. Though all the world should be against her, my arms should shield her, my hands work for her. I long for her, my beautiful Frankie! I long to take her head upon my shoulder and whisper that I love her, that I sorrow for her. Some day she will come back, some day she will put away from her the evil that has spoilt her life. And then, when like a tired child, she comes home—home to me, may the love I bear her blot out the remembrances of her sufferings and her sorrow and her shame.

Some day she will surely come, and until then I work, and watch and wait.

And if of your kindness you would do me some slight service, I would ask this—Think with regret, if you will, and sorrow, but not with harshness, of the woman I love so dearly, my cousin Frankie.

And so farewell! To the Confessions of Cynthia I needs must write

THE END.

[TO READERS.—If you have enjoyed this series of articles, I am sure that you will like the new series that starts next week. It has been written by a titled lady whose *nom de plume* is Lady Peggy Carstairs, and she tells of the way in which she endeavoured to "marry off" Belinda North (the daughter of an Australian millionaire) to some man with a title. The descriptions of life in high Society circles on the Continent are particularly vivid, and will tell you something you did not know before. May I ask you to buy *one extra copy* of next week's *SHORT STORIES* and give it to a friend who is likely to become a new reader. If so, I would thank you very much.—Ed. *S S.*]

TEN MORE GRAMOPHONES WAITING FOR CLAIMANTS.

HERE is a new competition by which ten more readers of *Short Stories* will each become the possessors of a handsome Gramophone.

The Gramophones are beautifully made instruments, fit to grace any drawing-room, and with every one will be given two records. The gramophone and the records would cost you £2 17s. in any shop. You could not get them for less.

All you have to do is to fix on one of the record discs, and you can hear the song or the instrumental piece as loudly as it was originally sung or played.

You can hear the finest bands in the world play the finest music.

You can hear the funniest comedians on the music-hall stage singing the funniest songs.

You can hear banjo champions playing solos, and other champions playing on the cornet or flute.

In fact, there is no limit to the number of songs and instrumental pieces you can hear.

Now that the long winter evenings are upon us, it is difficult to imagine a more enjoyable form of fireside entertainment than to sit in your armchair and listen to the voices of our best singers or to the musical performances of the best orchestras on the Gramophone. And this enjoyment may be yours continually by constructing for us one sentence.

The sentence you have to construct must be composed of words, the initial letters of which, in their proper order, make up the word "CHAPERONED"—a word selected from the title of the new series of articles "How I Chaperoned Belinda."

Here is a sample sentence: "Cynthia, Hartland And Percival Ever Regret Obdurate Norton's Endless Designs"

Make up a good sentence and write it down in ink in the spaces provided below, using the initial letters given as the first letters of your words. Then post the coupon on to the Gramophone Editor of *Short Stories*, 17, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

All attempts must reach us by first post, Tuesday, November 4th. A handsome Gramophone will be awarded to each of the ten readers from whom we receive what we consider to be the best sentences.

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Each competitor may send in any number of attempts, provided each is written upon a separate coupon.

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NANCY BROWN.

A GIRL WITH TWO NAMES.

"I WANT a big bunch of flowers; roses, carnations, lilies, and that sort, with plenty of green stuff."

"Yes, sir; take them, sir?"

"Yes."

In five minutes Raymond Morris, laden with a fragrant burden, was rattling away in a hansom towards 80, Mandeville Street, where his little chum, Kitty Marsden lived.

"How she will love them," he thought, and then his face beamed, as he pictured her happiness at the good news he was bringing. To be retained as counsel in "Buller *versus* Coke," was indeed a piece of luck; he might now safely consider that his feet were firmly set on Ambition's steep ladder, and if it lay in his power they should never slip off. "Dear little Kitty!" Times should brighten for her also. What a hard life they had experienced the previous two years, she perhaps, more than he, for of how poor she had really been Raymond Morris had no conception. "Hard-up" meant to him a chop instead of a decent half crown dinner, but to Kitty it meant a roll and a cup of cocoa, instead of the chop.

They had first met at a second-rate boarding house in Pimlico; she was a clerk, and he, at that time had been qualifying for the Bar, living in the meantime on journalistic work. What made them chum so, he never quite knew; her intensely sympathetic face, voice and manner had appealed to him, and when later, their homes diverged, he taking some unpretentious chambers West, and she a big studio, where she might feel one little corner of the world was her own, they still remained firm chums, and rarely did a Saturday pass without their meeting, or a Sunday, when he did not go to tea, and afterwards smoke his pipe and talk over his big plans with his enthusiastic little hostess.

He often wondered what she got paid, but a sort of delicacy prevented his asking, as though they were the closest of friends, she had never given him the slightest encouragement to help her in any way, and never would, except on the rarest of festivals, allow him to take her out, either to dine or to a play, so in man-like fashion, he concluded she had enough on which to manage comfortably. That thought was to cost him many a pang later on, but he knew nothing of it, as he drove to her, his heart longing for her warm appreciation of his well-deserved success.

"She must come somewhere with me to-night," he muttered, "she has been looking very pale and tired lately, not a bit like her old merry self; she never laughs now, and Kitty's merry laughter is the best tonic in the world, why, it must be ten days since I've seen her, ah! here we are."

"Miss Marsden in?"

"Miss Marsden, sir, she's gone!" said the slavey, with a sad smile, for she saw Miss Marsden's sweetheart (as they had all christened him), was going to, as she put it later, "take on awful."

"Gone? Gone out, my good girl, I suppose, well, I will wait for her."

"No, sir; she's gone away. She sold all her things 'cos missus said she lost her place and couldn't live here any longer."

"Sold her things!" What in the dickens did the stupid girl mean? Just then the landlady appeared and handed him a note.

"Miss Marsden asked me to give this to you, sir, when you called. You see, sir, it were this way. A month ago, she lost her place, and, poor thing, she tried hard but she couldn't get another, and so she comes to me, and says as how she were a-going to try her luck elsewhere, and would I buy her things, which I did, though sorry enough I were to do it, for I liked her, sir; she wor the quietest, nicest lodger I'll ever have. You see, sir, it had been a bad time of year, August, and though I told her, she wor quite welcome to stay and the rent could go on until it wor convenient, she wouldn't, she wor that independent; but, come in, sir, a minute, and rest and read your letter, for you look mortal bad."

Morris stepped into the dark hall, and depositing the flowers, sat down and read the note.

"DEAR BIG CHUM.—Your little pal has had the mouldiest luck possible this last month. Hurst sold the business and the new man brought a daughter to do the books, so I was not wanted, and I haven't been able to get anything else. I've tried till I'm pretty nearly desperate, but you know I can't type nor write shorthand, and so I've just come to the end of my resources, and for the present, dear, big, man, our trails are going to divide; maybe they'll meet again, if not, your little pal will always thank you for the two happiest years she has ever had. If I get on, I'll write you, but I can't be under the stream and you afloat in a gay steamer, so it's best to say 'good-bye,' just for the present.

"Don't worry about me, dear chum. I won't forget our motto, 'Here's to a brave to-morrow, that's born from a brave to-day.'

"Dear big comrade, your little pal wishes you all the good luck obtainable."

Raymond at first felt very savage with Kitty. Why, in the name of all the gods, couldn't she have told him her troubles? He had poured out enough of his to her, but it was just like a woman, they never had any sense. And now how could he find her? Where and what was she doing in this vast Babylon? And then he grew remorseful, as he remembered his last visit. It had been wet and cold, and he had made up a big fire and they had had a jolly tea, poor little girl, he had helped to consume the very little she had—no wonder she had looked ill and worn and seemed quiet. He could have struck himself in his anger.

He left the flowers with the landlady, and slowly retraced his steps, all the pleasure and excitement gone, but, *he would find her*, and scold her well for being such a stupid little girl with no real conception of the word "Comrade."

* * * * *

Two years later in his comfortable bachelor quarters Raymond Morris sat smoking his after dinner pipe with his firm friend Dr. Bruton. Already he was becoming known as the "rising barrister," but somehow all his successes failed to give him the joy he had fancied they would.

"Morris, why don't you marry?"

"Suppose, I've not met my other half—my—what do you call it—Affinity, old man."

"Have you never cared for anyone?"

"Not in the way you mean. I once had the dearest little girl as a pal, but—well, I lost her—and I've never found her. Somehow I don't fancy I'll ever marry."

"Don't you think Madge and I are a good enough example?"

"Yes. Your wife is perfect. By the way, how's the little one, quite strong now?"

"Joyce? Yes, she and her governess, Nancy Brown—pretty name that—have come back looking like two rosy

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apples, it does my heart good to hear them laugh. That's the result of letting them run wild at Hayling Island for four months. They were a sorry looking pair when I sent them off.

"What was the matter with Miss—Nancy Brown?"

"Insufficient food, fresh air, and everything else. Trying to live—no, not live—exist respectably on about ten shillings a week. Heaps of girls are trying the same game, poor creatures. The result in her case was general weakness, debility—bad cold, acute attack of pleurisy—and then—thorough collapse. Young Staines—you know him, brought her to the hospital one night; she was coughing and the exertion made her faint. The conductor of the 'bus in which they were, called a policeman, and then Staines volunteered to bring her to us, and there she stayed. The wife heard all about her from me, and when we were at our wits' end to know what to do with her, for the poor thing had no friends, she proposed sending her away with Joyce, and well, you should see her now. Staines would hardly believe she was the same girl. But you'll see her to-morrow, you're dining with us?"

"Yes. But had she no relations—Miss Nancy Brown?"

"She was insensible for days, and raved about Nancy Brown and her work, and for a long time she was too ill to be questioned. We just asked if that was her name and she nodded, and eventually we found out she had no one belonging to her, and was just earning bread and butter by addressing envelopes."

"Poor thing!"

"Well, good night, old chap, I must be off."

Left to himself Raymond Morris began to think, and his thoughts were not pleasant. He reviewed that weary search for Kitty; perhaps she, too, was like this Nancy Brown, oh! why had she not trusted him?

* * * * *

"Please ma'am, what can we do? Prior's just fallen upstairs and twisted her ankle awful, and can't move, and there's master and his friend coming in for dinner in an hour."

"Can't move! Poor thing! What have you done for her, cook?" asked pretty little Mrs. Bruton, her face puckered as she tried to think how they could manage, and she had wanted the dinner to be especially nice for Raymond Morris.

"She's gone to bed, ma'am, perhaps when the doctor comes in, he'll have a look at her, but what can we do, who's to lay the table and bring up the things?" wailed the cook in a most dismal voice.

"Why *I* will, cook, if you won't look quite so tragic," and Nancy Brown danced into the room with the pet of the house—three-year-old Joyce, in her arms. "Don't worry, dear Mrs. Bruton, Prior is more frightened than hurt, she's going to lend me a cap and apron and I'll make the smartest parlourmaid in the world."

"Nancy! You——"

"Yes, why not? Why, dear Mrs. Bruton, think what you've done for me, please do let me help you out of this little difficulty," pleaded Nancy.

"But, my dear, I wanted you to look your prettiest for our friend, and now——"

"I don't think Mr. Raymond Morris will mind," replied Nancy, in rather a cold tone. "A rich, successful barrister isn't likely to take much notice of a nursery governess."

"Don't be silly, child. You don't know him or you would not talk like that. Well, dear, I suppose I must let you, but I shall tell them all about it, and you will come in after, won't you?"

"Perhaps."

In ten minutes Nancy was dressed, the pretty head was crowned with one of Prior's coquettish caps, and her fingers soon had the table laid, even to Mrs. Bruton's requirements.

"I wonder if he—oh! no, he won't—I expect he's quite forgotten"—and resolutely banishing a tear, Nancy ran off to help cook dish up.

As the soup was being handed to him Morris endeavoured to get a look at Miss Nancy Brown, whom his hostess had told him had come to the rescue so nobly, and the face appeared strangely familiar, but it was not until the gentle voice said demurely, "Sherry, sir?" that he traced the absurd likeness to Kitty. *Nancy Brown was Kitty!* why, he must be dreaming, and he pulled himself together and talked to his hostess, though not one movement of the amateur parlourmaid escaped his keen eyes. It was—it was Kitty. But why call herself Nancy Brown?

"Are you sure that girl's name is Nancy Brown?" he asked his friend, when later Mrs. Bruton had left them and gone to Joyce.

"Why, yes. She says so. Do you think you have discovered some famous criminal in her?" laughed the doctor.

"No, but wait till your wife joins us and then I'll tell you what I do think."

In the doctor's cosy sanctum Morris told his story, and of his fruitless attempts to find Kitty. "And often and often, Mrs. Bruton, that last month, I don't believe she had enough to eat. I remember one night calling to see her, and grumbling like a selfish idiot, because I had not had time to have a regular dinner, and her quiet remark, "Did you have no lunch, big man?" And when I said "Oh, yes," she replied gently, 'Then, I don't think you will hurt, but you shall have a cup of cocoa directly.'"

"She has refused to come down, but suppose you go to her, she is in the nursery, the second door to the left, and see if you can persuade her, and try to find out if she is Kitty," said Mrs. Bruton.

He thanked her and went.

"May I come in?"

Nancy looked very startled and grew extremely red, as she answered:

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"You can tell me, if you have a sister or any near relation named Kitty Marsden?"

"I had—once—why—why do *you* want to know?" and she faced him bravely.

"Because the one object of my life is to find her. I have been looking for her now for two years, and I've almost lost heart."

"Why do you want to see her so much?"

"Ah! that I must tell to her. Won't you give me her address—Miss Nancy Brown?"

"I—I cannot—she died—long ago," but as she uttered these words her face crimsoned, and she bent to the fire to hide her confusion.

"Pardon my flatly contradicting you, but"—bending towards her, Morris endeavoured to take her hand, "tell me, why is my little pal masquerading as Nancy Brown?"

"Don't, please don't," and, wrenching her hand away, the girl sank on the floor by Joyce's cot and Raymond saw the little form was shaken with tremulous sobbing.

Kneeling down by her, he endeavoured to take her in his arms. "Little girl, big man's little chum, don't cry, see, your comrade won't bother you any more, you shall be a dozen Nancy Browns if you like. See, was it this, you ran away from me because you were not getting on, and things got worse, and you couldn't trust big man, and so you were afraid he would find you, and you—silly child, you thought he might pity you, so you changed your name and that was why he could never trace his dear little chum—Kitty."

There was no answer, but he fancied the sobs were less.

"Sweet one, don't you see big man is crying too. Won't Kitty look up and smile at her comrade, she's hurting him awful."

At this Nancy, or rather, Kitty, raised her head, but her eyes fell again as they encountered Morris' ardent gaze.

"Don't you understand, little one, though things have gone so smoothly and well with big comrade, he's not enjoyed anything through the loss of his little pal. He has missed her tender sympathy so, and he wants her to come and share his good luck and look after him for—ever, will she?" and he gently stroked the little face. "We must go down and tell them that I am contemplating bigamy."

"Bigamy?"

"Yes, sweet one, don't you see, I'm going to marry Kitty Marsden and Nancy Brown."

Robert Murray.

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Never Contracted Any.

GLADYS: "I hope, dearest, that you will never contract any debts." Jack: "Never." Gladys: "Jack, are you sure?" Jack: "Positive. I always expand my debts."

A Dear Girl.

"SHE is such a dear girl, and she loves flowers devotedly." "Yes," responded his unsympathetic listener, "most girls who love flowers devotedly are dear girls."

A Timely Warning.

FORTUNE-TELLER (to gaily-dressed girl): "Your husband will be a poor man—unless——" Maiden (eagerly): "Unless what?" "You dress more economically after marriage than you do now."

Excusable Sometimes.

HELEN HYLER: "Don't you think it is very bad form for a man who is calling on a young lady to sit down before she does?" Jack Lever: "Certainly; but under some circumstances he has to."

Unsentimental.

MR. POETICUS (entering cheerfully): "My love is like the red, red rose!" Mrs. Poeticus (looking up from the stove): "You'd look red, too, you lazy scribbler, if you'd been bending over a frying-pan for twenty minutes."

Poor Father.

CUSTOMER: "Some children's shoes, please." Dealer: "Yes, sir. Now there is an excellent make of shoe. How old is the child?" Customer (with a sigh): "Child! I have nine of them. Show me the wholesale department."

Only One of Many.

MAID: "Gentleman wishes to see you, mum. Here's his card." Miss Flirtie: "Um—I don't remember that name." "He said, mum, that you was to see him, or else give him something of his you had." "It must be someone I met at the seaside in the summer. Take that box of rings, and tell him to pick out his."

The Bridegroom Objected.

A WORKING man was being united to the lady of his choice at a certain church, and just before the moment for the production of the ring, the officiating clergyman leant toward the bride, and whispered: "Please take off your glove." To his intense dismay, the bridegroom resented the action, and cried: "Here, mister, no whispering to my gal."

What She Really Wanted.

JUDGE (to prosecuting witness): "Have you any real cause of complaint against your husband?" Wife: "Yes, sir. He refuses to buy me a new bonnet, and I haven't had a new silk dress for two years." Judge: "But I thought he came home tipsy and beat you over the head with a chair." Wife: "Well, he did; but I wouldn't count that if I could get the dress and bonnet."

Method in her Madness.

SWEET GIRL: "Papa, I wish you'd lock up your money and pretend to fail; there's a good old dear. It needn't last more than a week or two, and there are so many failures now no one will find fault." Father: "Of all things! Wha——" Sweet Girl: "Oh, it's all right. You see, I'm engaged to nine young men, and I've got to get rid of at least eight of them, somehow."

Made him an Example.

BRIGGS: "Does your wife object to you smoking cigarettes in the house?" Braggs: "No. She uses me as a horrible example to our boy."

A Cheap Threat.

OFFICER (to young lady at the ball): "If you do not reciprocate my love, I shall throw myself out of the window this very day." Lady: "You live on the ground floor, I presume?"

Two's Company.

CLARA: "My friend, Mr. Spooner, who caught a glimpse of you yesterday, said he would give anything to kiss you. Shall I bring him round to-night?" Maud: "No; send him round."

Distantly Related.

LIVINGSTON: "I didn't know that you and Miss Featherspray were so well acquainted." Nina: "Oh, yes; we are distantly related." Livingston: "How?" Nina: "We have both promised to be sisters to the same young man."

Wouldn't Look Well.

YOUNG LADY: "How much?" Telegraph Clerk: "Sixpence, miss." Young Lady: "What, for that one word, 'Yes'?" Telegraph Clerk: "You can repeat it half a dozen times for the same money if you like." Young Lady: "No, that wouldn't look well. It's an answer to a proposal of marriage."

Had his Reasons.

SCENE.—House of a recently-married pair. Loving Husband: "What are you smiling at, dear?" Sarcastic Wife: "I was recalling how you used to sit and hold my hand for an hour at a time before we were married. How silly you were." Loving Husband: "I wasn't silly at all. I held your hand to keep you away from the piano."

Wild Times.

"YOU make me think," John Williams said, dropping upon the sofa beside a pretty girl, "of a bank whereon the wild thyme grows." "Do I?" she murmured; "it's so nice; but that is pa's step in the hall, and unless you can drop out of the front window before I cease speaking, you'll have a wild time with him, my own, for he loves you not." He drops.

Willing to Oblige.

OLD BRAMBLE: "Want to marry my daughter, do you? Let me say, sir, that you are not exactly the sort of man I would like for a son-in-law." Young Gentleman: "Well, you are not the sort of man I would like for a father-in-law; but then, you know, we needn't be chummy unless we want to."

What he Wanted.

THE young man's face was flushed, and his manner was strangely agitated. "Miss Blanche," he said, "I hesitated about coming to you, but my feelings have overpowered me at last. Will it be too much for me to ask——" "Pray go on," said the maiden, with heart wildly beating, as his voice faltered. Yes, they were coming, the words that she and her dear mamma had so long waited for. "I came to ask you, Miss Blanche——" "Yes," she smiled encouragingly. "If it would be too much trouble for you to write down that recipe which you said you had for warding off indigestion. Doctors always charge so for a prescription."

He Acknowledged the Softness.

"YOU mustn't touch the top of the baby's head," said a mother to her four-year-old; "she has a soft spot there that is very tender." The youngster gazed at it curiously for a moment, and then asked: "Do all babies have soft spots on their heads?" "Yes." "Did papa have a soft spot on the top of his head when he was a baby?" "Yes," replied the mother, with a sigh, "and he has got it yet." And the old man, who had heard the conversation from an adjoining room, said: "Yes, indeed he has, my dear boy, or he would be a single man to-day."

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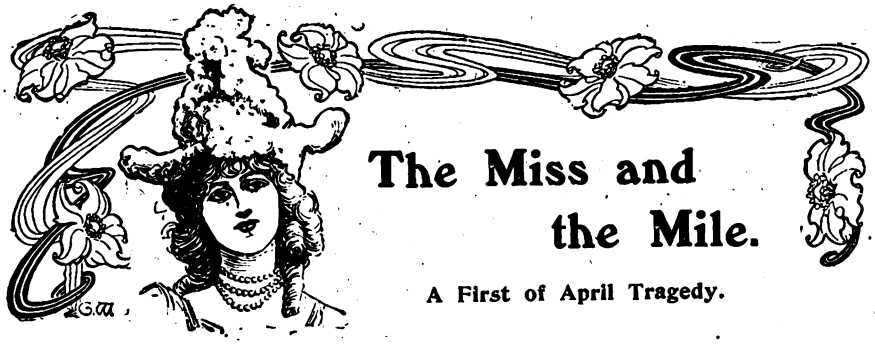

The Miss and the Mile.

A First of April Tragedy.

SEPTIMUS SMITH was a man who lived in a world of his own. He was one of the best-hearted fellows breathing, but somehow he could not get the girls of his acquaintance to acknowledge this fact. He absolutely yearned for domestic felicity, but at thirty-eight he was still a bachelor, still in vain pursuit of the princess of his dreams.

Now, it was perfectly clear that the one thing above all others which stood in the way of his settlement in life, was his painful shyness—shyness which always seemed to afflict him most when, as had happened some dozen times or more, he had screwed his courage up to the particular point of interviewing the current lady of his choice, with a view to a proposal.

As a matter of fact, it never came to that; the proposal never, by any chance, got farther than the intention; the three blondes, two brunettes, and seven other young ladies who were a little of each, being left in that unsatisfactory state of ignorance which is *not* bliss. He had an exasperating way of veiling his meaning, so that even the Sphinx would have been puzzled to solve the riddle.

Still, in spite of all this, he had a certain sort of attraction for ladies generally. He was rich, fairly personable, and—which was a great point in his favour—he was of a romantic turn of mind.

Now, romance is all very well, but it doesn't appeal to everybody; and, therefore, while women of the younger sort admired Septimus Smith for the imagination that was in him, his own sex, to a man, wrote him down as being something very much like an ass.

For some months prior to the date of this chronicle, he had been an object of solicitude to one of his lady friends. Delia Spence did not deceive herself into the belief that she loved the bashful Septimus, being so far candid as to acknowledge to herself that a picturesque and up-to-date Kensington flat, together with plenty of money to keep it up—and a little over—were the things most to be desired in connection with her dilatory suitor's anticipated declaration.

Every reasonable opportunity was given Mr. Smith when he paid a visit to—as Delia's terrible young brother called it—"come up to the scratch," but surely no bird was ever so difficult to approach with the salt-box. Times out of number, Mrs. Spence, with all a mother's anxiety for her daughter's matrimonial future, found something to do elsewhere, so that the consequent *tête-à-tête* might have every chance.

Delia's younger sister Connie, also, was not a whit less considerate than her mother, and invariably vanished at the sound of Septimus Smith's hesitating knock and ring.

But it was all thrown away, and poor Septimus, much as he desired to declare himself, never succeeded in getting to the—"Will you be mine?"

Then he came to a resolution.

It was the last day of March, and he felt that, for him, there was only one way to take the plunge.

"It's no use," he said to himself; "if I wait 'till doomsday' I'll never be able to do it. Somehow the words seem to freeze on my lips just when I am going to speak. I'll write to her! That's what I'll do. It will be easier for me; and have precisely the same effect."

There was no hesitation now. A coward in the presence of beauty, Septimus Smith was a veritable hero on paper. The letter was a triumph of the epistolary art, the writer's hand and heart being offered for his lady-love's acceptance in terms at once splendid and convincing.

With the fateful missive in his pocket, he set out for Chiswick, in the spirit of the man who has greatly dared, and conscientiously looks for his reward.

But the fair Delia had also, herself, on that same last day of March, come to a resolution. She was what people style "getting on"—being sensible, she knew it—and felt that if much more time were "wasted," she stood a very good—or bad—chance of attaining to the "shelf."

She was determined if Septimus Smith really meant anything, he should be made to say it, or give place to another and a better man, in the person of Lieut. Treen, R.N., who, though not so well-off as Septimus, was younger and better looking.

To give her hesitant swain no shadow of an excuse for longer delaying his declaration, Delia had concocted a scheme which certainly did credit to her ingenuity.

Procuring, through a friend, tickets for a Kubelik recital at St. James's Hall for that evening, she had asked the gallant lieutenant, to his great delight, to escort Connie and herself.

At the last moment a toothache or a headache compelled her, she said, to remain at home, but that Mrs. Spence could take her place.

It was astonishing how rapid was her recovery, for when, ten minutes after the departure of the concert party, Septimus Smith's knock sounded at the door, the "ache" had vanished, and Delia was warbling "In Old Madrid."

"Mamma and Connie have gone to hear Kubelik," she said, by way of first shot. "I expect they'll be late."

They talked in whispers, and sat with their chairs very close to each other, but Septimus Smith only uttered a string of unmeaning generalities; he did not so much as attempt to pop the question.

All in vain were Delia's modest efforts to elicit the words which would make her prospective mistress of the Kensington flat, and the comfortable income.

Had she but known that the housemaid who had opened the door to Septimus had in her possession, for deposit in Delia's room, that hero's written proposal of marriage, she might, perhaps, have acted differently.

Vexed beyond bounds, she saw her visitor depart, with almost savage satisfaction—if such a state of mind can be imputed to a lady.

"I'll write to Arthur Treen to-morrow, and if he asks me to marry him, which I know he will, I'll accept him, just to show Mr. Septimus Smith what I think of his contemptible conduct."

Of course she cried, women mostly do in such circumstances, and went to bed in the dark. Thus she never saw Septimus Smith's letter, which the housemaid had laid in the top of her dressing-case, and which was there still when the first of April dawned.

The Spences were great people for practical jokes, especially those of the "April fool" order. On the first of the month, therefore, everybody in the house kept well on the alert, to circumvent any attempt upon his or her credulity.

Connie Spence was a perfect little demon in this particular, and it was owing only to the absorbing nature of Delia's

affair that she had failed on this occasion to prepare something specially "fool-making."

The two sisters slept together, and it so happened that on the morning of the historic "first" Connie awoke before Delia.

There was sufficient light to enable her to see her sister's dressing-case. It was open, and on the top of its contents lay—a letter.

"It's a trick," she at once said to herself, "but they won't catch me!"

Creeping softly towards it, she saw that it was addressed to "Miss Delia Spence."

"Poor as poor!" she went on. "Delia will easily see through it, unless she forgets what the day is."

Then she was seized with an inspiration.

Hurriedly dressing herself, she sought out the housemaid, who regarded the note in her hand with anything but satisfaction.

"Jane," she said, "bring this letter upstairs, and tell Delia that Mr. Smith brought it this morning."

"Now to see the fun," she laughed, as she tripped back to her sister's room.

Delia was awake, and was on her guard.

"She won't fool me, if I know it," she said to herself.

"Mr. Smith asked me to give you this, miss."

It was Jane, the housemaid.

"Jane, I'm surprised at you! Miss Connie gave it to you."

"Miss Delia, as sure as I'm standing here, Mr. Smith gave it to me for you last night."

"Last night?" cried Connie, winking her eye at Jane, as a sign that she had forgotten her lesson.

"No, this morning, I mean."

There was nothing for it. Delia demanded the letter, which she proceeded to tear into half-a-dozen pieces, and throw on to the floor.

Lieut. Arthur Treen soon responded to Delia's invitation, and bore her off to the Winter Exhibition at Prince's Hall.

Then it was that Connie confessed to her mother, who, interviewing Jane the housemaid, elicited the fact that Mr. Smith had undoubtedly given her the letter the night before to place in Miss Delia's room.

Mrs. Spence now suspected that a miss had been made, which, for anything that could be done to rectify it, might just as well have been a mile.

The dust-bin was turned out, and after a lot of searching and soiling of hands, the half-dozen pieces of paper were rescued, joined together— and revealed Mr. Septimus Smith's proposal of marriage.

Delia was furious, when she was told on her return. Through being too clever she had really been made an April fool of.

To think that, after all, the tardy Septimus had proposed, and—too late. Yes, too late, for, instead of inspecting the pictures, she had had, in accepting Lieut. Treen, quite enough to occupy her while at Prince's Hall.

There is every reason to believe that Septimus Smith has not only never ventured upon another proposal, but has eschewed the society of the fair sex altogether.

E. Ralph.

A MARRIED lady, who is in the habit of spending most of her time in the society of her neighbours, happened to be taken ill, and sent her husband in great haste for a physician. The husband ran a short distance and then returned, exclaiming: "My dear, where shall I find you when I come back?"

"Is your papa in, Mary?" "Yes, but you may come in." "I don't think he likes me, and he might——" "There is no need of being afraid; he is engaged." "Engaged, is he?" "Yes; he stayed out till after twelve last night, and went off this morning without giving ma a chance to talk to him. She is talking to him now, and he won't be in this part the house for the next three hours. Come in!"

Your Editor Chats.

"Buy two copies of next week's 'Short Stories' and give one to a friend."

This suggestion I sincerely trust you will be kind enough to follow. It is one which, if carried out by you personally, will benefit your favourite little story paper in such a way as to justify the expense to which it has been put to secure the remarkable series of articles by Lady Peggy Carstairs which will start in next Tuesday's issue.

If you have enjoyed "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA" (as I hope you have), then you will certainly enjoy "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA"; and you will be doing your little favourite a good turn (as well as doing your friend a good turn) if you just for once spend an extra penny in getting an extra copy of next week's *Short Stories* and handing it to someone who is not at present a reader.

OUR GRAMOPHONES.

The result of the first Gramophone Competition will appear next week. I had hoped to publish it in this issue, but the attempts have been so numerous that it has been impossible for our large checking staff to get through the work in time. Meanwhile, there are other competitions going on every week, and it would be well for you to have a try for one of these splendid instruments. There is no reason why you should not go in for every one of the competitions, is there?

OUR NEW SERIAL.

I shall be very pleased indeed if readers would send me a line to tell me what they think of "A FOE IN THE FAMILY." Personally, I think it is one of the brightest and most entrancing stories that we have had in *Short Stories* for a long time. It will not take you long to scribble down on the back of a post-card your candid opinion of it, and the little trouble you take will be greatly appreciated by

Your Editor.

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Substance and Shadow;

or, LOVE THE HELPER.

"So that is how the wind blows, eh?" laughed her grandfather, with a good-humoured shake of the head. "Well, Edie, I guessed as much! I quite expected that Rob Miller would come here soon and ask to have a confidential talk with me, and now you tell me that he would like to see me!"

Edith Fulton blushed deeply. It seemed to her that he must be very keen-sighted to have detected "how the wind blew," as he phrased it; she had not learnt that lovers usually betray the state of their feelings to other people.

"Yes, grandad," she responded, laying her head against his capacious waistcoat to hide the blushes. "Rob and I are very fond of each other. He never said a word to me till the day when he saved me from being hurt when my pony ran away, but he always longed for the opportunity to say something. You see, he is not so well off as I—that is, as we are, and when he saw the others always waiting on me, he felt that he hadn't a chance against them."

"And you?" queried her grandfather, patting the head of his son's child. "What of yourself?"

"I saw him frequently as I went about, but I never spoke to him, although I was attracted by his straightforward, manly look!" said Edie, speaking more boldly, now that she felt called upon to give an explanation of the fact that she had fallen in love with one whose station in life was not equal to her own. "But after his gallant deed in saving me from serious injury, wounding his arm severely in the act, I began to love him, and now I consider him superior to any! He is coming to see you, to know——"

Edie paused; she was in some doubt whether her grandfather would look with favour on the young suitor or not.

"Oh, I'll see him!" said old Mr. Fulton. "If you love him, Edie, then he has my consent. I am concerned only for your happiness, and I would do nothing to mar it! Perhaps I have appeared harsh occasionally, but my actions have been dictated by a knowledge of life and it was all for your good!"

"I know it! I am sure of it!" cried Edie warmly, jumping up and kissing him affectionately. "Oh, we shall be so happy, Rob and I!"

Rob Miller came and was cordially received by old Mr. Fulton. Rob was an orphan and was working on a neighbouring farm. It seemed like impudence for him to aspire to the hand of Edith Fulton, but he was a manly young fellow, with every promise of becoming a good farmer. He was possessed of just enough ambition, in the opinion of Fulton, to make him get on in that calling, and that was sufficient to qualify him for candidature as Edie's husband.

The old man was very fond of his granddaughter, the only relation he had in the world, and he was ready to make any sacrifice for her; but he was not foolish and had enough determination to make him put his foot down firmly when occasion required.

The engagement was announced and the wedding day was fixed within a short time after the engagement was made known. Rob and Edie grew more fond of each other, if that were possible, and grandfather beamed with contentment while disappointed suitors made unkind remarks behind Edie's back. The question of ways and means for the future bride and bridegroom was settled by Mr. Fulton. Everyone expected that Edie would be provided for by the old gentleman, and their surmises proved well founded.

"Now, young people," he cried with a benevolent smile, "I have a wedding present for you. Here, Edie, is a deed of gift in connection with The Elms, the next farm to this, which I have had cultivated by a steward for the last three years in anticipation of something of this sort. That's why I didn't let it. It will belong to you and your husband as long as you live in it and cultivate it; if you leave it to live elsewhere, it will revert to me. And here, Rob, is a cheque for £250, which will come useful in setting up housekeeping and the remainder will serve as a nest egg; you will find a little money handy till you get your harvest in and also afterwards!"

Edie and Rob were loud in their expressions of gratitude and nearly overwhelmed the old man, who gazed at them with tear-moistened eyes and a look that seemed to ask: "Will you always be so grateful?"

The wedding was a grand affair for the village and the happy pair went off for a short honeymoon at a southern seaside resort; then they settled down to married life on The Elms farm.

It was the end of October when they actually took possession, and the labour on the land was practically beginning for the year. Rob and Edie were quite happy and contented, and full of high hopes. Old Fulton looked in now and then to see them and went over the land with his new grandson, but he said nothing; Rob was full of assurance and the old man admitted to himself that he had said he would let them manage their own affairs. On the whole, the farm was doing well and, although there were one or two points on which he was not entirely satisfied, it was not fair to complain.

Rob and Edie developed grander ideas as the months wore on; they were in good circumstances, they thought, and they ought to do as others did. The money given to them by Fulton had been considerably decreased, but the harvest would come in due time and all would be well!

They took advantage of various inducements by railway companies to take short trips to London and to cities nearer to The Elms, and just before the hay crop was due they spent a fortnight in the Metropolis. When they returned, Rob found that the hay had suffered; he had left his cutting a few days too long, taking advantage of the fine weather to prolong his stay in London, with the result that a rainy time set in immediately on his return and the value of his hay crop was reduced to a very low figure. The wheat harvest, too, proved bad; insufficient attention during the last four months had had the usual result, and Michaelmas saw Rob and Edie with lengthened faces and a sentiment of unrest and dissatisfaction in their hearts.

When Mr. Fulton came over next time, they were full of their trouble and Rob complained of the disappointing character of the soil.

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"The land is bad; it's very poor," said Rob in a vexed tone. "After all the time and labour and money spent on it, the return is runious."

Old Fulton's eyes glittered at this implied reproach of his conduct in saddling such bad land on them.

"The land is all right, my boy!" he answered grimly. "There has been too much time, labour and money spent on holidays; had that been put on the land, your harvest would have been as good as other people's!"

"Oh, grandfather!" exclaimed Edie reproachfully.

"I have done my best!" Rob cried, when Fulton had left them. "Edie, I am tired of farming! I never really liked it," he added, "for I believe it is not my true calling. I never had a chance of seeking my proper vocation in life. I wish—"

"What, Rob?" she asked as he stopped.

"I wish I could give up this place and go to London, Edie! I believe I am fitted for something better than the drudgery of ploughing! I'm sure I could do better."

"Yes, Rob! Let us go to London and get out of this!" cried Edie.

And so it was arranged.

For a little while longer they thought it over, and then old Fulton was informed of their intention.

"Very good!" he remarked quietly. "You must please yourselves. I hope that you will find your proper vocation. The Elms reverts to me, as you know."

They did know and they were prepared to hear him say it, although they had secretly hoped that he would allow them to let it and take the rent. They had to wait a few weeks longer, owing to the arrival of a daughter, but as soon as they could, they bade farewell to The Elms.

It was a glorious day when they left and, notwithstanding her unfailing devotion to her husband, Edie felt a pang as she took a last look at the old place. Rob saw the expression in her eyes; he himself felt saddened by the parting, but he reassured himself by saying that he would do ever so much better and he tried to drive away his wife's temporary gloom.

"It's not pleasant to say good-bye to anything, Edie, I know," he said lovingly, "but we have the great consolation of knowing that we are going to better things, dear."

Edie turned to him with a bright smile.

"In a little while we shall wonder how we endured it, Rob!" she cried. "Your capabilities were simply being wasted there!"

They took furnished lodgings at first, until they could get a

(*Continued on next page.*)

Indigestion

"SIX MONTHS AGO MY HEALTH BEGAN TO FAIL."

The foregoing statement was made by Mrs. Hake, 61 Lower Barton Hill Road, Bristol, to a *Bristol Times and Mirror* reporter. In continuing her story, she said:—"My appetite which had been excellent, fell off, and after the lightest meal, indigestion afflicted me, and bile began to rise in my throat. I was quite prostrated, and what with acute pains in my head, restless sleep, and severe fainting fits, it can easily be imagined that I became languid and 'fagged out' with the least exertion, and utterly miserable. I consulted a doctor, but my biliousness continued, and seemed to be incurable. Then my husband, seeing an account of a Bile Bean Cure in a case like mine, persuaded me to give them a trial. I commenced taking them, and soon noticed a decided improvement. The sickness became less frequent and severe, and my appetite gradually improved. Eating better, I gradually regained my strength, the headaches departed, and I began to obtain refreshing sleep. I continued taking the Beans, and finally not a trace of my ailments remained, and I am quite cured."

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house and furnish it with the money that remained to them. They had to take a larger house than they needed, as small houses were not easy to get in a good locality, but they decided that they would let two or even three rooms furnished if that should prove necessary.

Rob set about finding a position in real earnest. He had had no exact notion of what he would do, but he was well educated and wrote a good hand, so he concluded that it would be an easy matter for him to obtain a manager's place in a firm dealing in machinery or other agricultural requisites, if the worst came to the worst. His pet idea, however, was to try the stage or the concert hall (for he had been told that he had a good voice and believed it), but he was vaguely conscious that he might not get a chance immediately; in the meantime, however, there were other directions in which he would doubtless be able to make a mark.

The young couple were soon to discover the mistake into which they had fallen. Rob did not find the position suitable to his talent; in fact, his talent did not appear to be recognised by anyone in any direction. Week after week passed; the money was going out, but none came in. They decided to let two rooms and, after nearly a fortnight, they secured lodgers in the persons of a man and wife of small independent means—very nice elderly people who gave excellent references and wanted board as well as lodgings. They paid a month in advance to show their genuineness, for—as the man said—"references are nothing much to go by and money is worth more than anything in these matters."

Before the month was up, Rob obtained a situation as a warehouseman; it was a bitter fall, but he resolutely refused to take it as a defeat and regarded it as a stop-gap only. Edie supported him in this view.

"Everybody has his trials, Rob," she said confidently, "and we have ours, but we must persevere and all is sure to come out well in the end. You will find your vocation in time, and we shall be all the better for the trials; they will draw us together—keep us together, I mean."

She kissed him and they were happy.

Mr. and Mrs. Cornish were the pleasantest persons imaginable; not a bit of "side," although they were clearly in good circumstances. Mr. Cornish smoked a pipe with Rob very often in the evening, and Mrs. Cornish was more like a sister or a mother, to Edie. She was ready "to eat the baby," to use Edie's own words, and the two women became so friendly that they sometimes wore one another's jacket or skirt.

The first month passed. Mr. Cornish did not attempt to continue the advance payments, and Bob and Edie decided, after serious consultation, that it was not fair to ask. The second month passed, and the third was nearly up, but still no payment was forthcoming from the Cornishes.

"We must draw the remainder of our money for the rent and the taxes," said Rob gravely. "Including the gas and the water, I fancy we owe about thirty pounds and that is really more than we have got left in the savings bank. I think we might ask them for a little money now, Edie: it's best part of two months they owe, and it runs into a good deal to keep them."

"There was a note from the doctor this morning," said Edie, just as gravely. "He would like his account settled. We have had him here quite a lot for baby and me; I suppose it is the change from the country to the town, for we have not been well, either of us, since we came into stuffy London. But we shall get used to it!" she continued hastily. "And when you succeed, we shall be able to live out a little way."

"The little girl does not get used to it," rejoined Rob anxiously. "She is worse, Edie, than she was at first. She always seems to be ailing now!"

Edie was silent and cast an anxious look at the cradle. It was true; she hardly liked to admit it to herself, but she wished above all things not to discourage her husband. Yet she could not deny the truth of his remark.

DON'T FORGET THAT "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA" COMMENCES NEXT WEEK.

The little stock of money was deposited in a savings bank that paid on demand, so the gold was brought home by Rob on the following evening.

"I have asked Mrs. Cornish to let us have something on account," said Edie, "and she has promised that Mr. Cornish shall give me a cheque to-morrow for the two months—perhaps for three. I explained that our expenses were heavy, and she seemed so sorry that they had been so neglectful. I told her just how things stood, so far as money matters were concerned. What a nice woman she is!"

They would have gone to bed perfectly happy had it not been for the baby; little Daisy was not nearly so well and the medical man had to be called in again.

On the following morning Rob went off to work with a heavy heart, for the little one was much worse. Edie called in the assistance of Mrs. Cornish, who helped the young mother to attend to Daisy.

"I should call in the doctor," advised Mrs. Cornish, meditatively.

"He promised to come when on his rounds," responded Edie, striving to speak calmly.

"I would not wait till then, my dear," counselled Mrs. Cornish. "Go now. I will look after the little one and you won't be long."

Edie accepted the advice and went in search of the medical gentleman who kindly informed her that he would be there almost as soon as she was. On Edie's return, Mrs. Cornish decided to go upstairs and make some improvement in her toilette, so that she might be presentable when the doctor arrived.

Dr. Matthews reassured the distracted mother to a slight extent; he stayed quite a long time, and left with the assertion that the child, although very ill, was not in the immediate danger imagined by its mother and Mrs. Cornish.

"She wants light nourishment," he decided. "Can you get the special preparation I recommended yesterday?"

Edie said that it should be obtained at once and, when the doctor had gone, she called to Mrs. Cornish.

No reply. It was strange that the lodger had not reappeared. Edie ran upstairs and knocked at the door. Not receiving any answer, she ventured to open it, and she started back, in surprise. The room was in disorder and it was clear that many things had been taken out of it.

With an unknown fear oppressing her, Edie went to the other room, and a similar scene of disorder met her eyes. Then the truth appeared to stare her in the face and another horrible thought flashed across her mind. Running downstairs to her own bedroom, where little Daisy lay, she opened the drawer in which she had left the money drawn from the bank! It was gone.

"They were thieves! They have lived on us and robbed us in the midst of our trouble. I told her of the money yesterday, when she was inquiring so kindly about us!" wailed Edie. "They have contrived to go away with all that they could get out of the house easily, in a portmanteau—*he* did that while she kept me engaged yesterday, and perhaps this morning—and she has finished up by robbing us!"

Edie did what she could for the little one till Rob came home in the evening, and then they tried bravely to face the bitter trouble, strong in the love they bore to each other.

"The easiest way to raise money is by a bill of sale on the furniture," said Rob, "and I'll arrange for that to-morrow. It's better than pawning a few things; people know nothing about it and we can pull round when I get my chance!"

A strange feeling went through him, and he gazed at Edie. The sympathy between these loving hearts caused the same sentiment to arise in both at the same time. His chance! His vocation! Had they made a mistake? They gazed steadfastly in each other's eyes

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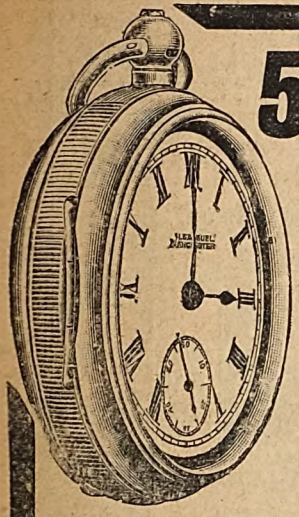

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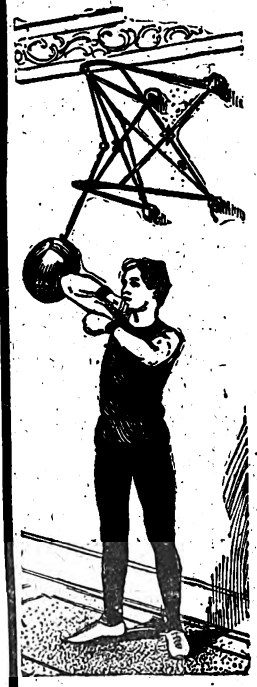

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"Perhaps I have," said Rob slowly, as if in reply to a question from her.

"Perhaps *we* have, Rob," she corrected gently. "If there is any blame we bear it together, for I have done as much as you. Were we wrong to leave the old place? Was our vocation there, after all?"

"We must face it now, dear," said he gently. "I have a little money left, to buy what Daisy requires, and the bill of sale will relieve us."

The matter was quickly arranged, and all bills paid, but that left them with scarcely anything to go on with, for they had raised only sufficient to cover pressing needs and they had sharks to deal with. Daisy recovered, but she remained very weak and the doctor nearly broke their hearts by telling them that she ought to be taken to the country.

The time went swiftly; expenses were running up, no fresh lodgers came and the prospect they had to face was black.

"If we go on like this much longer, Edie," said Rob desperately, one evening, "we shall be sold up. We can't meet the rent and other expenses, I can't get any more money out of those people for the furniture—they even talk of selling us up, and I fancy that our firm are going to reduce the staff. There hasn't been much to do lately. Edie, I think—I feel—that I—made a mistake! My vocation is not here, but on the farm. Can you ever forgive me, dearest, for bringing you to this?"

"My dear husband, I share it all with you. We were wrong, both of us. Now, for dear Daisy's sake, we must confess our error and try to remedy it. Perhaps grandfather will not be too hard on us! Our little Daisy will fade away if we stay here and—oh, Rob!—that would be too dreadful!"

Her strength failed and she burst into hysterical weeping. Rob comforted her and together they planned the way of the penitent.

"No, it is not fair that you should go to grandfather alone and bear the brunt of it!" declared Edie. "I'll write and ask him to come here if he still loves me, and then ——"

The letter was dispatched and Fulton answered it in person.

"Grandfather," said Edie contritely, "we have seen our fault and we——"

Old Fulton's keen glance had taken in the situation, and he stopped her with a hearty kiss.

"It's rather hard work for an old man to look after two farms, and I shall be quite thankful to have someone at The Elms again," he remarked, trying to appear unconcerned. "Rob, my boy,"—turning to him—"I've managed to get that other field added to The Elms land, so you'll have plenty to do!"

Rob wrung the old man's hand, unable to speak. Old Fulton created a diversion by going to the cradle and trying to make the baby laugh by snapping his fingers.

"You had better come with me straight away," said Fulton, a little later. "Let the sharks have the furniture, and I'll see to the rent and all that. Let us get out of it at once and begin again!"

They did so. Years have slipped by since then and old Fulton lies at rest in the village churchyard. Rob knows what his vocation is, and Edie and he wonder how they could have been so deluded in the early days. Daisy and other children are there to make them happy, and they are thankful.

"What could be better than this?" asked Rob, as he surveyed the fields and the children romping in the distance. "We had a rough time up there, dear, but it might have been a great deal worse. We learnt a lesson that we ought never to have needed, and the cost of it was not so heavy as we deserved it to be!"

"Love softened it, as love always does lighten trouble!" said Edie, and he clasped her in a warm embrace.

George Day.

MABEL: "I had a handsome young man at my feet yesterday." AMY: "Yes, I noticed you had bought a pair of new shoes."

LADY (on leaving crowded carriage): "Well, I'm glad to get out of the crowd. I've had to stand on one foot all the way." Voice from the corner: "Yes, and that foot was mine."

YOUNG LADY: "I should like to embroider a nice pair of slippers as a Christmas present for my aunt." Shopman: "We happen to be quite out of new patterns just now. Wouldn't something else do as well?" Young Lady: "Perhaps a cigar-case."

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SHE: "Read me something from your paper." HE: "Certainly, my love. Here's something that will interest you. 'Rumoured engagement.'" SHE: "How lovely. Wonder if I know them?" HE (continuing): "Fourteen killed on the Bulgarian frontier." SHE: "Wretch!"

Two young London ladies in the country were standing by the side of a wide ditch, which they did not know how to cross. They appealed for help to a boy who was coming along the road, whereupon he pointed behind them with a startled air, and yelled: "Snakes!" The young ladies each crossed the ditch at a single bound.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Melting an Iceberg.

"ALEC" sees his sweetheart three times a week. Very often, however, she is quite cold to him, and appears to take very little interest in his visit, while at other times she is warmth itself. What should "ALEC" do on the former occasions?

* * * * * *

"ALEC" should visit her less often, say only twice a week. Let him miss a visit or two, and see if this does not remove the occasional coldness. A little judicious neglect is the best way to make a girl appreciative of the attentions of her lover. Too much devotion makes many girls capricious and petulant.

Too Much Housework.

"CAN you give me a cure for fat hands and arms?" writes "L. M. D." "I have to do all the housework at home, and my friends make fun of my red and ugly hands. Please help me."

* * * * *

I am afraid you cannot get over your difficulty unless by a change of work. So long as you have to do all the housework, your hands must continue to be coarse. Had you taken proper precautions at first, you might have avoided it. By handling things in a careless way, constantly lifting heavy weights, and having the hands frequently in water and in contact with soap, they swell and grow inflated. There is nothing for it, "L. M. D.," so long as your present work continues. But still, I do not doubt that when the young man arrives, he will readily forgive this defect, when he remembers what a useful little woman it is that suffers from it.

Should He Put it Out?

A QUESTION of etiquette comes from "JOHN H.' It is, "Should a gentleman put out his cigar when a lady meets him in the street?" That depends on the quality of the cigar, and how far he has smoked it. If it is one of those given him by a kind friend who is not a judge of cigars, and the lady is one whom he wishes to impress favourably, I should advise him to throw it away. The same rule might be observed if the cigar were more than half smoked, as to cling longingly to a stump suggests to her mind that a cigar is a luxury he longs to linger over. But if he has just lighted it and it is a good cigar, likely to impress the lady, he should say, "Do you mind my smoking, Miss C.?" To which she will reply, if she has caught a wayward fume from a good Havana, "Of course not, I like it." In which case, "JOHN H." should continue for a few minutes talking, and resume his walk.

* * * *

I might add, however, that unless a lady has something very important to say to a gentleman, it would be rather better form for her not to stop him in the street, and put him under the possible obligation of extinguishing even a bad cigar.

Kissing in Public.

"ENA" was recently accused of the heinous crime of kissing her sweetheart in public. They were riding in a railway carriage at the time, and were caught in the act by a lady friend, who upbraided "ENA" for her conduct. "Surely, if we are engaged," writes she, "we may kiss when and where we like?"

* * * *

No, "ENA." No doubt you and your lover are very lucky in each other's possession, but to parade one's good fortune is the act of vulgarity. In public, you should disguise your feelings towards each other so far as possible, as displays of them only annoy other people, perhaps less fortunate. Wait till you are alone and unobserved next time, and the enjoyment should be ever so much greater. Everybody feels kindly towards the loving couple, but nobody wants to see their love too much in evidence in public.

A Point of Etiquette.

"SMIKE" wishes to know if a gentleman should assist a lady to get over a stile, or should he walk on a few yards and wait?

* * * *

Having got over the stile himself, he might say, "Can you manage?" And if she agrees—which she will unless an invalid or cripple—he should walk on and interest himself in the vegetation.

The Acquaintanceship Problem.

"I HAVE fallen in love," writes "GEORGE F.," "with a young lady whom I meet every day. How can I become acquainted with her. I don't know whether she cares for me or no. She is in business at a West End florist's."

* * * *

I select this particular letter asking this question from a bunch of similar ones, because I am better able to answer it. "GEORGE F." is much better off than his fellow inquirers, as the girl is at a florist's. Now, "GEORGE," just go in every morning, or evening, or at lunch time, or whenever you can, and buy yourself a nice buttonhole. In time, perhaps, she will have got to pin it in for you so nicely that you will be positively compelled to say pretty things to her, after which, don't you know, all is a matter of good fortune. Certainly where there is a flower, there's a way.

Deception—Its Cure.

"I HAVE always been a flirt," writes "DELIRIOUS," "but now I have met a man whom I love dearly. I think he returns my love. When I first met him, I told him I lived with my people. Instead of that I am only a companion to a lady. Now I am afraid to tell him the truth."

* * * *

This is a difficult problem. It was very silly of you to tell him a falsehood, especially one which was so unnecessary. If you think he is fond of you, tell him the truth now, and don't prevaricate any longer. Admit that you deceived him, and if he is fond of you he will probably forgive you.

Curiosity.

I TAKE the opportunity of telling the two correspondents who write to inquire whether the gentleman referred to in my answer to "VEILCHEN," is either of them, that they have not that honour. At the same time, if they find themselves in similar positions to this individual, such advice as I have been able to give in the affair in question is at their disposal if they care to use it. Briefly it is that if a man is really attracted to a girl, he can never hope to carry matters further unless he makes some effort to become acquainted with her. Obviously it is no part of a girl's duty to manœuvre an acquaintanceship, and unless the man takes the initiative, things can go no further.

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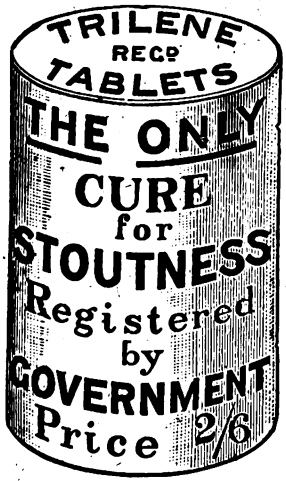

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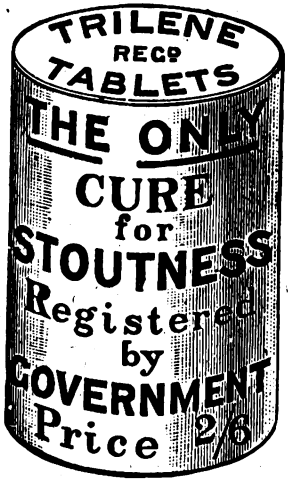

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"67 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

Miss CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful 'Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

Mrs. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. McLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 3lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18.b. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 3lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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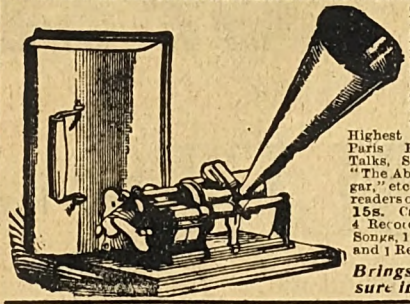

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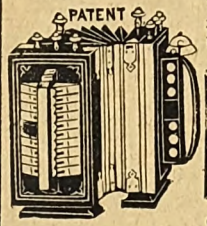

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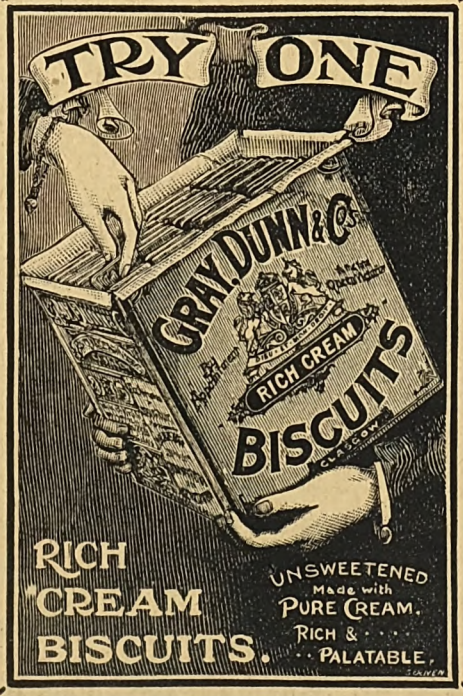

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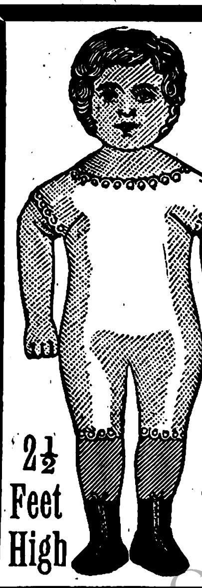

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Short Stories.

No. 723. For the Week Ending November 8th, 1902. One Penny.

A FASCINATING NEW SERIES. BEGINS HERE.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

Real life in High Society vividly portrayed.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

A keen sense of honour, we are told, is the watchword of the aristocracy. The forthcoming series of revelations—the actual experiences, remember, of a member of this aristocracy—tell a very different tale. The young girl whom Lady Peggy Carstairs—the pseudonym of the writer of the articles—chaperons, is the victim of as cruel and as crafty a series of plots as can be imagined. The heiress to great wealth, men of title, of old and honourable names, do not scruple to use the basest means to force her into marriage.

Everywhere the girl is a victim of intrigue, and to all her dangers and mischances she can only oppose her love and faith in the man of her choice, a man without title or wealth.

Many and various are the dangers to which she is subjected; her liberty, her very life is threatened. On one occasion her persecutor threatens to mar her beauty if she persists in refusing him.

With her chaperon she visits the Riviera, Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg, Vienna, all the centres of fashionable life. Everywhere attempts are made to trick her into marriage.

The revelations are startling, almost painfully so. They unmask the shams and the frauds practised in daily life in smart society. Above all, they cast a strong and searching light upon its dark places, its family secrets, strange mysteries, its extravagances and vices. All are truthfully and vividly portrayed by Lady Peggy Carstairs.

I Lose a Fortune and Find Belinda.

In the opinion of all young people, youth is the appointed time for romance, delightful happenings—fascinating, unexpected. Not till we come to middle age, say forty-five, which nowadays looks thirty-three, do we realise our mistake. At any rate I realised it, for at that age, and a little later, I met with the strangest and most exciting experiences of my life.

I had lived, as I say, some forty odd years in the world—though you wouldn't have thought it to look at me—the world of fashion that people call "Society." As a young girl, the daughter of the Earl of Darisbrook, I had been a social success. As a young woman, the wife of Sir Evelyn Carstairs, a man of great wealth, I had enjoyed distinction.

Those were pleasant years, the days that followed were far different.

Sir Evelyn died suddenly, leaving me a widow at twenty-eight with three young children. Heart disease ran in his family, so his death was not wholly unexpected. What was unexpected, and severely so, was the fact that he died penniless, all his money having gone in copper mines that held no copper.

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Imagine my position! A widow with a title, but without a penny, and with three girls on her hands.

What was I to do? Bring up my daughters on charity disguised as patronage? Impossible. My pride revolted at the thought. And yet what other course was open to me? How could I earn a living for my children and myself?

My old friend Crawley Drummond solved the difficulty. He told me of an American millionaire, illiterate but ambitious, who wanted his daughter launched into Society. I saw the man and agreed to chaperon his daughter on my own terms. Not only did he pay me to act as chaperon, but agreed to give me a large sum if I procured a titled husband for his daughter.

Within six months she was a duchess. I took my cheque and invested it to great advantage. Next came two sisters, pretty girls, who went off without much trouble. For them also I received a handsome sum. I invested my money under Crawley's advice in a bank of great repute—no mines for me—and with the aid of a little judicious speculation my income crept up to a respectable figure. I had no need to act as chaperon again, I had enough to live in comfort and bring out my girls.

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My life from that time on was that of most mothers in Society. I looked after my daughters, studied their complexions and designed their frocks. Later I found them suitable husbands—they all married well—and I arranged their settlements.

By the time the youngest was off my hands, I felt, having married all my daughters, I had done my duty, and that it was time to—well, to consider myself. And nowhere is it possible to pay oneself more charming consideration than in Cairo.

I had had a very trying time the previous year. Millicent's marriage, tiresome to arrange, had been very difficult to carry out. She was the youngest of my children, and somewhat self-willed. She talked a lot of rubbish about love—true her husband's neither young nor handsome—but then he has £15,000 a year. However, the wedding had come off at last, and now, having need of rest, I decided, as I say, to visit the city of the Caliphs.

A lovely afternoon in January found me on the Piazza of the Continental Hotel—Shepheard's is getting quite too general nowadays—in utter and complete content. Satisfied with myself and all the world.

Cairo is a wonderful place, the luxury, the refinement of the West, side by side with the immemorial customs of the East. The Ezbekiya or modern quarter of the town presents no unusual features. It might as easily be a part of Cannes, or Mentone, as Cairo. Its hotels are sumptuously decorated, their appointments as luxurious as those on the opposite side of the Mediterranean. Its roads are well drained, and lit with electric light, while down the principal thoroughfares run the electric tramcars.

The native quarter, where the Bazaars are to be found, is very different. There the East and the West shake hands. All the peoples of the earth are to be seen down the Mooski, or main street. On either side of the road are native shops or stalls, gay with bright colours, round which a constant bargaining goes on. In the roadway itself passes a never-ending procession of all races and nationalities.

The keen-faced Yankee from the States jostles a solemn and impassive-looking Turk who ambles past on a gaily caparisoned mule. Melancholy-looking fellahs—Egypt's hewers of wood and drawers of water—clad in scanty blue kaftans, mingle with green-turbaned shereefs and picturesque Bedouins, who in flowing bernouses stalk proudly by.

Here, a Moor of venerable aspect, turbaned and sandalled, salaams at the door of his shop to a young Oxford undergrad. A melon-seller lifts his tray, heaped high with the golden fruit, to a middy, spick and span in regulation uniform; near by a water carrier, with picturesque goatskin filled with water from the Nile, utters his plaintive cry. A Zouave, brave in scarlet and gold, forces his way through a knot of fierce-looking Albanians, whose many-coloured sashes bristle with weapons. Jewesses, gorgeous in purple and fine linen, brilliant with flashing jewels, brush skirts with a slim English girl, severely tailor-made. An ever-moving, many-coloured crowd.

Through the throng, forcing their way to left and right, comes a troop of donkeys—in Cairo everyone rides a donkey—the shrill cry of their drivers mingling with the steady tramp of a battalion of our khaki warriors marching to the desert, the babble of the market-place, the strains of a passing band.

A medley of sound and sight, a vivid sense of life and motion. The quickness, the vigour of the West, side by side with the quiescence, the langour of the East. And over all the glorious sun, the wonderful blue sky, against which the minarets and domes of the innumerable mosques gleam white as ivory.

It was at that very moment, just when I was thinking of the mosques, that Crawley Drummond, who was wintering in Egypt, came on to the Piazza. And from that moment dates the commencement of that astonishing chapter in my life, a chapter that includes the strangest, the most exciting incidents. I refer to the time when I chaperoned Belinda.

"Lady Peggy," said Crawley, "just observe that man. He has been standing opposite the hotel for the past ten minutes, staring at you all the time. Is he an unknown or an accredited admirer?"

"Unknown—to me at any rate," I answered. "What is he do you think?"

"The ugliest man in Cairo, I should say, if the information's any good to you."

I leant forward, studying the stranger with attention. He was ugly, no doubt of that, with a massive, determined face and heavy jaw, but his figure, square-shouldered, broad-chested, lean flanked, and a certain carriage of his head, went far to redeem his plainness. I judged him to be about fifty years of age.

He puzzled me, there was no placing him. I could not determine his position in Society.

For quite three minutes after he had moved away, a tall figure in an easy fitting linen suit, I thought of him. One has time to think in Cairo. After the hurry and rush of the London season, the worry of giving and going to functions, the trouble of trying on frocks and marrying one's daughters, a winter in Egypt is rest indeed.

As I say, one has time to think, yet not a moment hangs heavy on your hands. Life in the hotels is very varied. Strange and familiar faces greet you every day. You smile a welcome to a man or woman whom you last met at Hurlingham, quiz an Eastern potentate, greet a rising politician, a distinguished general, a well-known author or a famous artist. You can know everyone, and yet be intimate with nobody but your own set.

The "ugliest man in Cairo" was not included in the latter, and his appearance that evening at *table d'hôte* so surprised me that I allowed a *salmi* of prawns to go untasted!

That idiot Crawley Drummond noticed my absence of mind, and giggled in a fashion quite unbefitting his years. Crawley and I are contemporaries, as I take care to remind him when he is annoying.

"Your admirer's name is Hardy North, dear Peggy," he whispered. "I gather that he is an Australian of much wealth but little family. In the frozen meat trade, I believe—he looks a sheepish person."

I was too annoyed about the prawns to care much about the Australian or his sheep. Still, I noticed his clothes were well-cut, and that he wore the right sort of collars. He was seated next the Duchess of Eastacres. Her Grace had entered into conversation with him. He had evidently been introduced.

"Wants him for her daughter," murmured Crawley. "She's an awful lean woman, is Lady Honoria. She won't have a look in with you, Peggy."

Crawley is, at times, positively irreverent. To speak in such a way of the dear Duchess' daughter is, indeed, indecent.

Her Grace seemed very favourably disposed to North, and introduced him to Honoria with a gracious wave of her hand.

The Australian's voice was louder than one cares to hear indoors, but his conversation must have been worth listening to, for Lady Honoria laughed several times. Generally speaking, the poor thing has not much sense of humour.

Now I don't deny for an instant that the Duchess has great perception, and doubtless she recognised Hardy as a man of worth. I must confess, however, I was surprised to see her quite so gracious.

There was a conversational lull at the table, and the Duchess' high-pitched voice was very audible.

"Ilderim's a delightful old person," she cried. "You must see his bazaar, Mr. North. A sheik I think he calls himself. He has the most wonderful collection of treasures you can imagine. Gorgeous tapestries, wonderful shawls, the sort of

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things one reads of in the 'Arabian Nights,' and finds in Cairo. Ilderim's a great favourite of mine, and will show you his most costly wares at my request."

"I should like to go," said the Australian calmly. "Can it not be this evening? I may have to leave Cairo shortly; I should like to see what I can of the place while I am here."

Her Grace hesitated, but her daughter displayed such unwonted pleasure at the idea that she consented.

"It will be lovely in the moonlight!" said Honoria; "quite too delightful!"

I thought her enthusiasm strange, and so did Crawley. Lady Honoria was a thin, anæmic looking girl who rarely showed enthusiasm for anything. Undeniably plain, her lack of looks and want of money—the Eastacres were horribly poor—found her well on in the twenties without a husband or a sign of one.

"They're making all the running, Peggy," whispered Crawley; "you'll have to hurry up or you'll get left."

Before I could answer him an unexpected, but by no means an unusual thing occurred.

The electric light went out!

Lamps were placed upon the table in readiness for this event, and the attendants made haste to light them. In the confusion of the darkness, however, somebody knocked over an epergne, which, in its turn, sent a lamp crashing on the table. The next moment the oil had caught alight, the table seemed ablaze. Before I knew what had happened my dress—a thin muslin, was in flames. I started to my feet with a shriek of terror. Instantly I felt myself clasped in two strong arms, a heavy rug was deftly thrown over me, covering my head and face and arms.

It was all over in a moment; what might have been a terrible accident was averted by quick thought, and prompt action. I emerged from the rug unhurt, only my sleeve and the lace on my bodice slightly scorched.

"A narrow escape," said a grave voice. I looked up and met the eyes of the ugliest man in Cairo!

"How can I thank you?"—much agitated—"you have saved my life."

"Not quite that, I think; I've saved you a few burns, no more," and, with a quiet bow, he left me. The danger was over, both I and the lamp were "out." But, and I could not forget it, had it not been for Hardy North, I should have been most horribly disfigured!

I hastily sought my room to repair damages. While I was curling my hair Lady Honoria appeared in a state of suppressed excitement. She was wearing a white gown quite decently made, and she had a pink colour in her cheeks.

"Dear Lady Peggy," she said, "are you better? We are all so distressed about you."

"I'm all right now, my dear," I answered briskly.

"You're coming with us to Ilderim's bazaar, aren't you?" she said. "Please say you will. I want you to come particularly."

I stared at her in astonishment. If, as Crawley suggested, Honoria had designs upon the Australian, I was the last person she should have asked to accompany her!

She seemed to read my thoughts, and came quite close to me with an awkward attempt to be caressing.

"I don't want to talk to Mr. North," she said. "And—you understand, dear Lady Peggy, don't you?"

As a matter of fact I was considerably mystified. If the millionaire was not the attraction, why should Lady Honoria so greatly desire the expedition. It wasn't as if she were young or romantic; a moonlight walk could not possibly appeal to her.

I felt suspicious. All the same there was no reason why I should not join the party. Hardy North would take pleasure in my society, and I owed him some consideration for his bravery. I decided to oblige Honoria and go to Ilderim's.

Ilderim's bazaar was some distance from our hotel. The Continental is in a quiet part of the Ezbekiya quarter, near the English church. Ilderim's bazaar lies at the other side of the town in the native quarter off the Mooski road.

As a rule, in Cairo, as in other Oriental cities, each bazaar is confined to the sale of one class of goods. Ilderim's, however, was an exception. His trade was principally with Europeans, and he catered for the taste of his customers. The Duchess was one of his chief patrons, and introduced all her friends to the venerable sheik. Crawley declared her Grace exacted a sort of percentage from the old man, and that a fresh customer meant a Cashmere shawl or a Tunis rug. But, as I say, Crawley is at times irreverent.

We found Ilderim seated cross-legged at his threshold. The hour was an unusual one for customers, most bazaars closing at sunset; but Ilderim was an unusual person, bland as an ambassador, or impassive as the Pyramids, according to occasion.

The interior of the bazaar or shop, as we should call it, was lit by soft-shaded lamps. Before us were revealed the secrets of his treasure-house. Cashmeres and broidered stuffs of peerless texture hung above our heads, round us were things of silver, of gold, of ivory, of amber, of feathers, of bronze, of emeralds, of ruby, of beryl, their rich colours glowing through the dim light.

Marvellous caskets of mother-of-pearl, carpets soft as down, and every brilliant hue melting one within the other. Coffee equipages of inimitable metal, silver statuettes exquisitely chased and wrought. Feather fans and screens of every beauty of device were spread before us. And the air was heavy with the odour of spice.

The Duchess, as usual, was in ecstasies, and directed North's attention to the most expensive articles. The Australian listened to her recommendations, which Crawley supplemented with whispered asides.

"What is the price of this?" said North, lifting a necklace of amber and gold.

Ilderim stated the amount, naming, in true Oriental fashion, just double what he intended to accept.

North realised he was being cheated, but seemed too careless or indifferent to mind.

"I'll take it," he said, pulling out his purse. "It would just suit my daughter."

His daughter! So the man was married.

The Duchess dropped the silver coffee pot she was inspecting with a clatter, and gazed at North in the stony Eastacres fashion. Nothing abashed, the Australian pocketed the necklace and resumed his observations.

"She's only seventeen," he went on, "though she looks more, being tall. I'm very proud of my girl." His face flushed beneath the Duchess' stare, and he turned to me.

"You see," he said softly, "she's no mother. My wife died when Belinda was a baby!"

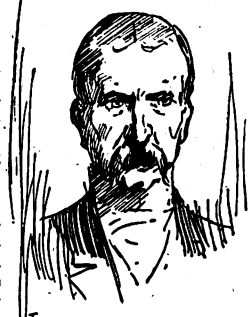
"Belinda! What a delightful name!" said the Duchess. A wife was a fatal obstacle, but a daughter might only be a drawback to her Grace's plans.

"It's a nice name," said North. His manner of speech was very simple and singularly direct. Different, very, from the tone of our set.

Crawley Drummond bargained for a set of chessmen, and I secured a dainty fan for Millicent. The Duchess contented herself with admiring our purchases. We were just about to leave when my attention was attracted by a curious and very lovely lamp hanging in the entry. It was very singular, a mingling of coloured glass, silver, gold, and ivory being wrought with much beauty in its formation.

"Isn't it gorgeous!" I cried; "just like Aladdin's wonderful lamp."

Ilderim salaamed and mentioned the cost—far more than I could dream of paying. One can't afford to buy things for art's sake nowadays. In a moment Hardy North signed to Ilderim to reach t down. He murmured a few



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

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words in the sheik's ears, and then, the bargaining over, we left the bazaar.

"I've told the old man to send the lamp to you at the Continental, Lady Peggy," said the Australian, in a matter-of-fact way. Really, he had no business to address me so familiarly.

"I know you're going to tell me that you won't accept it; that it's against the usages of Society, and so forth," he went on. "But, you see, I'm not in Society, so it doesn't matter. Where I come from we say right out when we want to make a friend of a man or a woman. I want you to be my friend."

"And so you give me a lamp? That sounds like bribery, Mr. North."

"May be. All the same I want you to take it. Come, you said I saved your life, you can't refuse me a small thing like a lamp?"

Considered in that light it was difficult to say no. In fact it was impossible. North was persistent and the lamp simply perfect.

I don't know exactly how it came about, but soon after the Australian and I found ourselves alone. We decided to extend our walk towards the Citadel, that grim fortress that frowns over the city of the Caliphs. Now the Citadel lies to the south-east of Cairo, and the Boulevard Mehemet Ali, the great modern highway, stretches straight as the crow flies, from the modern quarter to the gates of the Citadel itself. An electric tram runs the whole length of the Boulevard which is lit by electric lamps. A child could not mistake its bearings, much less a grown woman. Judge then, of my surprise when we reached the walls of the fortress and paused to gaze at its grim battlements; judge, I say, of my surprise when the Duchess in a state of great anxiety announced that Honoria had lost her way.

"It's impossible!" I said. "When did you miss her?"

"She was here not five minutes since," said her Grace. "Crawley and I were talking, and Honoria said she would go and meet you. She's not been back since, and what with camel-drivers and Bedouins, it's not safe for anyone to venture out alone."

"My dear Duchess, no one could come to any harm down the Boulevard," I said reassuringly. "It's as safe as the Brixton Road, and quite as well lighted."

Her Grace, however, was not so easily to be consoled. Finally, it was arranged that she and Crawley should walk along the Boulevard, while North and I searched in the neighbourhood of the Citadel.

It was quite silly, Lady Honoria being old enough, and in all conscience plain enough, to look after herself. Still it was a glorious night, and North was not altogether a dull companion, so I made no fuss, but set off to find, or rather look for, Lady Honoria.

I remember that night very distinctly, and for many reasons. Cairo lay before me, a wonderful, a glorious picture in the moonshine. Shadowy forms flitted through the deserted streets, quaint buildings in the native quarter, relics of Moorish palaces and ancient mosques, the frowning Citade flanked by the Mokattan Hills, in the distance, beyond the city walls, the mysterious, far-reaching desert, with its billows of sand, its fair islets of palm trees and fresh water all steeped in that wonderful light.

In our search for Honoria we drew near the gardens of an old Moorish palace now in ruins. The bitter-sweet of the mimosa, the heavy scent of the damask rose which grows in wild luxuriance throughout the East, made the night fragrant. Lofty trees cast a thick shadow on the earth, only the rustling of the leaves broke the stillness. It was a paradise for lovers!

"Look!" Hardy North grasped my arm, "under the trees there, through the break in the wall." I followed his eyes. A youth, tall and lithe, with the brown beauty of the East, a turban on his head and sandals on his feet, was clasping a woman in his arms. And she! Even now I cannot write the name with calmness, *she* was Honoria, daughter of the Duchess of Eastacres!

I could not speak to her, I merely waved my parasol and signed to North to shout. He didn't, but all the same Honoria came towards us. When she saw me she grew quite pale.

"Don't tell mother," she gasped. "I don't know what will become of me if you do."

Neither did I for that matter. The idea of the Duchess' despair at the thought of such a thing appalled me. Honoria, an aristocrat, an Englishwoman, embracing an Egyptian in a garden!

"Don't speak to me, please," I said, "I'm too shocked to listen to you."

We overtook Crawley and the Duchess half way towards the hotel, and I am glad to say her Grace scolded Honoria severely for what she called her carelessness. The rest of us walked home in silence.

"Are you going to report the girl?" whispered North in the vestibule.

"Of course," I answered. "I should be doing very wrong if I concealed it."

He nodded in a satisfied sort of way that surprised me.

As I passed up the stairs to my room later on that evening I turned in to the lounge to have a chat. The Continental boasts the nicest lounge of any hotel I know. It is a spacious place filled with hot-house plants, comfortable chairs, soft cushions, and pink-shaded lamps.

I sat down by Mrs. Murchison-Lee, a lively little American, and commenced to laugh and talk. I look back to that evening and wonder if ever again I can feel so happy, so lighthearted. Satisfied with myself and all the world, one moment. The next——!

Crawley Drummond, the centre of a group of men, was reading his mail, throwing out bits of gossip as he went along. Of a sudden he turned quite grave.

"Any of you fellows got money in Hammond's Bank?" he asked.

"Why?" said a chorus.

"Because"—Crawley's voice was very solemn—"they've gone smash. I shall lose a pretty penny, and poor Lady Peggy, Carstairs' widow, don't you know——"

I interrupted passionately.

"It isn't true," I cried. "Crawley, say it isn't true." I rose to my feet and staggered blindly towards him. "My money, the money I have earned so hardly, so cruelly, gone from me. My money!" I couldn't breathe, the room swam before me. I put out my hands to save myself from falling. Somebody grasped them firmly, and led me gently through the crowd.

Once again Hardy North had intervened to save me.

I don't know how I got to my room. I remember North putting me into the lift and bringing me some brandy, but after that there came a blank, until I found myself lying on the bed, cold and shivering.

I am no coward, I have been through scenes that would have wrung most women's hearts, and never faltered. I have borne trouble the thought of which would make most women shrink and made no sign. But, as I sat there with the consciousness that I must start life afresh, my heart failed me. I turned sick and faint.

What could I do, what could I do? I had nothing to turn to, nowhere to go. I had married my daughters brilliantly, but they were not so grateful as they should have been. I could not make my home with one, not even Millicent. And yet I had nothing, *nothing*.

I caught my breath and stared blankly before me. What should I do, what would become of me? Through the long

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night I sat, until the dawn broke over the city, lighting the East as with a golden torch.

About half-past seven my maid brought my tea. There was a note on the tray in a writing that I did not know. I opened it with curiosity.

"Please see me this morning," ran the missive, "if possible by eight o'clock. I shall call at your sitting-room at that hour. I have something of importance to say to you, important to you and me. HARDY NORTH."

Important to you and me!

Could it be, was it possible, had Crawley been right after all? Indescribably flustered I hurried on a pale pink *peignoir*, and bade Marie dress my hair becomingly.

Then, with palpitating heart, I hurried to my sitting-room. Hardy North was there already.

"I'm glad to see you're better, Lady Carstairs," he said. "It's very kind of you to see me at such an early hour, even before you've breakfasted. I appreciate it, I assure you."

I motioned him to take a seat; he placed himself beside me.

"Lady Carstairs," he said abruptly, "you've lost all your money, I understand?"

"Yes—all!" I said piteously.

He nodded sympathetically. Then—

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Really, Mr. North——"

"Please don't be offended," he interrupted quickly. "I'm very sorry for you, Lady Carstairs. It's dreadful for a woman of your position to be placed like this. I merely wanted to know if you had formed any plans as to your future. If not, you may be inclined to consider a suggestion I have to make to you."

"I've no plans—at present," I said.

"Well, then, you may consent to what I propose. It will strike you as sudden, not to say strange, Lady Carstairs, but I am used to think and to act quickly." He paused, and I felt horribly agitated.

"I want you, Lady Carstairs, to——" he paused again and looked long and earnestly at me. "To chaperon my daughter," he said slowly.

I gasped, I couldn't help it, the proposition was so very unexpected. Then with an effort I pulled myself together.

"Pray explain yourself, Mr. North," I said stiffly.

"It's like this," he answered. "I've set my heart on my girl making a success in Society. I'm no good at that sort of thing myself, I'm too rough and ready. But under the care of a lady like yourself Belinda would have every chance. I want her to marry well—not money, I've enough of that; but a title, a man of standing and of family. I want you to take her over here and now. I'll allow you ten thousand pounds for your expenses, and Belinda can have what she wants besides. If she marries as I wish her, on her wedding day I'll hand you a cheque for twenty thousand pounds. But"—he looked at me keenly, "Belinda mustn't know a word of it. Say, do you accept?"

For a moment I could not answer; the interview had turned out so differently from what I had expected. Still, twenty thousand pounds was not to be despised. I determined then and there to win it.

"I want you to travel about, to let the girl see the world. I don't mind where you go, I'll leave the route to you."

"Tell me, Mr. North," I said, "are your daughter's affections free—that is to say, has she had any love affairs? Girls at that age are apt to be romantic."

"I understand you," he said quickly. "As a matter of fact, I believe Belinda was rather taken with an Englishman she met on board the steamer, a civil engineer come over here to accept a Government appointment. Mere girlish frivolity. Nothing serious. You understand?"

"Yes," I answered quietly, "I quite understand. Your daughter is seventeen, I think you told me, Mr. North?"

"Eighteen in July."

I smiled, the twenty thousand pounds was as good as mine already. A girl of seventeen would be as putty in my hands!

"And where is your daughter, Mr. North?"

He glanced round, a sudden light in his face. "Look," he said, pointing across the room.

I turned, and there in the doorway stood — Belinda!

Belinda was a beauty.

No matter what she did, or what she wore, the fact remained the same. Beautiful with the unconscious loveliness born of the forest, the hillside, the wild, free places of the earth. More than common tall, her head set proudly on her shoulders, she stood before me like a young Greek goddess.

When I recovered my astonishment—Belinda always took people's breath away—I gathered the details of her appearance. She was very fair and slightly freckled, with wonderful blue eyes, large, wide open, fearless as a child's. Her nose was small and delicately shaped, and her mouth—the feature which spoils most faces—was perfect. Not a rosebud by any means, but with fine flexible lips that revealed a dazzling row of teeth. For the rest her hair, which hung in a thick plait below her waist, was brown, with curling, golden ends.

But her costume! When I tell you that her skirt was what the women's papers call "home-made," and that her blouse bagged horribly at the waist, you will realise the condition of her wardrobe.

That a girl could wear such terrible garments and yet remain a beauty speaks volumes.

"Belinda," said her father, "come here and speak to Lady Carstairs."

The girl stepped forward and surveyed me with a calm, critical gaze.

"How do you do?" she said. Then, "Have you and father been quarrelling? You seem to have been crying."

I gasped. How on earth could I teach this goddess in a badly-fitting skirt what her father described as "the usages of polite Society!"

Hardy North quickly intervened.

"Lady Carstairs has promised to take you under her wing, Belinda. She is going to show you the world, and introduce you into Society."

"What about you, father?" she remarked. "Where do *you* come in?"

I frowned at the atrocious slang. Young married women are allowed a certain latitude in language, young girls never.

North hesitated. Then laying his hand on his daughter's shoulder he looked fixedly in her eyes.

"I'm going back to Australia," he said. "I intend to leave you in Lady Carstairs' hands from now until"—he paused—"until you're married. I've thought the matter carefully out, Belinda, and I've decided that's the best thing I can do. I've great hopes and great ambitions for you. While you are with me there's no possibility of these ambitions being realised. I'm a man of the people; a rich man, but one to whom the customs of another and higher class feel strange. I want you to belong to this other class, to live in it, to feel at home in it. And so, for a time, I'm going to give you up."

Belinda listened attentively, then, with a shrug, she seated herself upon the corner of the table. "I'm quite satisfied with you, father, and your class too," she said.

North frowned. "I'm not going to argue the matter," he said firmly; "it's for me to order, for you to obey. I'm giving you a chance—the chance of your life. Later, you will understand and be grateful."

"Well," said the girl slowly, "tell me exactly what this chance is."

"You're to travel with Lady Carstairs. You'll see all the cities of Europe, meet all that is distinguished, clever, great in

Society. Know everybody, learn everything, go everywhere, under the guidance of a woman who knows it all."

"It sounds nice," said Belinda, taking a piece of chocolate from her pocket and nibbling it with relish. "Anything else?"

"Yes. It is my great hope that you will marry well."

"You mean a clever and a good man, father?"

"Something besides that, Belinda. A man with an old and an ennobled name. A man who comes of a family known and reverenced for generations."

"You mean a title, don't you?" said Belinda. "Well, I can't exactly promise to marry a title. Even for your sake I wouldn't have a husband that I didn't care the world for."

"My dear, for the type of man I speak of you would surely care?"

"Perhaps. But suppose I met someone who hadn't a title, and yet was clever and noble just the same. What then, father?"

"Are you referring to anyone in particular?" said Mr. North.

"N-no." Belinda seemed confused.

"Then the question doesn't arise. It will give me the greatest happiness in life if you marry as I wish, Belinda. Lady Carstairs understands my wishes and will do her best to carry them out. You will not oppose me? You will not see, nor meet, nor write to any man of whom I should disapprove?"

"If you mean David Carr, father—and I suppose you do—I'll give my word not to see or write to him without telling Lady Carstairs first. I can't promise more."

North gave me a troubled glance, but I signed to him to leave the matter as it was. Belinda was not likely to meet a detrimental while I had the care of her!

"I think you are making a mistake, you know, Dad," the girl continued; "but if your heart is set on sending me away I won't offer any opposition."

"That's my good girl. And now," he took out his watch, "I must be going. The boat leaves at noon, and I have much to do."

"I'll go on to Shepheard's and pack up," she said, and, with a nod to me, Belinda slid gracefully from the table and sauntered from the room.

"We put up at Shepheard's," Hardy North explained. "I left Belinda there when I came here last night."

"Mr. North," I said abruptly, "what made you come to the Continental?"

He paused; then, with a laugh and a flush, he took my hand.

"You mustn't be angry, Lady Peggy," he said softly. "When I passed the hotel yesterday and saw you in the sunshine on the piazza, I felt you were the one woman with whom I could trust my daughter. It was horribly presumptuous of me, I know, but I decided then and there to try and persuade you to be Belinda's friend and chaperon."

"And then," I said, "the bank smashed and I was ruined. Fortune played into your hands, Mr. North."

"It did, indeed!" he said gently. "And now to business. Here," he took out his pocket-book, "you will find notes for £500. The balance of the sum we agreed upon, £9,500, I will pay into the bank here on your account. Spend what is necessary for Belinda, Lady Carstairs, I shall grudge no expense, and send me on the bills. Good-bye and many thanks." He pressed my hand, and with a smile and bow departed.

I looked at my notes and thought of the balance at the bank. Decidedly the interview had brought its compensations!

I told Crawley what had happened, and he was much impressed and very pleased. We decided that he should inform the Duchess and our set in general that a considerable portion of my fortune had been saved from the wreck. Belinda, we agreed, should be regarded as an adjunct to my income.

The Duchess was deeply disappointed at North's abrupt departure, but revived somewhat at the intelligence that Belinda was a considerable heiress. I was quite prepared, and by no means displeased to learn the next morning that her Grace's son, the Duke of Eastacres, was expected shortly at the Continental.

"Dear Lawson's chest is *so* delicate," explained the Duchess. "He's suffered terribly of late. I'm hoping wonders from a winter in Cairo, however."

I murmured my sympathy, and we exchanged glances of understanding. Glances are quite as explanatory and much less compromising than words. It was as good as settled between us that the Duke should propose to Belinda. And, unless I was very much mistaken, Belinda would accept him.

The Duke was about five-and-thirty. A slight figure, just about the middle height; he had a fair skin, fair hair and pale grey eyes. High-bred from the crown of his well-shaped head to the tips of his aristocratic fingers. A little cold, perhaps, and decidedly reserved in manner. But in these days of demonstration reserve is a relief if not a virtue.

The Duke's title was old, but his income was small. The Eastacres had the gaming fever in their blood, and his Grace had long since gambled away his own and his sister's fortune. Rumour said he was as near to ruin as a Duke could be. Now Belinda's millions would reinstate his family's glory, pay his debts and dower Honoria. It would be in every way a most desirable match. I decided that it should take place.

My first act in connection with Belinda was to make away with her entire wardrobe. There are plenty of *modistes* in Cairo, and in a very short time I had fitted her out. She grumbled somewhat at the length of her skirts, complaining that she could neither walk nor run, nor climb trees with any degree of comfort! I managed to soothe her, however, with the promise of a tailor-made gown, and she finally consented to put on a dainty chiffon frock trimmed with lace for her first appearance.

I must confess I felt proud of my charge. With her plentiful brown hair coiled about her slender head, her slim white throat clasped with a necklet of pearls, she looked not only lovely but distinguished.

The Duke was immensely taken. He was extremely fastidious, and I had feared Belinda's girlishness might jar his mature taste. I was mistaken, however, he stared at her in evident surprise and admiration.

"The Duke admires you, dear," I said to her in confidence. "You ought to feel very proud."

"Why?" she asked, with wide blue eyes.

"My dear child, he has seen the most beautiful, the most charming women in the world. And yet he cares to notice you, a little girl from the wilds of Australia."

"He didn't say much worth listening to," Belinda answered. "And he's very little to look at. I never did admire small men. Now, David Carr," Belinda's voice grew a touch rebellious, "is six foot if he's an inch."

"Where is Mr. Carr now, my dear?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. He told me he was stopping in Cairo for the next week or two, but as he's not come to see me I suppose he's left. Gone up the Nile to the irrigation works perhaps."

"Perhaps," I returned, with a smile.

As a matter of fact I had seen David Carr the day before. He had called on Belinda; I as her chaperon had interviewed him. I explained to the young man how matters stood and intimated that I should prohibit any further intercourse between him and my charge. He departed much depressed but convinced of the impossibility of his suit. Of this, however, I did not inform Belinda.

That evening was the occasion of a religious festival in Cairo, and we decided to go out and see the town. The

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Duke met us in the vestibule with his mother and Lady Honoria. After due consideration I had decided not to tell the Duchess of Honoria's misconduct; at any rate not yet. Crawley Drummond was also of the party; he knew Cairo well, and generally dispensed with the services of a dragoman or guide. On this occasion, however, as the streets were likely to be very crowded, I suggested he should engage the services of one. He selected a tall, fine-looking Bedouin, who promised safe conduct through the streets. He was a civil fellow and spoke English well.

Cairo that evening was a brilliant scene. The Mooski was thronged, and we had difficulty to force our way among the people. Mousma, however, our good-looking dragoman, cleared a path for us. We turned into one of the narrow lanes of the great Khan—or large, covered market-place. The picture before us was like a scene from the Arabian Nights.

The long bazaar was lighted with innumerable chandeliers and coloured lamps and candles, and covered by awnings of rich shawls and stuffs. The shops had changed their character. Each was turned into a tasteful reception room. Seated in a richly-hung recess one could watch the crowd go by, while the sound of drums and fifes, the low chant of a story-teller recanting some favourite tale, the cries of a band of passing dervishes filled the air.

Mousma called our attention to a band of these same dervishes. They were about to enter a mosque, and he suggested we should follow and witness their performance. It seemed a risky thing to do, we were infidels and the passions of the Moslems might easily be turned against us. Mousma, however, reassured us. We made our way into the mosque.

The performance of the twirling dervishes is a weird and fascinating one. They stand in a circle, their eyes fixed on their sheik who remains in the centre of the group to direct and control their movements like the leader of an orchestra. At a given signal they commenced to dance and twirl round and round at the rate of sixty to a thousand times a minute. To keep this up for nearly half an hour without a single stop is a fearful and wonderful accomplishment.

We bent forward eagerly watching the countenances of the dancers. It was curious to contrast the strange quietude of their faces with the ceaseless movement of their bodies, the swaying motions of their arms. Round and round they went till one's brain grew dizzy at the sight.

It was horrible, yet fascinating to see. We were all more or less affected by it. The dear Duchess shook her head, tapped her feet, and for a moment showed a decided disposition to join the throng. Crawley gazed with flushed face and strained eyes, even the Duke lost something of his nonchalance. Honoria had already dissolved in tears—excitement always affected her in that way, and Belinda!

Heavens, that mad, that infatuated girl had become so absorbed with the performance that she had approached the dancers, and with a grave face and determined air, was commencing to emulate the antics of a dervish.

"It's not so difficult," she cried in her fresh young voice.

As she spoke she swung round, her arms extended, coming into contact with one of the dancers. Considerably astonished, the dervishes stopped their gyrations, and gazed solemnly at Belinda. They did not appear at all angry, only astonished. Possibly they thought she was overcome with religious enthusiasm, possibly the fact of her exceeding fairness had something to do with their amiability.

Anyway, their attitude was quite friendly, and there was no cause at all for apprehension. Certainly there was no reason for the surprising conduct of the Duchess. Seized apparently with the fear that the entirely well-intentioned dervishes had designs upon her life, she gave a wild, though somewhat high-pitched scream, and fled as if for dear life—I never thought the Duchess could have run so fast—until she gained the shelter of a friendly bazaar.

There was nothing for us to do but to follow her, Mousma clearing a way through the astonished populace. I noticed he laid tight hold of Belinda, fearing, perhaps, that she would do something rash if not restrained.

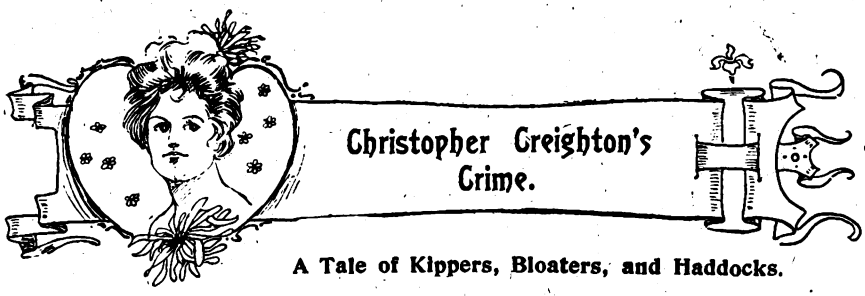
I thanked him for his care. He released Belinda and politely bowed.

"It is nothing," he said, "it is——"

Belinda interrupted him. She did more. She launched herself into his arms.

"It is you—*you*!" she screamed. "Lady Peggy, Lady Peggy! He's not a dragoman at all. He's David—David Carr!"

(*Interesting developments will be recorded next Tuesday.*)



Christopher Creighton's Crime.

A Tale of Kippers, Bloaters, and Haddocks.

It was the most exciting episode in the calm of Miss Thornton's existence.

She stood on the busy north pavement of the Strand. It was a foggy afternoon in November. The clocks had just struck five. She kept quite still amid all the bustle of the great London thoroughfare, her eyes fixed on a bank on the opposite side of the road. Sometimes a string of vehicles or foot-passengers obstructed her view of the door which she watched as a cat watches a mouse's hole. At such times she craned her neck in all directions, so anxious was she not to lose sight of the bank.

It was evident from the fact that she stood so far away and did not cross the road to a spot whence she would have had a less obstructed view, that she did not wish to be seen by the person or persons whom she waited to see.

Sometimes she consulted her small gold watch by the aid of the light which emanated from the shop windows and the street lamps and made the fog visible. The person or persons for whom she was waiting must have been late.

Presently she darted along the pavement towards Charing Cross. A young man had come out of the bank door and gone in that direction. With feline discretion she tracked him, keeping ever to her own side of the road. He turned up by St. Martin's Church and went along Charing Cross Road, across Oxford Street, and on through Tottenham Court Road, holding ever a northward course. He walked quickly and it was only with difficulty that she could maintain his pace. When she passed under the street lamps, her pale, eager face showed how tired she was.

On and on he strode, until he reached a somewhat disreputable-looking street, pretty far north. Here he suddenly disappeared into a little shop which had red blinds aglow with the interior illumination. She stood on the pavement, panting, hesitating, questioning. What could he be doing here? It could not be for any good purpose that he had come to this suspicious-looking place, whose ruddy blinds hid its contents and its business. She stayed there hesitating for several minutes. Then she resolutely opened the door, also red with an illuminated blind, and entered.

She was quite taken aback by the scene and the odour. It was an eating-house. In wooden boxes or compartments, like old-fashioned church pews on an exaggerated scale, sat perhaps a dozen people, some of them evidently not belonging

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to the aristocracy, eating with undisguised appetites. A quick glance around showed her that the person whom she had been following was not there. She went up to the counter, behind which stood, staring at her with inquisitive eyes, a pert-looking young lady who, to any more appreciative taste than Miss Thornton's might have appeared not altogether ill-looking.

"Hasn't a young gentleman just come in here?" she asked.

"There are a number of young gentlemen here," replied the girl, with a comprehensive sweep of the hand.

"I mean a *gentleman*," reiterated Miss Thornton, with a very marked emphasis on the word, and a quick glance of scorn at the shady creatures in the pews.

"Perhaps you mean Mr. Creighton?"

"I do."

"You wish to see him?"

"Yes. But before I see him I should like to speak with some responsible person. Can I see your master or mistress?"

"The manageress has pricked her finger, ma'am, and can't be seen. Perhaps I shall do."

Miss Thornton was too agitated to notice very particularly the girl's rudeness.

"Perhaps so. I only want to ask a few questions."

"All right, ma'am. I'm ready."

"Please tell me exactly why Mr. Creighton comes here. I am responsible for him and must know the truth. If you will reveal all I will reward you."

The maid's eyes had a new glitter in them. Here was a chance not often thrown in her way.

"Wait a minute, ma'am, and I'll see what I can do."

She went into a neighbouring room—the kitchen evidently—where her voice was indistinctly heard playing a low-toned duet with that of another maiden. In about two minutes she returned.

"Now, ma'am," she said, "I'll tell you all I know. Mr. Creighton comes here every evening except Sunday, and has tea in a private room."

"Yes?"

"That's all."

"Nonsense. Why should he have tea here? He can get all he wants at home."

"I don't know anything about that, ma'am. He comes, and he has his teas, and he pays for 'em."

"And does he take tea quite alone?"

"Well, ma'am——"

She hesitated.

"Mind, I want you to tell me everything, and I promise you shall not be the loser by it."

"Well, ma'am, I suppose he is always alone—except for——for——"

"Except what?"

"Except for the——"

"Go on. Quick!"

"The girl who——"

"The *girl?*"

"Well, ma'am, just you come with me and peep."

"No. I don't want to see anything. You must tell me all, and——"

Here, in a significant way, she took out her purse.

"But, ma'am, it's difficult to explain, and if you'd only just take a look at them."

"*Them?*" exclaimed Miss Thornton, in her most scornful tone.

"Yes, ma'am, just one little peep," and, going to a place screened off from the counter, the girl pushed back a thick curtain from a square window, showing a little room, in which the young gentleman sat at the table, while close beside him was a rather pretty girl with a bush of frizzy brown hair, and neatly dressed in black with a dainty white apron. Just at the moment when the curtain was pulled back the girl seemed to be patting the young gentleman on the cheek, laughing meanwhile with a shrill ripple that seemed to Miss Thornton to be an audible quintessence of the minx's forwardness.

Miss Thornton almost screamed.

"I don't want to see any more," she said, and, dropping a sovereign into the delighted girl's hand, she fled the unholy place.

* * * * *

In her cosy drawing-room Miss Thornton awaited with palpitating eagerness the arrival of her nephew. His parents who were in India, had put him in a London bank and left him for Miss Thornton to look after. She had rejoiced in having him; for she was a woman with well-developed views concerning the training of youths and their safe conduct through the muddy waters of degenerate day. And it is not every spinster who has an opportunity of experimenting. Old-maidish to the finger-tips, she tried to be a kind of breakwater to this youth, keeping from him all the troubled and bitter waters of the sea of life that would otherwise have beaten upon him. But after he had been only a few months with her, she felt that her power over him was lessening, and that there were corners of his life to which she did not penetrate. His recent habit of coming home late for dinner worried her a good deal. There was no excuse for it. Between the closing of the bank and dinner-time four hours elapsed. What did he do with himself in this interval? She had failed to find out. He maintained a stubborn reticence. And so it was that the lady braced herself to the quest upon which we have seen her.

Christopher was later than usual to-night. When she heard him coming she trembled all over.

"Well, aunt," he said, "you have the best of it here. It's miserably foggy in the streets."

She knew it only too well. She said:

"Chris, I know all."

Her tone was almost comically solemn.

He smiled.

"Yes? And so do I. Here's your sovereign back again."

Miss Thornton sank into a chair, staring at the shining coin he held out to her.

Assuming, in his turn, a look of solemnity, Christopher continued:

"I am sorry, aunt, that you did not trust me more. You would have been saved from being the victim of a practical joke. The thing was just arranged on the spot by the two waitress girls. I tell you I was pretty considerably taken aback by the creature's impudence; but I am afraid that if I'd known you were looking on I should have laughed. The girls were frank enough to tell me all about it afterwards. I rowed them well, of course, made them give back the sovereign, and foreswore the place altogether."

"Then you won't see her again—you promise me?"

"See her again? What do you mean?"

"I mean you won't go anywhere else to see her?"

"What! Do you think I go there to see that minx of a waitress? Haven't I told you that the scene was improvised for your benefit and your bribe?"

"But what *do* you go there for?"

"Why, for the kippers, of course."

"The kip——"

"Yes; the kippers, the bloaters and the haddocks."

Miss Thornton sat with open mouth.

"You know, aunt, that I asked you often, months ago, to let me have cured fish. You told me that such things were vulgar, plebeian, and all that kind of thing, and would not let me have them. Well, that made me want them all the more. I felt I could not drag through the day without a bloater or a kipper with my afternoon tea; so, as you would not let me have them at home, I went out for them. That's all. And, I say, aunt, that shop's the best in London for fish teas and suppers. But I'm not going there again. Perhaps you'll let me have my afternoon kipper at home now?"

"Well, yes, my boy, if you are so set on it."

"Thank you, aunt."

"But I think you'd better have it in the breakfast room. It wouldn't be so noticeable when we have visitors."

And on these terms the pact was made.

W. G. Locket.

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A FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER.

The Sequel to a Seaside Meeting.

Ned Singleton put his hands on the sides of his skiff, and, leisurely raising himself into a sitting posture, looked around. While he had been lying at the bottom of the boat absorbed in thought, and dandled by the gentle swell, the tide had carried him at least a couple of miles below the town. Dipping his sculls into the water, Ned began to pull slowly back to his starting point. As he neared the town again most of the passing boats were gay with brightly-coloured sun-shades under which reclined girls dressed in cool-looking cream and white. A few of the fair visions were rowing, but the majority seemed quite content to occupy the stern of the craft, where they could display their latest confections for the admiration of their escorts and criticise at their ease the toilets of the other ladies.

On the right, the sea, sparkling under the sunbeams, stretched away, a sheet of molten silver, till it reached the horizon, while a thin line of smoke, hardly visible to the eye of a landsman, betrayed the presence of some outward bound steamer. On the left, beach and parade were gay with bright dresses; while the stirring strains of the "Soldier's Chorus," played by the military band, sounded pleasantly across the water.

Ned's serious face was rather a contrast to all the gaiety around him. For some time he had been trying to decide upon making a proposal of marriage. Though he preferred to think that there was little doubt of his suit being favourably received, the lady of his choice being of humble birth, whereas his father was a high dignitary of the Established Church, there were several circumstances in connection with the affair which caused him anxiety.

Their first meeting occurred during the summer. Picturing it to himself for the hundredth time, he again marvelled at its strangeness. Early one morning, as he was strolling through some of the narrow streets of the older part of the town, he had lighted upon the fish market. It was a queer little place, consisting of four or five stone slabs upon which the fish were exposed for sale. Noticing some fine soles, he had gone closer to look at them, when a young girl came out of a sort of little cupboard behind the stone counter. Her face was not exactly beautiful; she had no classic regularity of feature; but her keen, intellectual eyes, her dignified carriage, and the refined tones in which she asked him what he wanted, immediately struck Ned as being curiously out of place in such a situation. Upon hearing what he required, she called out "Dad," but receiving no reply said: "He'll come and serve you in a minute," and was retreating into the cupboard again, when Ned, prompted by some mediæval reminiscence out of an old French book he had been reading, doffed his cap, and, bowing low, exclaimed: "The fish were worth four times the price, fair maid, if 'twere served by thy own fair hands."

She looked at him sharply, hesitated a moment, then, catching his humour, replied in the same strain: "In sooth, good sir, thou valuest my hands right royally. To quadruple the price of the fish were well worth a washing, yet will I charge you but another moiety for your compliment." Taking up those he selected, she spoke a few words to a weatherbeaten old fisherman who came up just then, and smilingly handed the fish to Ned.

Undaunted by his expensive experience, he found himself strolling in the same direction on the following morning, and, indeed, for many mornings afterwards. She was not always there, but the old salt who took her place, seemed benevolently disposed towards Ned, and quite willing to talk about the virtues of his daughter. When he got to know her a little better, Ned found his first impression had been correct. She was far better educated than he had thought and seemed a lady in every respect. Glancing from the rough, coarse-featured old man, whose speech and manners were those of his class, to the refined, neatly-dressed girl beside him, it seemed incredible that he could be the father of such a daughter. Whether influenced by Ned's lavish presents of tobacco, or his extensive orders for fish, which the young fellow had a good deal of trouble to dispose of, the old man began to grow increasingly friendly towards him, and afforded him every opportunity of making himself agreeable to the young lady—a privilege of which Ned was not slow to take advantage.

During the rest of his holiday he saw her almost every day. Soon she seemed to expect him, and they went about a good deal together. The more he had of her company, the more he admired her; and, by the time his holiday was over, he was as much in love as a man could be.

All through the winter Ned took great care to keep in touch with his new friends, sending the old man tobacco, and the girl little knick-knacks; while he got them more orders for fish than they were able to fulfil. He had asked Ella for her address, but the most he could obtain from her had been a promise to meet him next summer. Summer had come again; she had kept her promise, and, in his eyes, she seemed more beautiful and desirable than ever. He had made up his mind that to-morrow he would ask her to become his wife. Hitherto she had fenced with him, and in some way or other prevented him coming to the point whenever he broached the subject; but this time he was determined not to be put off.

"I'm sure she loves me," he said to himself, and the thought sent the blood coursing through every vein, while the vigorous strokes of his sculls drove the little skiff through the water like a torpedo boat.

* * * * *

Ned had carried out his resolution. The two were sitting on a grassy bank shaded by stately elms. At intervals the fresh morning breeze, laden with the perfume of clover and hay, made a gentle rustling overhead.

"And you are sure—quite sure, Ned, that you will never regret marrying a common fisher-girl," she asked.

"You are not a common fisher-girl," he replied warmly. "And if you were—if you were a beggarmaid, it would be all the same; for I love you, Ella."

"But think of your parents. What will they say when they hear of it? Cottage folk are apt to be awkward and out of place in the drawing-room."

"You would not be out of place in a palace. Besides, what does it matter to them? You are not going to marry my relations, or I yours. Don't let silly social distinctions stand in the way of our love."

And he seized her hand, and poured out a torrent of passionate pleading.

She let him keep it for a few seconds, looking straight in front of her with a curious smile in her liquid brown eyes Then she softly drew it away.

"Listen, my dear," she began. "In the olden days before a knight gained the hand of his mistress, he performed some gallant feat of arms, killed a dragon or some other unfortunate

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beast in order to prove his love for her. I like to think that there is still some romance left in the world, and I want my knight to do something for me. Will he do it?"

"My lady has but to name the task," he said.

She laughed. "Well, as the dragons are all dead, you will have to be content with smaller game. What I want you to do is something quite different, but perhaps more difficult.

"You have only to say what, and it is done."

"Bravely spoken, noble sir. Now you shall come and give me a taste of your quality. There are three things I want you to do—that is the proper, mediæval number, isn't it?—the first this morning, the second and third this afternoon; and then——

"No, not yet," she exclaimed, pushing him away. "You must do your duty first. She got up from her seat, and walked briskly in the direction of the town. Ned followed her, wondering what was going to happen. She did not speak until they reached the fish market. Then she said: "You are ready to prove your words? You are quite sure of yourself?"

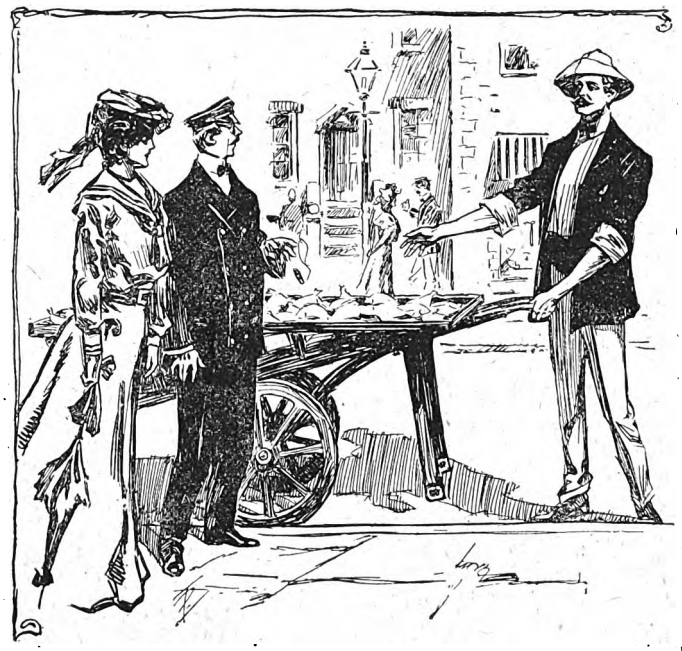
"Try me," he replied.

She pointed to the fisherman's barrow covered with some freshly caught plaice. "That is your first task. Take that barrow, and cry those fish for me along the parade. Then shall I know that you do not despise the calling of my father."

The family pride of the Singletons drove the warm blood into Ned's face till it was as scarlet as a cardinal's hat, and, for a few seconds he stood still and said nothing.

She watched him attentively. "Well, my gallant dragon-slayer, is the task too hard for you?"

At the sound of her mocking words he recovered himself. "In sooth, my lady," he replied, "'tis the easiness of it that has disappointed me. I had hoped for a foe more worthy of my steel."



"How are you, old chap? Want some fish? You can have the lot for a couple of bob."

"'Tis one that will test your pride, and he that is faithful in a few things—so, if you are not ashamed——"

He pushed the barrow into the street. "Since my father is a servant of St. Peter, 'twould ill become his family to be ashamed of the calling of the apostle," he said. But he thought otherwise. He pictured the look upon the face of his father, the bishop; the horror-stricken expression of his respectable mother, and the scornful grief of his superior sisters could they see him now. And, as he thought of their consternation, his feeling of mortification changed to one of amusement, and he laughed merrily to himself as he turned on to the parade.

At first his appearance created a good deal of attention. A well-set-up young man in panama hat, spotless flannels, and light-brown boots, pushing a barrow of plaice, was rather a change from the usual mahogany-faced, blue-jerseyed, sea-booted boatman. But he buckled himself to it, and soon a crowd of gaily dressed people, ready to welcome any distraction, however trivial, stood still and watched him as he passed, listening with an amused expression on their faces to the customary fisherman's cry of "Rye Bay plaice, Rye Bay plaice," rendered in a light, musical baritone.

Ignoring the bands of children who gathered at his heels and the general interest he was creating, Ned went doggedly on with his task, and, before he reached the south end of the parade, succeeded in disposing of most of his goods. Ella had not stipulated that he should sell the fish at any particular price, and he took advantage of her omission to ask a considerably lower figure than that usually charged. But his ordeal was not quite over.

"They look nice fish," said a lady accompanied by a cavalier, arrayed in an eyeglass and a most glorious yachting suit perfumed with the odours of Araby. The amateur fisherman looked up. There was no mistaking Harold Mortimer, the biggest dandy in the Temple. Their eyes met, and the latter stood dumfounded with amazement.

"How are you, old chap?" Ned exclaimed, mischievously holding out a hand which bore unsavoury traces of his lately adopted occupation. "Want some fish? You can have the lot for a couple of bob."

Mr. Mortimer reddened and hesitated. "Yes, send them along to that address," he said, pretending not to see Ned's extended hand, but depositing a card and a couple of shillings on the barrow hurriedly walked on. For a moment Ned felt inclined to hurl his money after him; but after a few seconds he smiled to himself and dropped the coins into his pocket. Then he delivered the remainder of his fish at the proper address, and, with a feeling of relief, wheeled his empty barrow in the direction of the market.

On the way he met Ella. She was in a hurry, and just stopping to say "This afternoon at four," passed on. Giving a boy a shilling to take the barrow to its destination, Ned went to his lodgings wondering what the afternoon had in store for him; but feeling that after his morning's experience he was capable of anything.

At the appointed time he walked towards the pier. A little knot of people were standing near the water admiring a tiny yacht, which was apparently a new arrival. As he walked down the steps on to the beach he saw Ella coming along the parade.

"I'm dying to know what my second task is to be," he said, looking admiringly at her rosy cheeks and bright eyes sparkling with suppressed excitement. "I hope it's nothing else in the fish line."

She laughed. "You haven't forgiven me then. No, I'm going to test your seamanship this afternoon, and see if it is worthy of the husband of a fisherman's daughter. What do you think of her?" and she proudly pointed to the little craft before them, at the same time tossing her mackintosh and several other parcels into the stern of the boat.

"But how?—where?—whose?" he began.

"Now, sir, no questions, please."

A dozen willing hands assisted them to launch the boat,

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and in a few minutes they were running past the head of the pier.

"Which way is the wind?" said Ella.

"Nor' west," said Ned, who was steering.

"Good; now I want you to steer south-east. That ought to take us straight to Calais, oughtn't it?"

"Yes," he replied, "but I hope you don't expect to get there to-day with this tide."

"Will you please cease your objections, sir, and remember your vow of obedience."

"I'll lay her course for the North Pole if you like," he said, looking fondly at her.

As they were running before the wind, and the sea was comparatively smooth, the boat wanted little attention, and Ned's eyes continually rested upon the smart little figure in front of him. She had always dressed neatly, but to-day she had taken special pains with her toilet, and her dark blue yachting costume, faced with white braid, suited her lithe, slender figure admirably. As soon as they got away from the shelter of the land, and felt the full force of the breeze, their craft flew along at a pace which delighted them both. "Doesn't she go beautifully?" said Ella, and taking up a long pair of field-glasses, she swept the horizon in front of them. Then she began to chat vivaciously about general subjects. Ned had never seen her so excited. Presently she suggested refreshments, and, taking the helm, made Ned open a bottle of champagne, and regaled him upon cold fowl and ham, and strawberries and cream. He opened his eyes in surprise, but she placed her finger warningly on her lips, and he said nothing.

They had been running in a south easterly direction for about three hours, and the light was beginning to fail. Behind them, a little to the left, the Southsand's Head beacon showed the receding Goodwins; and in front, away to the right, the Gris Nez light flashed out like a great white fire with ever increasing distinctness. Several times Ned had hinted upon the advisability of returning, but had been immediately checked by his imperious mistress. So he ceased to care what was going to happen, and gave himself up to the delight of being alone with the woman he loved. But, presently, when he found the wind freshening so that he was obliged to take in a couple of reefs, and the sea running so high that he had to steer very carefully, he began to get rather anxious. But Ella would not listen to his remonstrances, and refused to let him alter their course. It was not until a sea broke over the stern and nearly swamped them that she seemed to realise the situation.

"I told you so," he said, as they bailed out the water.

"Well," she replied, "try and keep on five minutes longer, and if I can't find what I want then, we'll try another tack." She again took out her glasses and carefully scanned the horizon. After a few second's search she uttered an exclamation of delight, and pointed out the mast white and port red light of a steamer about a mile off. "Lend me a match, Ned, and bring to if you can," she said, opening one of the boat's lockers. With some difficulty she lit a blue light, and then a red one, waved them round her head and threw them into the air one after another. They had scarcely reached the water when a couple of answering lights flashed over the bows of the steamer. Then a searchlight was turned upon the boat, and the vessel came rapidly down upon them.

"Your second task is finished," said Ella, with a slight tremor in her voice. "When we have boarded that yacht there is one thing that I want you to do for me."

"Hearkening and obedience," he replied, muttering to himself: "Was there ever anything out of the Arabian Nights to beat this?"

The steamer soon drew alongside, and in a few minutes they were standing on her deck, while the boat was rapidly hoisted up to the davits.

A smartly-dressed officer received them. "Well, Captain Meriton, how are you?" said Ella. "You see I've come aboard at last."

"Yes, miss, I'm glad you have," he replied. "I was getting anxious. We're going to have some dirty weather, and the wind's blowing up a bit too fresh for that little craft to be comfortable."

"Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Singleton, Captain. I suppose his berth is ready?"

"Everything as you ordered, miss," replied the officer.

"That's all right then. Now, Ned, we may as well go and have some dinner. Captain Meriton, I hope you'll join us."

So saying she tripped down the companion into the saloon. It was artistically and neatly decorated, though there was none of the useless luxury often found on board the modern yacht. Comfort seemed to be its prevailing characteristic.

"One minute, Ned," and beckoning him to follow her, she led the way across the passage and opened the door of another room, which looked like a library. Motioning him to sit down, she stood up facing him.

"My last request, Ned, is that you will forgive me."

"Forgive you? What for?" he said.

She took up a copy of a New York journal which was lying upon one of the tables, and pointed to a paragraph among the items of fashionable intelligence. It read as follows:

"By the death of Mr. McKinton, his daughter becomes one of the richest heiresses in the States. We understand Miss McKinton is very unconventional and independent. She will shortly sail for Europe in her own yacht, etc., etc."

Ned looked up. "But I don't quite understand," he began.

"I have deceived you," said Ella. "My name is Ruth McKinton. Mrs. Dixon is only my foster mother. I have been accustomed to spend a week or two with them every year, for rest and quiet. When I met you I told them not to say anything about my real position, for I wanted a man who would love me for myself alone; and when one is rich—— Will you forgive me, Ned, or shall I tell Captain Meriton to steam back to Eastholme?"

Ned immediately replied in the most emphatic manner possible.

"Ned, Ned, don't," she pleaded. "You really must let me go. My maid is waiting for me, and Captain Meriton will be wondering where we have got to. Please tell him I won't be long."

* * * * *

"Well, I'm hanged," said Harold Mortimer, as he glanced through his paper at breakfast time. "What a blithering idiot!"

"What's the matter?" inquired his wife. "And who is the idiot?"

"I am," he replied. "You know that chap selling fish we met at Eastholme last summer—I should have spoken to him if you hadn't been with me. I told you that was Ned Singleton, the Bishop of St. A——'s son, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did, and a good many other people as well; but what about him?"

"Why, he's married the daughter of McKinton, one of the richest heiresses in America. He's a multi-millionaire. They've just arrived in London. And to think that I cut him!"

"Well, I must say I agree with you Harold. You *were* an idiot."

And the pleasure of finding that his wife did not disagree with him on at least one subject was all the satisfaction Mr. Harold Mortimer ever got out of the affair.

J. B. Beer.

What she Cried For.

Toto was crying very hard. "What is the matter?" asked one of her father's friends. "I have lost two pennies that mamma gave me." "That is not a difficult loss to repair," replied the friend; "here are two pennies." An instant later Toto was crying harder than ever. "What are you crying for now?" asked the gentleman. "I am crying," said the artful baby, "because if I had not lost two pennies I should now have four."

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THE STORY OF A PARTING.

AND OF AN UNEXPECTED REUNION.

"Well, dear, what do you think of it?" said Jack Trever joyfully, as with shining eyes he threw a letter on to the table. His pretty wife laid down her sewing, a flimsy bit of lace work, and crept close to his side.

"It will separate us, Jack," was all she said with quivering lip.

The flickering firelight seemed to cast a shadow on the lovely upturned face, and glint in and out of the waves of her chestnut hair.

"But, Alice, look what it will mean to us,"—to me he had almost said. "Here have I been slaving for a mere pittance, and now this piece of good luck comes at last; it is simply glorious!" Then casting a look at the sorrowful face at his side, he said, in a soothing tone, "It will only be for two years at most, love, and then I will send for you, and we will be as happy as the day is long. You will be patient, dear," he added, putting his arm round her, but still glancing at the letter on the table.

"Yes, Jack, I know it is for your good, dear, but it is so hard to bear;" and then scarce able to repress her tears, she crept from the room.

Left to himself, Jack paced restlessly to and fro.

"Poor Alice," he said, and then his thoughts flew away to the quaint little fishing village on the west coast of Ireland, where he had met her two years ago. Being attracted by her wondrous beauty, fell in love, and well—had married her, and been promptly disinherited for his pains. And such a struggle as it had been for him since then! He heaved a sigh at the thought. Now he would be able to enter his own sphere again, and mix with the people of the highest class—which was as it should be. Had he not been brought up in one of the best families in England? And Alice—she had sometimes worried and retarded him; her lack of education had vexed and annoyed his high-strung temperament. What would he do with her now since he had got this lucrative appointment in far away India? How would she pass herself among his well-bred friends?

"Ah, well, poor little Alice," he said aloud. "I will have plenty of money now, and maybe I can manage to send her to school on the Continent after awhile." But deep down in his inmost heart there throbbed a thought that sent the hot blood flaming to his forehead; and still it came, crush it as he might, persistent and recurring—"I shall be free, I shall be free for two long years, I shall be free!"

And away up in her own little room Alice was weeping as if her heart would break.

* * * * * * * *

He had gone—and oh, the desolation that had crept into one loving, lonely heart. For three months she had scarcely left the house, dark rings showed about the lustrous eyes; she wandered listlessly to and fro, looking at any little memento that might remind her of him, her husband, her darling; wondering why the sun shone and looked at hearts so sorrowful as hers. But one day, with his familiar rat-a-tat, the postman left a letter. It was from him, her idol; she could scarce see it for blinding tears, yet all at once the world had turned into a bright and joyous place. Then after a blissful half hour spent in deciphering it, she rushed for pen and ink to answer. But now the sweet face clouded.

"I cannot do it—I cannot do it properly," she murmured, a slight pout on her red lips. "They would laugh at him when they saw my letter," and hot tears gathered in the brown eyes and fell one by one like little jewels upon the unoffending paper.

She bent her head upon her hands in dejection; a sunbeam stole through the window and kissed her rippling hair, and as if it had lent an inspiration to her troubled thoughts, her face suddenly cleared, she sprang up, the glad light once more in her eyes.

"I'll do it!" she cried. "I was always good at lace work. Miss Crickmay shall teach me. I'll educate myself on the money Jack sends me, and keep myself by my lace. Lady Severn always bought it, and maybe in a year I can save enough to take me out to Jack, my Jack, and it will be such a surprise to him." And all the time with trembling fingers and fast beating heart she arranged her hat, preparatory to going to the select School for Young Ladies, over which Miss Crickmay presided.

Far away in India a young man was bending over his desk, just signing a flourishing "Jack" to a letter commencing "My dear wife."

"She must never come here," he said sadly. "It would break her heart to be slighted. What would Lady Winton say to her, I wonder? Not that she isn't far more beautiful," he ended up.

* * * * * * *

"You are marvellous, your progress is great, madam. My friend, Miss Crickmay, she is delighted!"

The girl addressed bowed gracefully, and closed her French book just as a lady entered the room.

"You are coming now, Alice, I suppose?"

"Yes, Miss Crickmay."

And side by side they left the room. On the pavement they stood for several minutes. People turned to look at this beauteous type of womanhood, who was talking so confidingly to the elderly lady.

"Yes, I know Lady Winton slightly, and I can give you a letter of introduction to her; but it is a mad venture, child. If I were you I would inform my husband of this intended journey; he might not approve." And so saying the elder lady hailed a hansom. "Come with me to lunch, dear," she said, "and we will talk it over." And very soon they were both lost in the maze of London's streets.

* * * * *

In his private apartments in one of Calcutta's largest hotels, Jack Trever sat smoking, his eyes on the cheque-book he held in his hand; the little wreaths of smoke curled round and round, the clock ticked ominously in the silence; presently he closed the book and sprang to his feet.

"I cannot do it, it is a harder battle than I thought; but I promised her in two years, she will die of disappointment. Oh, for a bit of time!" he cried, as wringing his hands he walked up and down, the book lying forgotten on the floor.

"In a month Lady Winton's ball will take place. Alice could never face it. I will wait until then, and maybe they will send me farther inland—they would snub her so, poor child." And self was whispering—"What of me? How could I stand

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it ?Oh, no, I'll have to wait, I could not do it," he added aloud.

Out on the blue Mediterranean a great steamer pulsed and panted onward, ever onward, bearing its freight of human lives, and in a cosy nook on the deck Alice Trever sat and thought of Jack. It would not be long now, and how surprised he would be.

* * * * *

Lady Winton's ball-room had never been surpassed; soft lights, glorious exotic plants, beautiful women. Jack felt the spell as he stood apart for a moment, listening to the sweet strains of the opening valse. Suddenly he turned pale and almost staggered, clutching a chair for support. A beautiful woman had just entered, and was being presented by Lady Winton to a few select friends. Gentlemen crowded round, anxious for introductions and dances, to all of whom she was gracious as a queen; but ever and anon an anxious look came into the glorious eyes, as if there was a someone or a something missing.

Jack soon regained his composure.

"So like," he said, "yet so unlike. Why, Alice is thousands of miles away; besides she never could act like that even if she were here," he added bitterly.

In the course of the evening Jack contrived to get within the charmed circle that surrounded this queen, and was content to linger on the fringe of her admirers and listen to the brilliant conversation. But her fascination was too much for him. Oh, if only he had never met Alice, this woman would have been his ideal—beautiful, educated, graceful, and yet so like his absent wife.

She had turned and looked at him, he stifled with a cruel hand a certain sweet wildness that had sprung up in his heart at that look. He moved a little nearer—he would, he must have a dance; he need not deny himself that. Only to hold her in his arms once, even though it would be short.

A sudden boldness seemed to take possession of him. He pushed Lieutenant Faversham slightly aside, bowed, and with his heart thumping against his side, inquired if she was engaged for the next dance. A colour soft as roses spread over cheek and neck, she handed him her card without speaking, and he had scarcely written his name when the music began.

Rising with a smile she laid her hand upon his arm. "I do not wish to dance, let us sit it out in the conservatory," she said softly.

He glanced at her quickly, a faint glimmering of the truth dawning upon him.

"Alice," he almost gasped, as they reached a quiet spot, "is it you!"

But two soft pleading eyes were all his answer, and then two lovely arms went round his neck, with, "Jack, my love, my darling, see what love can make me do."

Amy M. Knight.

"So you are going to marry? Have you anything laid up?" "Yes, I've got a rich uncle laid up with a paralytic stroke, an' I'm his only surviving relative."

WIFE (displaying her new bonnet): "This is the very latest fashion, John." Husband (sighing): "I wish it were, but I know it isn't. There'll be another one out next month."

SCHOOL-TEACHER (trying to explain what a brother-in-law is): "Now, look here, my boy, have you a sister?" Tommy: "Ah, sir, it's no good, she has three young men already. You wouldn't be in it."

SMALL BROTHER: "I should think sister would a good deal rather have you call to see her than Mr. Getthere." New Adorer (delighted): "Would you? Why?" Small Brother: "'Cause he always messes her hair so."

LITTLE MISS: "I'm going to have a birthday party next week." Mr. Nicefellow: "The members of your family always celebrate their birthdays, I believe?" Little Miss: "Yes, all but sister. She's got so careless, she's beginnin' to skip hers."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

November 4.—Those having their birthdays to-day will have an active year; some danger of law; not a good year for speculation.

Girls will find love affairs very quiet.

The day is not good for signing papers, buying or selling. Do not make new friends, nor ask favours here.

A child born to-day will be thoughtful, suspicious, and cautious. Will do best in the employ of others.

November 5.—A favourable birthday for business, health, and general concerns.

Young girls will receive attentions; if engaged they marry.

The day is good to make new friends, and travel. Deal with jewellers, surgeons, dentists, and those in authority.

A child born here will be generous, cheerful and active. Will rise in life and will be successful.

November 6.—The birthday indications for to-day are bad, bringing much worry and anxiety over the next twelve months.

Girls born near 3 or 9 p.m. experience disappointment in love.

The day is evil for most things; have a care against chill and mishap from 3 to 4 p.m.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate and fond of pleasure. Will be crafty and perhaps malicious.

November 7.—An expensive year over home affairs. Go quietly or business will suffer.

Young girls need some care with married men.

The day is one on which to remain quiet and defer all important undertakings.

A child born here will be extravagant, fond of change and travel.

November 8.—A mixed year may be expected by those whose birthdays occur to-day Some expense over home, and through sickness.

Love affairs cause girls anxiety; third parties interfere.

The day is good for buying and selling; evil for pleasure, visiting, marriage, and dealing with superiors.

A child born this day will be unfortunate in the employ of others. Fond of pleasure, change and society.

November 9.—A good birthday, and the year will be one of progress; make changes and sign agreements; deal with land and property.

Girls will find the opposite sex friendly.

A child born here will be active, clever, and skilful. If a male, would do well as a designer, draughtsman, or in a shipping office.

November 10.—A year of activity; have a care against law and accidents. Insure against fire, and see you are not robbed by servants. Some benefit through a death, or a friend.

Girls become engaged or marry, but need some caution with letters.

The day is good for pleasure and marriage, but some extra care should be taken near horses, and against mishap.

A child born to-day will be cheerful, active, witty and free. The temper will be hot when roused and the speech bitter and sarcastic.

Asturel.

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TOM'S FLIRTATION.

Things Are Not Always What They Seem.

"And so you positively refuse to give up this intimacy?"

"Really, you ask too much, Aunty. What else can I do in this stupid place? I am devoted to yachting, you know, and besides, Mr. Trevor is the only man here who has a motor car."

"But, my child, you are engaged to be married! What would Tom say if he should hear of it? And what would you do if he followed your example?"

"Oh, I wish he would! His devotion wearies me sometimes. He used to be quite a tease, but since our engagement he seems to have foresworn everything exciting."

Flossie tossed her pretty head until her blonde curls fell over her eyes from which gleamed a spirit of mischief.

The first speaker was Miss Treadway, the girl's aunt, a wealthy woman of forty years, who had adopted her after the death of her parents. Flossie's *fiancé*, a young doctor of good family and some means, was completing a medical course in Germany, and they were to be married as soon as he received his foreign diploma.

The girl loved him, but she was very young—only nineteen—and she was a wilful maid, having always had her own way. Her besetting sin was love of admiration, and she deemed it essential to her happiness to have a man in her toils. So, being for the time bereft of her lover, she had drifted into a serious flirtation with a rich bachelor who lived near the seaside resort where they were staying.

Mr. Trevor's summer home, a fine stone mansion overlooking the harbour, was the scene of many festivities. He had already given two dinners in Flossie's honour, at which functions Miss Treadway had served as an unwilling chaperon, for she realised that the brilliant company invited to meet them regarded her niece as the future Mrs. Trevor. Now we find her reproving her young relative, with indifferent success.

"Flossie," said Miss Treadway. "I think you ought to consider Mr. Trevor's feelings. It is not fair to him; he does not know about Tom. Perhaps you had better tell him?"

"And spoil all my fun? Why, aunty, what a fuss you are making about a trifle! I cannot mope here without men's society, Tom is in Germany, the sea divides us, and he is welcome to enjoy himself in like manner. However, there is no prospect of his doing anything so sensible. Why, I verily believe he spends all his leisure time writing to me. I get so many letters that I don't read half of them. And that reminds me, one came yesterday when I was getting ready to go out in the yacht. I haven't read it yet; really, I had forgotten it."

"Flossie, you are incorrigible!" exclaimed Miss Treadway with as much severity of tone as she was capable of. "I give you up, wash my hands of the whole affair. But if you lose Tom do not blame any one but yourself. I will leave you to your own thoughts, as I am due at a meeting at the Rectory this afternoon."

When she was alone Flossie curled her dainty self in a large easy chair and laughed softly as she recalled her aunt's words.

"Lose Tom," she repeated. "No danger of that, couldn't get rid of him even if I wanted to." Then she fell to musing, and a tender look came into her deep blue eyes. "Dear Tom," she murmured, "I do love him. I wouldn't give him up for twenty Mr. Trevors!" She went to her desk, found the letter, and having a fine sense of personal comfort, sank back into the soft depths of the chair and with a box of chocolates in one hand, the letter in the other, began to munch sweets and read.

At first her expression was slightly bored, then astonished, and finally she threw the sweets and the letter on the floor, flung herself face down on a couch and commenced weeping. The portion of Tom's letter which had produced such dire results ran as follows:

"I had such a strange and exciting adventure that I feel it my duty to tell you all about it. You know that my hotel is in one of the best streets here, and that from my windows I can see much of the beauty and fashion of Berlin. However, I never dreamt of such a vision of loveliness as the piece of femininity whose acquaintance I made yesterday."

At this Flossie's blue eyes opened wide, she sat up, loosed her hold on the chocolates, and read on:

"The object of my admiration sat in her carriage alone and unattended just below my window. Suddenly I heard the rush of a runaway horse from the opposite direction, and seeing her alarm, I hastened down the steps and assisted her to the pavement. She smiled sweetly and was about to speak when her attendant returned and she re-entered the carriage and was rapidly driven away; not forgetting to throw me a kiss just as she was lost to view.

"The world seemed a blank without her" (here Flossie's expression became indignant); "I found on inquiry that she was staying at my hotel, and so had grounds for hope of a speedy meeting. That night for the first time in years my dreams were not of you alone, the beautiful blonde appeared to me more than once, always with that charming smile!"

"Fancy!" exclaimed Flossie.

"To-day the plot has thickened, and however painful it may be for you to hear it, I feel it only honourable that you should know all particulars, and then judge for yourself if I am to blame. This morning I was seated near the front window reading. Keeping one eye on the street—you can easily imagine why—when there came a gentle tap at my door.

"Thinking it was the waiter, I shouted 'Come in!' The door opened, and, to my utter amazement, there stood the beautiful blonde all smiles and blushes. After I had recovered from the delicious shock, which thrilled me from head to foot, I invited her to a seat on the sofa, and then endeavoured to entertain this fairy guest to the best of my ability. You must not be shocked, dear, when I confess to you that we soon became great friends, and that she came of her own accord and sat on my lap——"

It was here that Flossie flung the obnoxious letter away

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from her and began to weep wildly, and she was so absorbed in her grief that Miss Treadway entered unobserved.

"Why, what is this?" exclaimed her aunt. She bent over the prostrate form and said: "Flossie, dear; tell aunty."

The girl only cried the more, but at last wailed, "That man; that wicked, false man!"

"Who do you mean?" asked the bewildered woman.

"Tom! See, the letter on the floor!"

Mrs. Treadway picked up the letter, put on her glasses and began to read; at first she looked puzzled, then amused, and finally she laughed outright.

Flossie raised her head and gazed at her reproachfully with tear-stained eyes which looked like wet violets, and said:

"Oh, aunty, how can you laugh? The false villain! To let a strange woman sit on his lap! And I loved him so!"

"Why don't you finish the letter?" asked her aunt, with a quizzical expression in her kindly eyes.

"Because I won't!" cried Flossie, springing to her feet. "Never mention that man to me again. Where are my hat and my jacket? I am going to ride with Mr. Trevor at five, and if he asks me to marry him I will say 'yes.'"

At this Miss Treadway only smiled.

"There, there! Sit down and listen to your old aunty. Nay, I insist. If I am not mistaken you left off just when she sat on his lap?"

"Yes!" cried Flossie. "How can you bear to speak of it?"

"Listen," interrupted Miss Treadway. Flossie, awed by the unaccustomed severity of tone, obeyed.

"She came down of her own accord and sat on my lap. Fortunately I had a box of sweets and I was offering her some when there came another tap at the door. Putting her hastily down, for I did not wish to be caught with a young lady in my arms, I opened the door and there stood a stout French nurse, with a high white cap and apron, who asked anxiously if "*la petite Mademoiselle Hélène*" was within. And, Flossie, she sternly reprimanded my charmer for entering a strange gentleman's apartments uninvited, and she led the beautiful blonde away in tears, who, by the way, was just three years old, and it was from a baby carriage that I assisted her the day before!"

By this time Flossie had ceased to weep, and, though much abashed, she could not refrain from joining in her aunt's laugh.

"Flossie," said Miss Treadway later on, "how do you like the idea of Tom's flirting? And I believe I heard a maiden say not long ago that she wished he would tease her as he used to do. How do you enjoy it?"

"Spare me!" cried Flossie. "You know I don't like it. Oh, I wish we could go away from here. Mr. Trevor's attentions are so marked, and the worst of it is I now realise that I am to blame."

"What do you say to a trip to Germany, for instance?" said Miss Treadway.

"The very thing!" cried Flossie, all smiles.

And the next week found them bound for the Fatherland.

L. K. Fulton.

"Does he write to you regularly since you became engaged?" "No; sometimes I only get one letter a day."

Mrs. Prim: "Do you think his love for you is unselfish my dear child?" Daughter: "Oh, quite! The other evening he let me sit so long on his knee that he walked lame for ten minutes. Fancy that, ma!"

"What kind of a clock is that, Jawkins? It doesn't seem to be right." "Sh—sh! It's called the married man's delight, my boy. The hands stop at ten o'clock every evening, but the ticking goes on as loud as ever. See?"

Husband (the father of six daughters): "Come, Rosa, there is a gentleman in the drawing-room who wants to marry one of our daughters. He is a wine merchant." Wife: "A wine merchant? Thank goodness! Then he will be sure to select one of the older brands."

Your Editor Chats.

This week I am able to present to my readers the first article of the remarkable series by Lady Peggy Carstairs, about which so much has already been said. One or two inquiries have been made in regard to this and the preceding series with which it may be interesting to deal.

For example, two or three readers have wanted to know why in a story paper like *Short Stories* I should publish articles containing plain facts. In reply to this I would say that although the statements made in the series are perfectly true, they still come under the heading of stories, and are therefore suitable for a place in *Short Stories*. It does not necessarily follow that all stories are fiction; there are true stories as well as fiction stories, and both "The Confessions of Cynthia" and "How I Chaperoned Belinda" come under the former heading.

Again, a certain similarity in the method of writing the stories will be observed between the two series. This is not accidental. The style in which the first series was written was so much appreciated that I took particular care to arrange for Lady Peggy to write her series in the same bright, conversational style. This condition, I am sure, will be generally appreciated by my readers.

When you have read the first article would you mind sending me a postcard and telling me what you think of it? All I want is your genuine, candid opinion, whether it be favourable or otherwise.

On another page of this issue you will find an announcement regarding Miss Madge Morris, who is shortly to be married. Of course, we can scarcely expect Miss Morris to devote so much time to journalism after the happy event takes place, as she has other duties to attend to, but she has kindly consented to continue to conduct the "In Confidence" page for some time to come. This will be good news for those who have benefited by her advice in the past and for those who may have reason to consult her in the future. Miss Morris' services in connection with the "In Confidence" page have been invaluable to hundreds of readers, and I am sure that all of you will join with me in wishing her every happiness in her married life.

Since finishing her series of articles, Miss Cynthia Hamilton has been writing fiction in the shape of short stories. Some of those she has submitted to me have been quite good, and I hope to be able to publish them shortly.

Your Editor.

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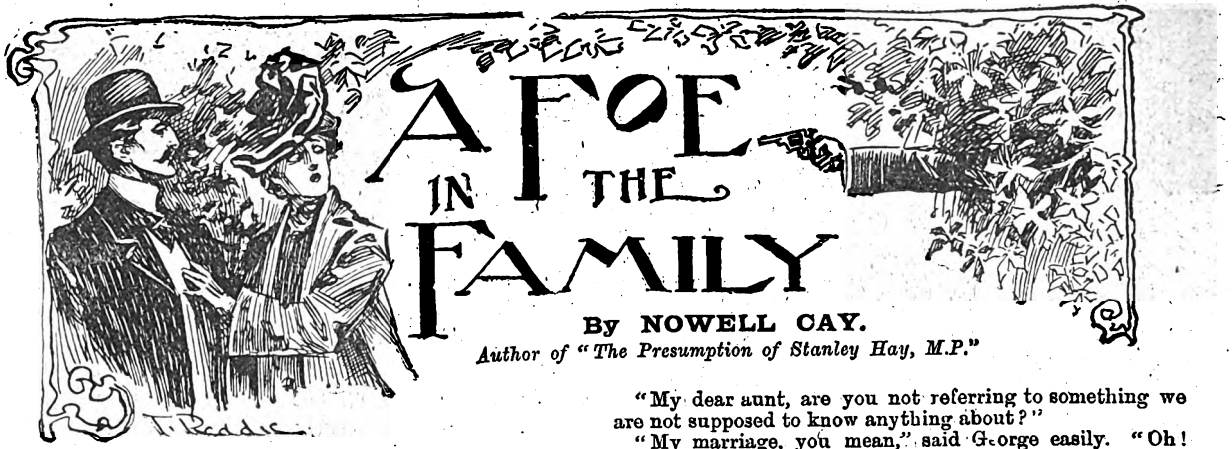

A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Plot to be Frustrated.

GEORGE ILDEN, Baron, of Ilden Castle, while staying with his uncle Jasper, at Pennybrook Hall, suddenly discovers that several suspicious events which have taken place during his stay at the Hall, point to the existence of a plot against his life. He has been shot at, poison has been placed in his pocket-flask, and other attempts, fortunately futile, have been made on his life. He confides in Cathie Hay, his cousin, and they agree that as many members of his own family would materially benefit by his death, the attempts must have their origin in that direction. They suspect Percival, Ilden's cousin. Ilden asks Cathie to marry him, as a means of circumventing his enemies' designs, but she has to refuse.

At about this time he meets Florence Courthorpe, the sister of an old college chum who was drowned while boating. She is very poor, and has taken a situation as governess at Witterby, a village not far from Pennybrook. In seeking to escape his foe, Ilden inadvertently settles down just opposite Florence's temporary home.

Late one night Florence sees a man attempt to enter Ilden's bedroom window with evident criminal designs. She leaves the house clad only in dressing-gown and warns Ilden of his danger. For this exploit her employer dismisses her.

She now has no home, so next day leaves Witterby to stay with some friends at Lallerton. Ilden accompanies her. Arrived at Lallerton, however, they discover that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left suddenly, and no trace of them can be found. Florence, of course, is greatly distressed.

Ilden, however, feeling that he is responsible for her position, and desiring to baulk his enemy, proposes to her, is accepted, and marries her secretly. An announcement in the papers informs his family of the wedding.

Shortly after their marriage Ilden receives a message urging him to return to Pennybrook, his uncle Rupert being dangerously ill. Leaving his wife at the apartments he has taken in London, Ilden leaves for Pennybrook. He is met at the Hall by Cathie, who informs him that his uncle is dead, and that he is again exposing his life to danger.

(The above is a short synopsis of the opening chapters.)

Ilden and Cathie Have a Chat

"You will of course come down to Mordenhale for the funeral?" said Percival, as Ilden was retiring.

His reception at the hall had been, as he expected, a cool one, except from Catherine, whose affectionate solicitude rendered him a little uncomfortable. He liked Catherine, but he was very relieved to think that she had not accepted his offer of marriage. He wondered that he had made it.

Mrs. Jasper had greeted him with the air of a person who had been personally injured.

"It is kind of you to give your relatives an opportunity of congratulating you," she said in her high-pitched voice, "although they are rather late, the fault is not ours."

Jane Barton interrupted her.

"My dear aunt, are you not referring to something we are not supposed to know anything about?"

"My marriage, you mean," said George easily. "Oh! no, it is not supposed to be a secret, Cousin Jane, after its publication in the *Times*. I ventured to take your congratulations, dear aunt, for granted."

Percival had made no reference to the fact of his cousin's marriage, and, indeed, had barely exchanged words with him, until now that he called him into the dining-room as he was passing to make his enquiry about the funeral. Ilden hesitated.

His uncle's death had been an unforseen calamity, complicating his plans. He had left Sydenham intending only to see him and return the next morning.

To postpone his return would be to break a tacit promise to his wife, or rather a promise which he had made to himself to satisfy certain twinges of conscience that he had felt for leaving her at all. And yet the social duty seemed one which he could not decently avoid now that he had actually shown himself among his relatives.

"Yes, I shall be present, of course," he said reluctantly. He was full of impatience to get back to his girl wife, and put an end to her anxiety, an anxiety which must be all the greater because they had agreed to run no risk of her discovery by the exchange of messages while he was away.

He could, of course, return to Sydenham in the morning, and still get back to Mordenhale for the funeral on the next day, but he resisted the temptation of the plan. He would not give his enemies an opportunity of following him and discovering the whereabouts of his hostage only to leave her again alone and unprotected.

"You will accompany us then, when we go down to-morrow?" said Percival, and it seemed to his cousin that the uncertainty as well as the eagerness in his tone were both suspicious. But he could not allow personal apprehension to make him neglect a plain social duty.

"No, I shall be at Mordenhale to see the last of poor Uncle," he said quietly. "But I do not suppose that I shall travel down with the others or be with you for more than the actual ceremony. You see, I left instantly when I got Uncle Rupert's letter, and I have a good many things to arrange."

"You mean that you will have to return to Lady Ilden. By the way, you have not told us where you are staying for your honeymoon, or how far the poor governor's letter brought you."

Ilden smiled curiously.

"No, I have not told anybody."

His cousin was not discouraged by the tone.

"You have an object in keeping it secret?"

"A very weighty one," said George, and closed the conversation by walking out of the room.

It was just as well for his cousin to know, if he were guilty, that he suspected him.

In the hall he met Catherine, her face full of anxiety.

"It made me horribly nervous to think of your being alone even for a moment with him," she said in a concerned

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whisper. "If it was Percival who has been attemptin your life, he must be more eager than ever now that only one life—a failing one—besides yours, stands between him and his ambition."

"Well, I do not think that you need be nervous for a couple of days," said George with assurance. "Cousin Percy, whom, for all we know, we may be misjudging horribly, is not the man to risk his own skin rashly, and, if he is laying plans, I think that he will wait till we are at Mordenhale before he tries to carry them into execution. He knows his ground so well there."

"Then surely you will not go there," she cried.

"I must—for the funeral. I should think it cowardly to shirk a social duty because of my apprehension; but I shall make the risk as small as possible by going there only for the actual interment. After that I shall have done my duty to the family, and can look after myself—and my wife, again."

They had been climbing the stairs together, and reached the drawing-room now, to find it empty.

It was the first time that he had even alluded with her to his marriage, and Cathie's face took an immediate expression of reserve. It seemed as though she had taken it for granted that on this subject she could no longer expect her cousin's old frank confidence; but she could not neglect the opportunity he had given her by mentioning his wife—an opportunity for which she had been waiting.

"Oh! yes, your wife must be in danger too," she said, her voice constrained. "Is she aware of the fact?"

Ilden stared at her.

"Aware of it? Of course. You do not think that I should let any lady marry me in unconsciousness of her danger."

Cathie flushed a little at the tone.

"I never doubted that you would act fairly," she said, thinking that the advantages which the Rectory governess would receive from the marriage must more than compensate her for its dangers, whether she was aware of them or not.

"I thought I was acting fairly—but one never knows," he answered thoughtfully.

His tone unintentionally deceived her into the belief that he was ready for confidences about his wife.

"What, has Lady Ilden been complaining already?" she asked, seating herself. It had occurred to her that "the adventuress," once married, would soon kick against the life of seclusion which robbed her new position of its glories, and she flushed again when her cousin retorted warmly—

"Complaining! Good gracious, no. My wife is much too content, considering how little I am able to give her."

"I have no doubt," said Catherine, coldly, "that Lady Ilden calculated the advantages which she would receive from her marriage, and found them satisfactory."

The tone of prejudice was undeniable, and George was conscious of an unreasonable anger against his cousin. What right had she to imagine that Florence had married him for the sake of the advantages she would derive from the match? For a moment he felt quite indignant with her; then, as he realised with his usual sense of fairness how much justification he had given her for her belief, his anger and indignation were turned against himself. He realised for the first time that his own action and attitude had tended to prejudice Catherine especially, against his wife. He was anxious to make amends.

"My wife married me only because she loved me and wanted to take half my danger," he said stoutly, and hated the expression of scepticism on her face.

She had not expected her cousin, of all people in the world, to be so easily deceived by a cunning adventuress.

"A case of love at first sight," she said, almost with a sneer.

Ilden's eyes flashed dangerously, but his voice was deliberate enough as he answered:

"Practically. But Miss Courthorpe had already heard a great deal about me when we met, from her brother. He was a chum of mine at Rugby, and was drowned while boating at Oxford about four years ago."

Catherine still answered coldly—

"I am glad that you knew something about her before your marriage. It is a great risk to marry anybody of whom you know so little. I do hope that you will not regret it."

"Oh, no! I shall not regret it," he said smiling, although the tone had made him angry.

Cathie ignored the confidence of the assertion.

"You see, I cannot help feeling a certain amount of responsibility," she went on without a trace of self-consciousness. "If I had given you a different answer a fortnight ago, it would at least have saved you from this necessity. I did not know that you were determined to marry at all costs, although if I had known, it could scarcely have made any difference. But I have been a little troubled in my conscience after what has happened."

"Oh, I am sure that you took the right course," he said quickly. To hear her speak as though it were a matter beyond dispute that his happiness would have been safer in her hands than in those of the girl-wife he had left at Sydenham amused him, even while it tried his patience. His cousin had never seemed less attractive to him. He was almost afraid of being rude in his indignant desire to champion Florence, and tried to change the subject.

"I will wait for your verdict on my choice until you have met my wife. I wonder when it will be possible. At present I am not a bit nearer to solving the problem than I was when I saw you last. I suppose you have seen or heard nothing to help me since I left Pennybrook so precipitately."

The mention of his departure reminded her that she had something to tell.

"You remember the man in black whom we overtook on our way to the station?"

Her tone had become impressive, and George smiled.

"Yes, I have often thought with amusement of the excitement into which he threw us. He is a Mr. Despard, a friend or rather an acquaintance of my wife's. What is the matter?"

Cathie had uttered an exclamation of dismay. Her face was perceptibly pa'er.

"Your wife's," she repeated. "Oh, don't say that, George."

"And why not?"

"Because I am sure that he is in the plot against your life."

He stared at her tragically troubled face, incredulously, although he did not follow the connection in her mind which had taken the colour from her cheeks.

"This Despard in the plot. It is impossible," he said. "What makes you think it?"

"I only know that the arrival of Despard, as you call him, in Pennybrook frightened your cousin Percival away. You remember how hurriedly he left the night before you went. Well, Grant tells me that it was because he caught sight of that man skulking in one of the lanes."

And she told her story, as Grant had given it.

Ilden still looked sceptical as he listened.

"But this only shows that Percy has an enemy on his track as well as me," he said when she had finished.

"If it were so, what is more probable than that his enemy is yours, George. For one man to threaten both your lives is possible.

For two distinct men to threaten two different members of the family without any connection in their designs would be a coincidence too remarkable for credence. But my own view is that he and your cousin are in league. Of course, as you say, we may be misjudging Percival horribly, but we agreed at the outset to spare nobody in our suspicions, did we not?"

She looked up as if anxious for his concurrence.

"Of course," he agreed. "We must say what we think. But if Percy brought the man here why should he show so much fear when he saw him?"

"Can't you understand it? To arrange a crime is one thing. To watch it being accomplished is another. Besides, prudence would make your cousin anxious to be out of the neighbourhood while the crime was actually committed. I cannot help thinking that the story points suspicion against your cousin Percival. Against the man in black I had my suspicion, as you know, immediately that we met him. And you say that he is a friend of the woman you have married."

Ilden did not like the tone.

"Lady Ilden's greatest friend is Mr. Despard's sister. She has known them both since her girlhood. What she has told me about the brother makes it impossible for me to suspect him—at any rate of being a paid assassin, and unless we imagine Percival paying him to pop me off, what possible object could he have in molesting me? Oh! no, it is out of the question. Mr. Despard is a gentleman, an artist, devoted to a country life of seclusion and his sister."

Cathie interrupted him.

"According to Lady Ilden's account?"

Her cousin turned upon her.

"What do you mean?"

Catherine burst into tears.

"Oh! George, dear, you know that we agreed to speak openly to each other, whoever it might be that we suspected. And I cannot help thinking that in trying to defeat the plot against you by marrying, you have only entangled yourself more in its designs. How long have you known the woman you have made your wife? What do you really know about her? Nothing except what she has told you herself. All that I know is that at the Rectory she gained for herself the reputation of a schemer and tried to inveigle young Haydon into a clandestine love-affair. And she confesses herself the friend of the one man whom we have most cause for suspecting to be the man who is attempting, or pretending to attempt, to take your life. You must let me speak out,"—as for the second time he tried to interrupt her broken and excited argument. "Of course, I know that she has made herself very charming, and pretended to love you. Women are such good actresses. I admit it, although I am a woman myself. And the wicked women make the best actresses of all, because they are troubled by no compunction. Do you think that any good woman could really know, love and trust you sufficiently in the little while that this one has done to confide her whole life to your care? It is impossible."

The young man's face had grown stern and set as he listened; but his voice, when she allowed him to break in at last upon her half-hysterical outburst, was almost painfully under control.

"And you suggest that Lady Ilden became my wife in order to give her friends fuller opportunities of taking my life?" he asked.

Catherine was not to be suppressed by the tone.

"I do not know whether the marriage was part of the plot, or the plot intended only to bring about the marriage," she said excitedly. "You know yourself that you would not have married her if it had not been for these supposed attempts on your life. And not one of them ever injured you. If they had really intended to kill you, do you think that the shot would have missed you every time?"

For a single moment Ilden did not answer. Mechanically and without his volition, his mind summoned up for review all the incidents which had led to his marriage to be considered in the light of his cousin's theory. Every step in his connection with Florence had been associated with the intrigue against his life. Their first meeting had come dramatically with the most determined attempt to shoot him. It was the poison in his flask which had driven him from the Hall and led to his travelling by the same train as his future wife.

Of the next attempt at Witterby he had no proof at all beyond her word. And it was this story with its alleged consequences at Minerva House which had led directly to Florence's complete dependence upon him. He remembered that on their way to Lallerton together, she had seemed to anticipate and almost prepare him for the fact of the Despards' departure.

Was it possible that Despard could really have travelled with her on the previous day without mentioning that he and his sister had left their home? His naturally fair and judicious mind busied itself for a moment in presenting proofs that Catherine's theory was a true one. How easy it would be for a prejudiced person to believe that the whole intrigue had been, not a plot against his life, but a cunning device to entrap him into matrimony.

He realised that Catherine would be absolutely convinced of the truth of her theory if he gave her all the additional facts which crowded to his mind, and even without which she had formed her suspicion. Percival's fear of Despard explained itself easily in the light of the theory. Percival had been at the Hall longer than he, and although he was not such a good catch as himself, he was certainly desirable prey for a penniless governess.

Perhaps his cousin had been subjected to exactly the same experience as himself, and had become nervous of lurking strangers, or perhaps of Despard particularly, before the intrigue was directed against higher game.

In the moment of silence he allowed himself to look at what had happened from his companion's point of view. Then the thought of his wife came back to dispel the theory and bring back reality. He was not troubled by a shade of uneasiness.

"You do not know my wife," he said severely, "it is the only excuse that I can make for you Catherine. Till you do, and see for yourself how absurd your suspicions are we had better not discuss the affair—or else we shall quarrel. I will go now and ask Percy what he knows of Despard. That scene in the lane—unless Grant has invented it—certainly calls for explanation."

She was too disturbed by his attitude even to resent the implied suspicion against Grant.

"But George, if your faith is misplaced," she pleaded laying her hand on his arm. "Men have been deceived before now, and it is terrible to think of you putting all your faith in an enemy. If I was sure that the intrigue was only to make you marry her, I should not be so anxious. The thing is done, and you would find out soon enough how you have been deceived. I should say nothing. But if it is really intended to take your life, and the marriage was meant to make it more easy—oh; it is awful to think of you trusting the woman who is only betraying you."

She was crying again, but Catherine's tears gave him no impulse of tenderness as another woman's had done. He was only conscious that crying made his cousin's nose red, and rendered her even plainer than usual. He felt very impatient with her, but his unfailing sense of fairness

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enabled him to remember that Catherine was thinking only of his welfare.

"It would be," he said with less severity," but there is not the least need for you to distress yourself in this way, Cathie. My wife is *not* betraying me. Even if she were, the abnormal young person whom, for some reason, you choose to imagine her—and I assure you that she is not—she would scarcely assist a plot that could only lessen her income and her dignity."

But Catherine's mind had already met the objection.

"If she is really your wife, George!" she interrupted. "You are not even sure that the marriage is not a deception."

Her obstinacy made it more than ever difficult for him to keep his temper. But he still made the effort.

"You may assure yourself that the marriage is as valid as it could be made," he said, smiling.

"But it would mean nothing if the woman were married already. For all you know she may be the wife of this man Despard, or even of Percival himself. Grant has just heard a report that he was married secretly this summer to some girl in the country."

Ilden was too angry to take any interest in it.

"Don't you think that you are going a little too far, Catherine," he said, frigidly. "You seem to forget that you are talking about my wife. I have let you say much more than I ought to have done; but that is only because this ends the matter. Lady Ilden's name must not cross your lips again until you can speak of her as you ought to speak before her husband."

Catherine was answering with spirit, as Grant strolled unconsciously through the open doorway.

"You talk as though it were a real, ordinary marriage. You cannot pretend that you care for her," were the words that caught his ear, before the sight of Catherine's tears made him retire with an apology.

George overtook him in the hall, but made no reference to the scene. He was on his way to the room where he had left Percival, determined to ask him point blank what he knew of Guy Despard.

Who is Mr. Guy Despard?

From the first moment when Ilden had begun to suspect the existence of a plot against his life, and after due consideration had come involuntarily to the conclusion that Percival was the most likely person to have originated it, he had been very anxious for a straightforward talk with his cousin. But so far he had found it impossible to make any tangible charge against him.

Here, however, was a field for cross-examination which was not ostensibly connected with the attempts at all. His wife was anxious to ascertain the whereabouts of her friends, the Despards. Percival had shown some acquaintance with the man. He had an excuse for questioning him closely, and if Catherine's theory that the two were in league against him were correct, he might hope to gain something from his admissions.

He entered the room where he had left his cousin feeling that their interview might be an important one for him, and was disappointed to find it in darkness. Evidently, Percival had quitted it, turning out the lamp as he went, and George was turning to go when his cousin's voice, sharp and startled, surprised him from the darkness.

"Who's there? Who is it?"

Ilden laughed as he struck a match. He had no inclination to be left in the dark with Percival.

"Nobody very terrible," he said easily, as he re-lighted the lamp. "Whom did you expect! A ghost?"

His cousin was standing by the window with his hand still on the curtain slightly drawn as if he had been looking out into the dark grounds, and his face suggested the question. He looked pallid and nervous.

"You startled me. I was just coming out," he said.

"Then I wish you would give me a moment first. There is something I wanted to ask you, Percy."

"Fire ahead, then. I was just going to turn in."

There was a cigarette between his lips, but it had ceased to burn, and he was relighting it over the lamp. As he spoke Ilden lounged against the mantelshelf.

"I want to know whether you can tell me anything about Mr. Guy Despard?"

Percival's cigarette dropped on the table. His face that had been pale before became even more ghastly, and for a moment he stared at the speaker, too startled to speak.

Then, picking up his fallen cigarette, he made an evident effort to recover his self-control.

"Mr. Guy Despard? Who may he be?" he asked with attempted indifference.

"I imagined that you knew. If you can tell me anything about the man, I wish you would let me know it. His sister is a great friend of my wife's, and she has lost count of her whereabouts and is anxious to find her. I understood that you knew Despard."

Percival cast at him a quick glance of suspicion.

"His sister is a friend of your wife's?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes, but the fact can scarcely interest you if you know nothing whatever about the Despards. Come, you met the brother here in Pennybrook a fortnight ago, or rather went out of your way to avoid meeting him."

Percival stared at him blankly.

"I don't know what you are talking about. I tell you I know nothing about the man."

"Or rather, to judge from your manner, that you know something which you do not care to tell me," said Ilden. "That is what I wanted to ascertain. I can form my own conjecture as to the nature of your acquaintance."

He was turning away as he spoke, satisfied that Catherine's theory was correct, when she made Despard an agent of his cousin's, but Percival stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Ilden. There is no need for us to quarrel over such a trumpery matter. On my honour I am not acquainted with Despard. I have never spoken to him in my life. All I know is that he stayed at the Ilden Arms a week or two ago, and seemed to be following me about. I imagined that he was a dun sent by some creditor or other of mine. Heaven knows I have plenty. So I thought it best to give him a wide berth. If he is a friend of Lady Ilden's, I suppose I was wrong. Has he said anything to you or Lady Ilden about me?"

His eyes watched Ilden's face keenly, as if anxious to read there a reliable answer to his question. There was no doubting that it was one he was eager to have answered.

"Come, I have told you all that I know," he said impatiently as Ilden hesitated, "why don't you treat me with equal candour?"

Ilden laughed.

"Candour, you call it. If you want to be candid, tell me where Despard is now."

"And what should you do then?"

"Write and ask him the address of his sister, for Lady Ilden's benefit."

Percival lighted himself another cigarette with hands that trembled visibly. He seemed to be deliberating.

"If I tell you where Despard is, will you in return tell me all that has passed between you."

"Certainly," said Ilden, "although there is nothing to tell. I have never exchanged words with the man."

"Any more than I have. But I happened to see him this evening. So I take it that he is at P——brook again.'

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"At Pennybrook?"

The announcement gave George a curious sensation.

"Staying at the Ilden Arms again?" he asked.

Percival answered irritably.

"I know nothing about his movements. I saw him here. That is all. If you want to know any more you must ask the man himself."

"As I intend to do," said Ilden shortly, and walked out of the room.

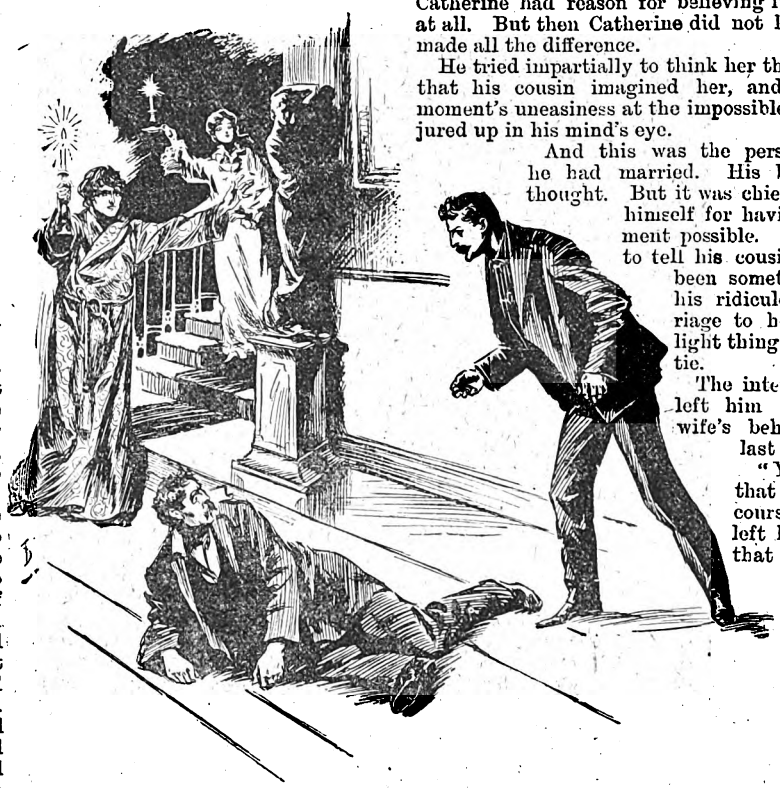
Percival's face was more ghastly than ever as he listened to his retreating steps. With an impatient gesture he threw away the cigarette that he had been trying in vain to smoke. Then he turned to the sideboard and helped himself to a glass of neat brandy.

The colour came back to his face when it was gulped down, and he gave a little laugh.

"Go, my Lord Ilden, by all means," he said aloud. "You will find Despard quite as eager to meet you as you are to meet him. If he is watching the house to any purpose, I think he will save you the trouble of a walk."

Another Attempt on Ilden's Life.

As Ilden left his cousin, he saw that Catherine had once more been waiting outside the room, nervous of the two being alone together. But this time she did not stop to speak to him. She was slipping into the library as if anxious to avoid his notice, and George was not sorry to be spared another *tête-à-tête*. If Catherine should hear what had passed, she would certainly see in it a confirmation of her suspicion against Florence.



Ilden half expected it, and yet was conscious of a shock to find he had been grappling with his cousin Percival.

It was proved at least that there was some connection between his wife's friend, this Guy Despard, and Percival, a connection which the latter had some reason for disowning.

Ilden had no doubt at all about it in his mind, and he put down the evident fear which his cousin had shown when Despard's name was mentioned to a nervous dread lest his ally should have betrayed him.

Yes, incredible as it appeared after the account which Florence had given him of her friend's brother, the quiet artist, content with a country life and indifferent to society, must for some reason have become Percival's tool. It was he, no doubt, who had fired the shot in the coppice and put poison in his pocket flask. He had really been pursuing him when he left Pennybrook, and although he had been thrown off the track at Rickerby Junction, he had probably returned when he discovered his mistake and found the clue again in time to menace his life at Witterby. It was Despard, of course, with his slouch hat, who had watched, revolver in hand, outside the Black Bull. And in going to Lallerton he had been approaching danger, a danger which sufficiently explained the warning he had received there. It had been given, if not by Despard's sister, by somebody who had enjoyed her confidence. For he no longer doubted it was Despard's sister who had written the intercepted letter to warn him of her brother's designs. Florence's identification of the handwriting on the envelope had not been a mistaken one.

It was a remarkable—indeed a marvellous—coincidence that he should discover his actual assailant to find him an acquaintance of his wife's whose disappearance with his sister from Lallerton had in a way necessitated their marriage.

Ilden did not disguise from himself the fact that Catherine had reason for believing it to be no coincidence at all. But then Catherine did not know his wife. That made all the difference.

He tried impartially to think her the creature of intrigue that his cousin imagined her, and smiled without a moment's uneasiness at the impossible person he had conjured up in his mind's eye.

And this was the person Catherine thought he had married. His blood boiled at the thought. But it was chiefly with anger against himself for having made her misjudgment possible. He had been a fool to tell his cousin anything. He had been something worse to make his ridiculous proposal of marriage to her, and show what a light thing he had thought the tie.

The interview with her had left him very jealous on his wife's behalf, and his cousin's last retort stung.

"You cannot pretend that you care for her. Of course you could not have left her like this believing that she was in danger if you did," she had said, and the words worried his conscience. If he did not care for his girl-wife as she believed that he did, it was unfair to her to let the fact be recognised.

Had he been cruel? Had he ignored her claims in considering those of his family? He was keenly conscious of the anxiety she must be feeling on his behalf, and he rebelled against the prudence which had made it seem impolitic for him to give his enemies the least chance of tracing her by sending her a letter or a telegram.

He had been putting on his coat with the intention of going at once to the inn and confronting Despard. Now that his actual assailant was presumably discovered, he was very anxious indeed for a talk with him. If the fellow's only motive was pecuniary gain—as it must be—it would be interesting to discover whether he could not be bribed to betray his employers. His heart had beat high at the thought that another hour might see the whole plot exploded and brought to nothing.

It was the thought of Florence which dissuaded him from the task he had set himself. His life was no longer his own to risk as he pleased on a foolhardy enterprise; and his previous acquaintance with Despard at Pennybrook in the dark had warned him that it would be fool-

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hardy, even while his zest for adventure inclined him to ignore the fact. Mr. Guy Despard was not likely to leave the village while he remained there, and, for Florence's sake, he must run no unnecessary risks. It was not enough that he had provided for her future in the way of money. He must remain at her side to champion her against the prejudice and unjust suspicion which his own action and attitude had done something to rouse against her.

Percival, listening intently for the opening of the hall-door, was disappointed to find that his cousin was going upstairs instead of out into the night, where, ten minutes earlier, he had seen the stealthy figure of Despard lurking in the grounds.

"Curse him, I wonder how much he knows," he said to himself, and helped himself to another glass of brandy.

Meanwhile Ilden was going to his room for the night. The Honourable Jasper and his wife had already retired, the former in a more helpless state than usual, on account of the efforts he had been making to drown the uneasiness caused by his brother's death, and George had no desire to see Cathie again.

But upstairs in his room, he became conscious that he was feeling restless and lonely. He seemed to have so much to tell Florence, and he could not even write to her until after the funeral. He was surprised to find how necessary her sympathy had become to him. The few days in which he must remain away from her seemed intolerably dull to him in prospect.

It had been foolish of him to come, and a strong impulse came over him to ignore his social obligations and return to Sydenham by the first train in the morning.

But in the morning he was to confront Despard. He solaced himself with the thought that the result of the meeting might justify him in leaving Florence and coming to Pennybrook at all.

He felt in need of justification, for the white, strained face which his girl-wife had worn at their parting haunted him more than ever.

How brave she had been. He lay down thinking of her with a pleasant sense of satisfaction at the thought that he possessed her, until a disturbing thought came to mar his complacency.

The fact that Florence knew the Despards would make it more likely for them to discover her whereabouts. His wife and he had indeed made some slight effort to trace Miss Despard. If Florence heard of her friend while he was away she would communicate with her naturally without a single scruple, and—if his suspicion was well-founded against Despard—betray herself to the enemy.

The impulse to return to Sydenham became greater than ever, and he satisfied himself only by deciding on a compromise with his resolve. In the morning he would go on to Ilden Castle, and send a telegram from the post-office there to Sydenham. Experience had shown that the dispatch of letters from the castle had not been attended by danger. Despard would no doubt follow him, but he was counting upon his ability to make the man change sides.

His mind was more at ease when he had decided it all, but it was some hours before he could lose his uneasiness in sleep.

And sleep only brought dreams more disturbing than his waking thoughts. His wife was in danger, and he could not get to her. Trains kept starting for London, but he was always on the wrong platform, and people kept him talking so that he could not cross. He could hear the bell jangling as a sign that the train was starting, and woke with a start to find that he was bathed in a profuse perspiration.

A strange feeling of dread was upon him, and it was some moments before he could remember where he was. Then as he became fully awake he realised that the bell which he had heard in his dream was still jangling loudly. Somebody was ringing the alarm bell fixed in the turret, which a provident builder had placed there to summon the neighbourhood in case the Hall caught fire, but which had never been used in Ilden's memory of the place.

His first idea was that the place was on fire now; his second that it had been set on fire by his enemies with a view to his own destruction.

The idea coming to him as he was half-way to the door suggested caution. He had to remember that he had an enemy inside the house as well as one outside. The alarm itself might simply be intended to make him leave his room, which he had made as inaccessible as locks and bolts could render it, and expose himself in a house full of confusion.

He turned back, therefore, to throw on his coat and make sure that his revolver was safe in the pocket. The feeling of nervous dread, physical, no doubt, with which he had wakened from his dream, still oppressed him and made him more than usually careful. For all he knew an enemy might be lurking in the dark corridor outside, only waiting for him to open his door, and he was anxious to give his opponent no warning. Fumbling for the bolts in the dark he drew them as noiselessly as possible, and turning the key with the same care, pushed the door open warily, to find all his precaution justified.

As the door opened there was a swift movement in the darkness of the corridor before him, an arm descending towards him with something in the hand that caught a gleam from the window behind him. He stepped back, slamming the door to before him, and felt the quiver of a knife struck into the woodwork that but for his wariness would no doubt have entered his heart.

His blood rose at the sound. Here was another attempt, plain and unmasked, on his life. This time he would not let his assailant escape him, and as the stab of the knife sounded on the wood he flung open the door again and sprang upon the indistinct figure in the corridor.

At last he had a tangible foe to deal with, man to man, and a fierce exultation possessed him as he threw himself into the struggle.

The man had gone down before his onslaught, and he had his knee on the arm that, for all he knew, might still have the knife to wield while he gripped his enemy's throat with merciless fingers.

The man writhed under him without power to speak or free himself, and would in all probability have been actually strangled if the struggle had been permitted to continue without interruption. Ilden felt utterly merciless.

But already people and lights were coming on the scene. The clanging on the alarm bell which still continued was rousing the household and bringing everybody from their rooms.

Grant, who slept at the other end of the corridor, opened his door, carrying a candle, which cast its yellow light on a picturesque figure in an embroidered dressing-gown of sea-green, at the moment when Cathie in her nightdress ran down from the next floor.

Her first thought had been of danger to George, and she flew past the poet with terror in her eyes at the sight of the two indistinct figures on the ground. Grant advanced more slowly, shading his candle, and as its light fell on the suffused face of his half-strangled antagonist, Ilden's fingers relaxed, and he rose to his feet feeling strangely sick.

He had half expected it, and yet was conscious of a shock to find that he had been grappling with his cousin Percival.

(Percival's explanation of his outrageous attack upon his cousin will be given in next Tuesday's thrilling instalment.)

THE wife of a man who often finds it cheaper to move than pay rent, recently misplaced her thimble, and was considerably annoyed over her unsuccessful search for it. "Never mind, mamma," said her little daughter, reassuringly; "we'll find it when we move."

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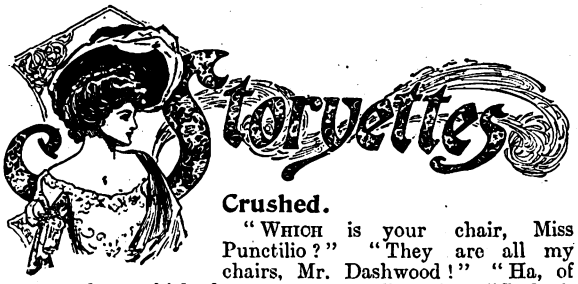

Crushed.

"WHICH is your chair, Miss Punctilio?" "They are all my chairs, Mr. Dashwood!" "Ha, of course; but which do you most affect?" "I don't affect one more than another; do you think I weigh a ton?"

Knew Her of Old.

WIFE: "I've got a splendid dinner ready for you to-night. I was determined to please you." Husband (after complacently viewing the spread): "Ah, yes. What kind of a dress are you thinking of getting?"

He Got Her.

ARDENT SUITOR: "I lay my fortune at your feet." Fair Lady: "Fortune! I did not know you had money." Ardent Suitor: "I haven't much; but it takes a very little to cover those tiny feet." He got her.

Wrong Either Way.

HE: "Only one, just a little one." She: "Oh, no! I have no wish to be added to the list of girls you have kissed." He: "I have never kissed a girl in my life." She: "Oh! Then I'm not going to let you serve your apprenticeship on me."

He had Noticed It.

"WOMEN," she said, "are broad in their ideas and in their methods. They do not exhaust valuable energies in bringing small things to a fine point." "I have noticed it," he answered. "A woman invariably gets a man to sharpen her lead-pencil."

No Need after Marriage.

"EVERY single woman," said the eminent lady lecturer on "How to Find Happiness," "should study her faults and failings." "But why not the married woman as well?" asked one of the audience. "There is no need for her to study her faults. Her husband will attend to that."

Tommy Couldn't Write Nicely.

MISTRESS: "I found in your room a letter of mine that had been taken out of my writing-case. What is the meaning of this?" Cook: "Oh, ma'am, I only wanted to copy it for my sweetheart." Mistress: "What can he want with it?" Cook: "Please, ma'am, he's in the Army, and he doesn't know how to write me a love-letter."

Didn't Want the Tailor to Have It.

"I'VE had a rip in my Sunday coat for a month, but it will be mended when I go home to-night," said Dumsquizzle. "How do you know?" asked Skimgullet. "I bet my wife five shillings I'd find it there. She'll sew it to win the money." "You could have got it sewed at the tailor's for that." "I know, but I wanted to keep the money in the family."

A Hint that was Taken.

MR. AND MRS. JONES were starting for church. "Wait, dear," said the lady. "I've forgotten something; won't you go up and get my goats off the table?" "Your goats?" replied Jones; "what new-fangled thing's that?" "I'll show you," remarked the wife, and she sailed upstairs and down again with a pair of kid gloves on her hands. "Why I call those things kids," said the surprised husband. "Oh, do you?" snapped the wife. "Well, so did I once, but they are so old now I'm ashamed to call them anything but goats." Then they went on to church. The next day Jones' wife had a half-dozen pairs of new gloves.

Wo—man!

IT is justly said of woman that she divides our sorrows and doubles our joys. Pity she quadruples our expenses.

She Would Dispose.

HE: "I—I would propose to—to you if I knew what to say." She: "You wouldn't if you knew what I'd say."

Both Took Pains.

YOUNG WIFE: "I took great pains with that cucumber salad, John, and I hope you enjoyed it." Husband (anxiously): "I'm afraid, my dear, that I'm taking great pains with it, too."

His Share of the Work.

JAGGS: "It's a shame to make your wife work so hard. Why don't you help her?" Baggs: "Why, I do! I make the fire every morning." Jaggs: "But who carries the coal upstairs?" Baggs: "We use a gas stove!"

A Distant Prospect.

HE: "How many bridesmaids are you going to have, dearest?" She: "None." He: "Why, I thought you'd set your heart on it." She: "I had; but, from present indications, the girls I want will all be married first."

She had Saved.

WIFE: "John, dear, you know how I have been skimping and stinting myself to be able to get a sealskin jacket. Now I wish you would help me." John: "How much do you need?" Wife: "The jacket is £20, and I have it all but £19."

A Terrible Error.

GIFKINS: "What's the matter, M'Curdie?" M'Curdie: "Matter enough! You know some time ago I assigned all my property to my wife, to—to keep it out of the hands of—of people I owe money to, you know?" Gifkins: "Yes." M'Curdie: "Well, she's taken the money and gone off—says she won't live with me because I swindled my creditors."

Why He Gave it Up.

MAN (to acquaintance): "Hello, Grinsley, how are you getting on?" Grinsley: "So, so, only." Man: "Are you still running that woman's rights paper?" Grinsley: "No; I have given that up." Man: "Didn't pay, eh!" Grimsley: "Oh, yes; it paid very well." Man: "Why didn't you continue to run it?" Grinsley: "I got married."

A Silenced Girl.

"YOU need not deny it, I know that he kissed you while you were sitting on the steps last night." "Yes, mamma, eight or ten times, I fancy." "Eight or ten times! Why—I—you——" "Yes, mamma, dear, I told him the first time if he did it again I wouldn't speak to him, and after that I could not tell him to stop without breaking my word. And I knew you would not want your daughter to tell a fib."

He Preferred Riches Himself.

JACK: "I have a chance to marry a poor girl whom I love, or a rich woman whom I do not love. What would you advise?" George: "Love is the salt of life, my friend. Without it all else is naught. Love, pure love, makes poverty wealth, pain a joy, earth a heaven." Jack: "Enough. I will marry the poor girl whom I love." George: "Bravely spoken. By the way, would you—er—mind introducing me to the rich woman whom you do not love?"

Wasting Time.

THEY were dining off fowl in a restaurant. "You see," he explained, as he showed her the wishbone, "you take hold here, and I'll take hold here. Then we must both make a wish and pull." "But I don't know what to wish for," she protested. "Oh, you can think of something," he said. "No I can't," she replied; "I can't think of anything I want very much." "Well, I'll wish for you," he exclaimed. "Will you really?" she asked. "Yes." "Well, then, there's no use fooling with the old wishbone," she interrupted with a glad smile, "you can have me."

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THE AWAKENING;

or, the End and the Means.

MADGE DAWSON laid a restraining hand on her husband's arm, and they stopped behind a sheltering hedge through which they could see the speakers whose voices had fallen on their ears.

"That's the worst of coming by the train previous to that by which you are expected," whispered Tom Dawson. "You come unexpectedly on a scene not intended for you to witness." "Oh, well! It's nothing!" responded Madge. "I should have gone straight through upon them, but I wanted you to have a look at my friend Felice before you spoke to her. There she is, and the man, about four years older, is her affianced husband, Llewyn Graham. He is her cousin. What do you think of her?"

"I should say that she didn't care a fig for him, or she wouldn't show him a cross face like that!" pronounced Tom decisively. "Let us go forward; I don't like to be accused of eavesdropping."

But the intention was frustrated by the words uttered by Felice, which came to them just loudly enough to be perfectly audible. The conversation was wafted to them on the breeze, for the engaged couple were now talking in a high tone.

"I don't believe in these child engagements, Llewyn!" said the girl, petulantly. "Two children are destined by fond parents for each other, they grow up together always with that one idea, they become engaged—formally, I mean—at a specified time, and they marry at the appointed time! Then you write "Finis!" and the thing is done! That is how it has been with us so far, and there is no excitement about the thing at all; it's the same always. Now, when you don't know to whom you are going to be married, it's different. It must be, of course!"

"I am sorry that there is so little excitement in our courtship, Felice," said the young man gravely. He might have said it with a smile half a dozen months previously, but he had heard a similar remark several times since then. "What can I do to make it more exciting for you? I have taken you to balls——"

"Oh, no, that isn't at all what I mean! And I can't explain, if you don't understand!" cried the girl irritably. "But, of course, it's all right and just as it should be! It is the best thing from all points of view that we should marry, and if it is all so commonplace, it can't be helped. Still, I should like a little more romance!"

"Romance generally means sorrow!" retorted the young fellow.

"That would be a change!" remarked the girl flippantly.

The watchers noticed the look of mingled love and compassion on his face as he gazed at her for a moment before replying, but Felice was blind to it.

"If it is so very irksome," he said slowly, "perhaps the arrangement can be altered."

"Probably you want it altered! Do you?" she interposed with slight sarcasm. "It happens like that, I should say, in early engagements. You grow up with the idea, as I said before, and when it is too late you look round and find there are others in the world! Perhaps it is so with you, and you wish to make an alteration?"

She looked at him defiantly. He stood motionless for a few seconds.

"You will not make me quarrel with you, Felice," he said at length, "although you always appear to be trying to do so! Let us dismiss the subject! I must go now!"

"Silence gives consent—you did not answer the question!" mocked Felice.

She turned on her heel and ran towards the house, a ripple of laughter coming from the flying figure. Llewyn strode away in another direction, much to the relief of the Dawsons, who thought he was about to surprise them.

Madge Dawson had been a friend of Felice till the former had removed from the neighbourhood of the Grange to Manchester. She was three years older than Felice, and less fortunately circumstanced. Her engagement with Tom Dawson had been prolonged owing to the fact that he had not been successful in his efforts to gain a position such as he desired to offer to his wife, but finally Madge had broken down that barrier, and had thrown in her lot with his.

"A woman's influence, so the great men say, is valuable to a man, and a wife can often help her husband by encouraging him and in many ways. Two heads are better than one, Tom! Let us take the present position and try to improve it together. Why should we wait and wait?"

So they were married quietly, and Felice had extended them an invitation to The Grange on behalf of her father. In her eagerness to see her friend, Madge had insisted on taking an earlier train.

"It will be a surprise for her!" she laughed. "We can walk up from the station, and the dog-cart can fetch our trunks."

As a result, they had arrived in time to witness the foregoing incident.

"Your friend does not impress me, Madge!" declared Tom. "She wants a touch of sorrow to awaken her. She has everything in her favour—money, a good fellow for a future husband. She doesn't know the happiness that is within her reach. I wish that things had been as smooth for us, dear!"

"I cannot understand the way she treats him," observed Madge sorrowfully. "He is a thoroughly good, patient fellow. She is good at heart, yet she is quarrelling with her happiness! Why?"

"She doesn't love him!" pronounced Tom.

"I believe she really does!" declared Madge energetically. "But she always kept him aloof. I know that he tried to kiss her and make love when they were engaged, but she was scarcely old enough to understand, and she laughed at him. Naturally, that put him off, and he thought she did not like his demonstrations of affection."

"She is pretty," mused Tom. "No, I incline to my belief that she doesn't care for him."

"I'm certain she does!" asserted Madge, although she hardly knew why she spoke so warmly, and the next instant there came a little misgiving into her heart.

Tom was watching her out of the corner of his eye, and an amused expression began to spread over his face, but was instantly checked.

"If she really loves him," he observed quietly, "she requires to be awakened to the fact. Do you think we could manage it while we are here?"

"How? What?" demanded Madge eagerly.

"We must show ourselves now, or we shall be caught," replied Tom, evading the question.

They walked forward to the house and were met at the door by Felice, who had seen them just in time to welcome them at the threshold. The two young ladies greeted each other affectionately. Tom was shyly introduced as "My husband!" and then Felice was all activity in her arrangements to make them feel at home.

Mr. Graham, the owner of The Grange, was suffering from an internal malady that might take him off at short notice, but might permit him to live many years. He was desirous that his brother's only son should marry his only child and daughter; otherwise the estate might pass into other hands.

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and he wished to see a Graham continue the line of owners of The Grange. There was no question of money, as there was enough on both sides to make one independent of the other.

Mr. James Graham left the young people very much to themselves, contenting himself with a quiet life in the midst of books. Llewyn was living at The Grange, managing the property.

Llewyn Graham took to Tom Dawson from the first, and the four young people promised themselves some very happy excursions and good times generally during the stay of the Dawsons.

"What did you mean by saying that we might awaken Felice during our stay here, Tom?" asked Madge on the second day.

"By our example, Madge," replied Tom, with just the least hesitation. "You seem to be very thick with her, so she might gather from you—well, you know!"

"Ye-es," said Madge, doubtfully. She was rather disappointed; she had scented a plot and wished to be in it, and now there was nothing at all mysterious in Tom's idea.

Felice Graham did not appear to learn much from the example of Mr. and Mrs. Dawson; there was no mistake about the affection existing between them, and quite unconsciously they showed it clearly, without intruding it on others, notwithstanding. She continued to treat Llewyn in the same off hand, discontented style, and nearly drove the poor fellow into saying something harsh.

"I don't understand why you ratified an engagement with me, when you have seen others whom you apparently adore so much," she said to him once, when they chanced to be alone, and the conversation had drifted round to his last visit to Portsmouth, he having mentioned one or two ladies whom he had seen. Unthinkingly, he had spoken of their charming and attractive manners. "I can't expect to be brilliant."

"I was not making any comparison, Felice," he said deprecatingly. "They are not to be compared with you; no comparison is possible!"

"Oh, I know I am not a match for those or any other of your acquaintances!" she remarked with exasperating assurance, purposely misinterpreting his words. "Hadn't you better consider before it is too late?

His face paled. She was trying him beyond endurance. He had an angry retort on his lips, his heart was rebelling against this petulance, but he checked it. Feeling that it was necessary to say something, yet unable to trust himself to say more than a word or two, Llewyn turned on his heel with—

"It may be worth considering!"

He made his way hastily to his own room, where he sat in moody reflection.

"It would be a sad blow to Uncle James, but I am beginning to think that it must come to it!" he muttered. "It may be all very well to keep the name of Graham at the Grange, but I don't wish to spoil her life. I am passionately fond of her, and it would be well to unite the two branches of the family at the old home, but that is only sentiment, after all! Uncle could make it a stipulation that her husband should take the name of Graham, or that, if she sold the place, I should have the first chance of acquiring it at a fair price—not that I think she would sell it! I'll think it over a little longer before I mention it, but I feel that it will have to come!"

It was the last day of the visit of her friend, and Felice was struck with the worried look on Madge's face.

"What is wrong, Madge?" she asked, half earnestly, half banteringly. "Are you not looking forward to having your husband all to yourself?"

"Well, no, it—— That is——"

"So it isn't all happiness to have him all to yourself!" cried Felice, picking her up quickly, and laughing at her own smartness. "Well, if it is like that with you two, how will it be with Llewyn and me in another six months? You have had a little romance and I haven't!"

"I'm worried, Felice," said Madge, with unusual earnestness. "It isn't about myself, but—— You brought him into the conversation, so I shall not hesitate to mention him. Llewyn, I mean. I'm worried about you, though, more than him! Tom told me this morning, you see!"

"I don't see, so please explain!" Felice felt a strange something at her heart; her cheek was a trifle paler and her breath came less freely.

"Well," said Madge in desperation, "he told me something about your cousin that worried me, for your sake. I don't know how Tom got hold of it, and I suppose I ought not to say anything about it, but I must. I wonder if you would be very sorry if—if you lost him and he married another whom he loved better?"

An impatient gesture from Felice had caused Madge to shorten her rigmarole, and say what she meant in a blunt way. The girl looked strangely at Madge as if unable to comprehend; then she went as pale as death and both hands pressed against her heart. She seated herself in a chair near her friend, and steadied her voice to speak.

"Do you mean that Llewyn is in love with another girl?" she asked, with appalling calmness.

"Tom says he is positive about it!" asserted Madge. "I thought you ought to know. Tom said you wouldn't care a fig; he thought you would be rather pleased to be free, because you did not treat Mr. Graham as you would if you were fond of him. That's true enough, isn't it? You won't care much about losing him, that may be, but it isn't fair of him not to say so straight out."

"Don't say a word against Llewyn!" cried Felice almost fiercely. More calmly she continued—"Are you sure of this?"

"Tom is positive," repeated Madge, "and I must say that Mr. Graham has not seemed so attentive to you during the past three days as before. You must have noticed that yourself. But you don't care, do you, Felice?"

She stopped helplessly, for the girl before her was on the verge of swooning. Madge jumped up in alarm, but her movement had the effect of recalling Felice to her surroundings and she signed to Madge to resume her seat.

Both sat mute for fully two minutes, Madge watching with something akin to fear the varying expressions of her friend's face. At last—

"I must see Llewyn," said Madge, in a hollow voice. "He will tell me the truth."

"I thought you did not care for him, Felice, or I would have left the unpleasant task of telling you to somebody else to perform. I thought—you would be almost glad of your freedom, although annoyed at being——"

"Glad!" echoed Felice, in an expressionless voice. "Glad Madge, if he does not love me I shall die! I have never realised it before. I know now how wicked I have been to trifle with the love of a good man! It all comes to me like a horrid panorama! I must see him and learn the truth from his own lips. And if it is true——"

"Your father would like to see you, Miss Felice," said an old servant at this moment. She had knocked at the door, and, receiving no response, had opened it.

Felice went mechanically to the study, where she found her father in a state of considerable excitement.

"What is this that Llewyn has been telling me?" he asked excitedly. "I can't have this! You must go to him at once and set it right! I—Oh, dear, I can't have it! Go to him and see what you mean, the pair of you!"

"I'll see, father!" said Felice.

She kissed him and went out into the garden, towards a corner which was reserved for the private use of Mr. Graham, his daughter, and Llewyn. She was told that he was there.

"Has anything happened?" asked Llewyn, as his cousin approached him and he observed the extreme pallor of her countenance. "Is your father ill?"

"No, it is nothing!" she replied in the same hard voice as she had spoken the short sentence to her father.

She searched Llewyn's face for signs that would tell her what she expected to hear, but he was all anxiety. Yet it must be true; her father's remarks, coming immediately on Madge's revelation, were proof enough. Llewyn had told her father that he did not care for her, and wished to be released from the engagement.

"Don't trifle, Felice!" said Llewyn sternly. "When you

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come to me with a face like death, I know that there must be something very serious the matter. Tell me at once!"

He spoke sharply, and it caused her some surprise; he was always so gentle.

"I have come to ask you a question, and I wish you to promise me, on your word as a gentleman, that you will give me the truth in answer. Will you?"

"Of course I will!" he replied, staring at her blankly.

"Whatever I ask?"

"Whatever you ask!"

"Llewyn, are you in love with another woman?"

He started in amazement, and answered with some show of bitterness.

"No, I am not! But it would not affect you if I were, would it?"

"Yes, Llewyn," she said clearly, decisively, drawing a long breath, "it would kill me!"

"Felice!" was all he could exclaim.

"Why did you tell my father that you were in love——"

"I said nothing of the kind!" denied Llewyn stoutly. "I could not say it, for it would not be true! I told him that, as you did not love me, it would be better to give up the old arrangement and allow you to marry where marriage would bring happiness with it."

"Then—you thought—that I did not love you, Llewyn?"

"Yes, Felice! You have so often complained that I was forced to believe it."

"It is wrong," said Felice steadily. She was penitent, and determined not to spare herself. "I do love you, but until to-day I never realised how much. I thought I had lost you, and I had an awakening!"

"My love!" cried Llewyn. He held out his arms, still hesitating, lest she should not respond, but she threw herself into them and he pressed her to his breast and kissed her again and again.

"But who told you that I was in love with another woman?" asked Llewyn, when they were wending there way back to the house, his arm round her waist.

She told him all that had passed between Madge and herself laughing guiltily when she repeated her friend's homely truths.

"I did treat you shame——" The rest was smothered by a kiss.

"Tom Dawson must have keen powers of reasoning, if he deduced any conclusion of that kind from what I said!" cried Llewyn sarcastically. "But first we will go and explain to your father, and then you can settle with your friend while I talk to Dawson."

"No, no!" cried Felice hastily. "It was a privileged communication! I will speak to Madge while you talk to father."

Madge was unfeignedly surprised and delighted with the news that Felice had to tell, and promised to rate her husband soundly.

"I wouldn't do that!" said Felice with a happy laugh. "Through his mistake I have found happiness, so I ought to thank him for being a little—too sharp, I mean! I will thank him the first time I see him!"

Madge went off to find Tom in order to rate him soundly. She began as soon as she saw him.

"You have made a nice mess of that about Llewyn and Felice and another woman, haven't you?" she asked with vexation in her voice.

"Then it isn't true?" asked Tom demurely.

"All wrong! But it did good, though, for it awoke her to a sense of her conduct and told her that she really loved him, and so it turned out that your silly mistake did a lot of good and made everybody happy. And Felice is going to thank you for being silly and——"

"It was an odd mistake, wasn't it?" queried Tom drily, so drily that Madge stared and then gasped.

"You made it up, Tom, just to bring about the awakening that she wanted! And you never let me into the secret! That's too bad!"

"I thought you wouldn't act the part properly if I told you!" said Tom contritely. "I won't do it again!"

George Day.

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To each of the ten competitors whose sentences the Editor considers the best, will be awarded a handsome Gramophone.

All attempts must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday, November 11th.

RESULT OF THE "CUT-PICTURE" COMPETITION.

A SPLENDID Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following competitors, whose attempts in the above competition were the neatest of those which were found to be correct:

D. Pope, 5 Vernon Place, Birkenhead; J. Duxbury, The Central Newsagency, 32 George Street, St. Helens; F. Holt, 29 Rake Street, Bury; H. A. Joyce, 80 Westmorcland Road, Bromley, Kent; P. Smith, 4 Challoner Terrace, East, South Shields; Miss A. Mackenzie, 46 Teulon Street, Walton, Liverpool; Miss Olive Oliver, 21 Lee Road, Harpurhey, Manchester; Miss M. Bredall, 3 Birdhurst Road, South Croydon; Sergt. Jas. McKenzie, 77 St. Vincent Street, Glasgow; Chas. Sobey, 2 North Road, Queenboro; J. Bullers, 100 St. Asaph Road, Brockley, S.E.; B. Beales, 19 Birchin Lane, E.C.; E. Hardy, 46 Mersey Street, Hull; C. Pollard, 35 Heygate Avenue, Southend-on-Sea; W. Anderson, 66, Brunswick Street, Edinburgh; R. W. Vanderben, 47 Henry Nelson Street, South Shields; Miss Scott, Hope Villa, 17 Cann Hall Road, Leytonstone, N.E.; Miss J. Fisher, 125, Mornington Road, Leytonstone; G. W. Weller, Kingston Lodge, Prestonville Terrace, Brighton; J. Barnes, 105 Ruckholt Road, Leyton, E.; B. Nash, 2 Buxton Road, Brighton; W. Vernon, 3 Hull Street, Crumpsall, Manchester; Mrs. Wathen, Draycott, Cheddar; H. Howe, "Rossmoor," Grosvenor Road, Ilford; W. Murray, 11 Church Road, Cadoxton, Barry.

BELOW will be found the key of the numbers of the squares in their correct order.

PICTURE No. 1.

44	39	51	30	8	2	23	43	4
11	49	15	21	28	25	48	33	46
1	52	27	13	37	17	5	26	20
53	19	9	14	41	35	3	16	6
45	54	40	24	18	32	10	34	29
42	36	12	50	47	31	22	7	38

PICTURE No. 2.

11	48	54	30	49	34	10	7	8
22	28	1	52	9	31	29	17	46
36	35	33	27	19	20	12	4	18
26	53	51	37	16	21	13	25	38
32	47	45	6	41	39	3	5	14
23	50	40	43	2	44	42	15	24

PICTURE No. 3.

51	24	14	50	13	42	23	22	12
10	43	39	9	18	35	38	53	48
28	44	41	27	5	30	16	40	3
31	38	54	26	19	17	20	4	46
32	45	21	47	2	11	6	25	29
34	1	52	33	49	37	15	7	36

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A Mixed Affair.

I Marry Your Sweetheart, You Marry Mine.

"How are you, Jack?" cried Fred Wilmot as he warmly shook hands with his chum Jack Blyth. "I was just coming to your place, old man, and I am so glad I met you."

"What's up?" asked the other; "anything fresh?"

"Nothing beyond this," said Fred, "that I am in a little bit of a fix, and I want you to do me a turn and help me out of it."

"Of course I will," replied Jack; "say the word and I'm your man."

"Well, it's like this. I promised to take Miss Rivers to the theatre to-night and unfortunately I can't. Mother got a wire that Miss Steel will arrive at King's Cross at eight o'clock and of course, I am to go with the *mater* and meet her, I being the only man of the family."

"Isn't Miss Steel a cousin of yours?" asked Fred.

"Well, she is a kind of half cousin on my mother's side. Now it is rather sneaking on my part to palm the job on to you, but there is no time to warn Miss Rivers, and if she keeps the appointment and I am not there, you know there will be a beastly rumpus."

"Well?"

"Well? well? can't you say well again? don't you see what I am driving at?"

"No, not exactly."

"Would you go and meet her in my place?" blurted out Fred. "I know it is awkward for you, but——"

"You want to go by proxy?" said the other laughing; "all right, old man, I've no engagement on, and will obey your commands. Give me particulars as to where we meet, when we have to be home, how many times we have to laugh, and——"

"Oh, hang it, look here, you don't mind the job, do you, Jack?"

"Not at all, I'll be there."

After getting particulars the two friends parted, the one to see his cousin and the other to see his friend's best and sweetest girl. It was a foregone conclusion that Jack would be best man at the marriage, so there was nothing out of place in acting as substitute in a case of emergency like this. The only point was that Miss Rivers might feel the position, yet if she exercised the common sense with which she was supposed to be so richly endowed, there was no cause for friction.

Arriving at the place indicated by Fred, Jack waited for a cool quarter of an hour, then he saw Miss Rivers approach. She started when she saw who it was waiting for her, and inquired anxiously after Fred.

"Oh, Mr. Blyth, you gave me such a fright," she said; "something must have happened to Fred. Where is he? and why are you here?"

"I will explain matters in less than no time if you will allow me, Miss Rivers," replied Jack laughing. "Fred had to attend to a very important piece of business, and was called suddenly away, so he asked me to meet you as he did not want to disappoint you?"

"It is very considerate of him," and she tossed her pretty head to convey its ironical meaning, "but he might at least have found time to wire me, and not have me coming here for nothing."

"Thanks awfully," replied Jack with a grin. "You know what the poet says——"

"Never mind the poets, Mr. Blyth, you can tell Fred from me that I am very disappointed in not seeing the play."

"All right, Miss Rivers," he replied; "I'll do so with pleasure—that is—I mean I'll let him know that you were so much upset by meeting me, that you declined to go to the theatre," and he heaved such a sigh, that it blew out his cigarette.

"Oh, did Fred ask you to escort me?" she said with a pleased look.

"He appointed me to the dignity of ambassador, and representative of——"

"Now don't say such silly things," she interrupted with a merry pout, "and if we are going to stand here all night, we had better be going, as the Irishman said."

"Then you confess you haven't come for nothing after all."

"Come on, you silly goose," she replied laughing; "if you don't behave yourself better I won't go at all."

For answer Jack Blyth wheeled round and hailed a hansom and they were soon bowling along, and chatting on all the commonplace topics of the day.

Suddenly Miss Rivers said, "You have not told me what the business was that prevented Jack from coming?"

"He will likely tell you himself," was the reply; "you see, probably he did not think it important enough to make a special mention of it."

"But you know?"

"Yes, of course I do, but why so inquisitive?"

"I'm not inquisitive; I only want to know all about it."

"That's a good argument for a woman," said Jack laughing; "would it do you good, and be conducive to your happiness if I told you?"

"Yes; I am dying to know."

"But don't die just yet, or you won't see the play."

"There's no chance of getting anything sensible out of you," she said with an attempt to look angry; "will you tell me where he has gone?"

"To the railway station," he replied.

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"Oh, don't be so provoking or I will get out," she said, stamping her foot on the cab floor. "What did he go to the station for?"

"To meet a train." And he smiled a smile.

There was silence profound as the cab drew up at the theatre door, and not a word was exchanged as they took their seats in the circle.

As the piece proceeded, Jack stared hard at the stage, and when the curtain dropped on the first act, he carefully perused the hideous advertisements displayed to remind the people that they were not allowed to escape the worries of the outside world, and must be reminded even immediately after the hero has died at his post that "Silas Konkus toffee is the best."

The awkward silence could not last for ever, so Miss Rivers condescended to remark, "Aren't the dresses lovely?"

"Where?"

"On the stage, of course."

"I don't see any," he replied, with a provoking smile. "I was admiring the way that man is driving that pantechnicon

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and four horses. Now don't you think it a shame," he said sadly, "that after listening to the histrionic gifts of clever actors, that you are required to be reminded by that man sitting on his box, that he will remove your furniture by land or sea, at contract prices."

"Really, Mr. Blyth, you are getting too awful, I wish I had not come. I——"

"I am so sorry, Miss Rivers, if I have offended you," he replied ruefully; "I'll say no more about the pantechnicon man, if you don't like him. Perhaps you would prefer that cheerful undertaker's advertisement up in the right hand corner, he——"

"Are you going to behave yourself, or shall I leave you?" asked Miss Rivers with as severe a frown as she could muster. "You have spoilt my night's enjoyment, I will never come with you again."

"Have some chocolates, Miss Rivers?" he asked, completely ignoring the young lady's last remark. "I can recommend them. The last young lady I had with me said they were delightful."

"Oh!"

"Yes; will you have some?"

"Certainly not," was the reply, with a great amount of dignity, "you can get them for her the next time you bring her here."

"Oh, but I take some home occasionally, you see, my sister is very fond of chocolates."

"Your sister?" with an inquiring glance.

"Yes, why not? most sisters like chocolates, don't they, Miss Rivers?" he asked, with a provoking smile. "I——"

But the band in the orchestra struck up and closed the debate.

The remainder of the evening passed pleasantly enough. Jack Blyth felt peculiarly happy, as he sat next to Miss Rivers. Why, he could not say, but he was enjoying himself thoroughly, and felt almost boisterous in his mirth.

Miss Rivers could not but admit to herself that Mr. Blyth with all his faults was very pleasant company, and on the return home from the theatre she for some time seemed in deep thought, then suddenly said:

"Has Fred gone to meet his cousin?"

"Which one?" asked Jack with pretended innocence.

"How many has he, Mr. Clever?" replied Miss Rivers laughing. "I only wanted to know, for instance, if it was Miss Steel he went to meet?"

"Do you know her?"

"I have heard of her from Fred. I know she was coming to London on a long visit, but the time had not been definitely fixed. Am I right in my guess?"

"I will explain to you in as few words as possible," replied Jack with a smile. "Fred Wilmot went to King's Cross to meet his cousin, Miss Steel, and——"

"Now do stop that nonsense," cried Miss Rivers, "and talk sensibly. I did expect that Fred would have come to meet us as we came out of the theatre, but I suppose his time has been fully occupied in attending to his cousin," and a slight tone of jealousy showed itself as she spoke. "Not that I care, of course, but if he prefers her company to mine he can please himself in the matter, I will never submit to——"

"Hello!" cried Jack laughing, "you say you don't care?"

"No, not a bit," she replied with emphasis.

"Then why worry?" inquired Jack in mock solemnity; "you will find when you see Fred he will be all right, and as the poet says——"

"Oh, bother the poets, here we are at my place. Won't you come in, Mr. Blyth?" she asked as the cab drove up.

"No, thanks," he replied, "it is much too late, but if I——"

"You can tell Fred when you see him that I am not pleased with him."

"It would be better for you to tell him yourself. Don't you think so, Miss Rivers? The question I am most anxious for you to answer is, have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Very much indeed, Mr. Blyth. I am very pleased to have had your company Now we will say good-night."

(*Continued on next page.*)

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"Good night," and Jack Blyth raised his hat and walked down the street with a light step.

Fred Wilmot duly arrived at King's Cross to meet his cousin. They had met before, when she was of short frocks, and he of the merry knickers and scarlet stockings. He had recollections of a pretty face and laughing eyes, but he was simply dumbfounded with surprise when he beheld one of the loveliest girls he had ever seen step on the platform when the train drew up. Fred's mother and sister were there to give her a warm welcome; and after the first greetings were over, Miss Steel turned to Fred and said, with a merry laugh:

"Why, Fred, you have grown to an awful size; and, I must confess, good-looking too! Don't you think so?"

"I can't say as to that," replied Fred pulling himself up to his full height, and stroking out to its full length what did duty for a moustache. "I don't know much about my looks, cousin Minnie, but you—well, I must compliment you on your dazzling——"

"Come, come!" said Fred's mother, with a smile; "don't begin to flatter each other so violently already, or you will quarrel soon. We will now see to getting home," and putting her arm into that of her niece, she left Fred to follow on with his sister, and a rather disappointed look on his face.

Fred had originally made up his mind to go to the theatre just to put in an appearance at the end to smooth matters over with Miss Rivers and thank his friend Jack; but the time at home passed so cheerily that he delayed and delayed till he found that he was too late to be of any service in that direction, so he told his conscience not to blame him under such extreme circumstances.

Miss Rivers was duly introduced to Fred's cousin, Minnie Steel, so also was Jack, and, strange to say, whenever a proposal was made to go anywhere they always formed a quartette, which arrangement seemed to give satisfaction all round. Of course Fred was in duty bound, so he told himself, to see that his cousin enjoyed herself, and was taken round to see the sights; and Miss Rivers seemed to have no particular objection to the arrangement, so everything went smoothly up to a certain time.

"HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA" commences this week.
See First Page.

The four friends went into the country for a day's outing; and in the general course of things strolled about at their own sweet will; but Miss Rivers found herself completely in charge of Jack Blyth, while Fred Wilmot disappeared with his cousin, and a search for each other was vigorously proceeded with in a half-hearted manner, as though each party were afraid of succeeding in finding the other.

"I think it is beastly mean of Fred to go and leave us as he has done!" cried Miss Rivers, tossing her head. "I will never come out like this again!"

"But you see, Miss Rivers, this is an exceptional case."

"Oh! of course you men can always find some excuse for yourselves; but I call it simply horrible treatment to be left by myself in this manner!"

"Thanks!" replied Jack with a grin. "Your compliments are like rays of sunshine and balm to a fellow's feelings."

"No nonsense, Mr. Blyth, you must go and look for them."

"That's what we are doing now, aren't we? If you consider me nobody, Miss Rivers, would you kindly allow me to be your shadow?"

"I did not call you a nobody, Mr. Blyth," she replied, looking away from him. "You are trying to make yourself generally disagreeable or fishing for compliments."

"All right, Miss Rivers," he replied, laughing. "As your name applies, I will do some fishing. Anything to catch?"

"You should not be so funny when——"

"When you are angry. Come, Miss Rivers, confess you are angry; but why with me? What have I done to cause you to snub me as you do?"

"I don't snub you."

"Yes you do. If things are as they are, I am not to blame. I know perfectly well I have no right to be so often in your company"—she looked at him—"but it is only a matter of convenience for the time being."

"It is my turn to return thanks for your kind consideration, Mr. Blyth," she replied haughtily. "We had better return to the hotel and see if the others have arrived."

"Of course I am always putting my foot in it," said Jack. "I meant no offence, Miss Rivers."

"I don't care whether you did or not!" was the reply; "it is quite immaterial to me, I can assure you."

"Oh! in that case we had better do as you suggest and return at once. I hope you will not be offended if I propose that this should be our last meeting, as apparently my company always seems to annoy you?"

She would have answered him if she could, but it took her all her power to choke back the tears that were ready to burst out, so they walked amid a silence that was most painful; and Jack Blyth swore he would never more do this sort of thing. It had apparently brought misery and disappointment to Miss Rivers, which upset him very much. As, though he was supposed to be a half careless sort of fellow he was thoroughly genuine at heart, and he did like her very much. The journey home that evening was none of the most enjoyable. Miss Rivers complained of severe headache, and not one of the four seemed particularly sorry when the time arrived to say good night.

Two or three evenings after Fred Wilmot burst into Jack Blyth's rooms with the announcement that a grand excursion had been planned for the next day.

"I say, old chap, you will come, won't you?" cried Fred.

"I rather think not," was the reply. "I have had quite enough outing for the present, and will now take a rest."

"Oh, hang it all, man!" cried the other, "we cannot do without you."

"Is that the reason you ask me?" said the other, with a slight grin.

"What are you grinning at?" asked Fred laughingly. "Is there anything tickling your imagination?"

"There is—slightly."

"Oh! What is it?"

"*You* have no idea, I suppose?"

"Well no; I can't exactly say that I have."

"Not exactly," said the other. "I quite admit that; but give me half of your idea, and I will give you half of mine."

"Now, don't get up an argument, Jack," cried Fred. "The point is, will you come to-morrow?"

"No!"

"No? Why?"

"Simply because I say no."

"What's wrong, old man? Have I offended you?"

"Not in the least; but you must admit that if I do not wish to come and join you, I am entitled to my opinion?" and he smiled a thoughtful smile.

"Look here, Jack, what am I to do without you? The four of us were going to take a boat and——"

"You require me to pull?" with a laugh.

"But Miss Rivers is going with us."

"Oh!"

"Yes."

"Now look here, Fred—do you hold that out as an inducement?" and he looked his friend straight in the face, and calmly waited his reply.

"I—I—that is, I thought that you enjoyed her company?"

"Well?"

"Why do you look at me like that?" asked Fred. "Are you suspicious of anything?"

"Are you?"

"What is all this fencing about?" asked Fred with an innocent air. "There is something in your mind."

"And yours?"

"Will you come?" asked the other, evading the question.

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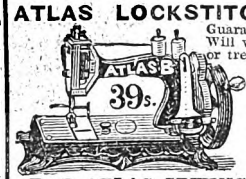

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"I might come on one condition, and that is, that I take Miss Steel for——"

"But," broke in the other eagerly, "you know it would be very awkward for me; you see I have had her company since she came, and she would think it strange to—to——"

"Just so."

"Now, don't interrupt me, Jack. I am only doing a duty, and I am much obliged, sincerely obliged to you for the way you have done. I admit it is hard lines for you, but I—that, I——"

"Are you finished?" asked Jack, with a knowing look. "Is this all you have got to say?"

"Well, you see, it's like this——" And a prolonged pause ensued.

"Like what?" asked Jack teasingly. "You have not explained what like it is, or any other like. But may I ask if you like your cousin?"

"Of course I do; it is only natural one should like ones relations, isn't it?"

"Of course not," drily; "there can be no particular objection to anything of that sort, or liking your fellow-creatures, for that matter. Why, I like Miss Steel very much myself," he said calmly.

"What!" and Fred jumped to his feet.

"Certainly," replied the other. "'Love thy neighbour as thyself.'"

"Come now, Jack, it is time you stopped this nonsense!" said Fred, which was followed by rather a watery laugh.

"Will you come to-morrow and assist me to entertain the ladies?"

"Now, look here, Fred, it is all very well for you to spin a yarn about my assistance, etc., etc., but do you think you are treating Miss Rivers well when you have neglected her to a great extent for some time past? Do you think it fair, I ask you?"

"But then, Jack, you were with her."

"That is begging the question altogether, Fred. You must not forget my dear fellow, that there is still a regiment called the Marines, to whom you had better apply to believe your story of disinterestedness in the matter. The fact is, you are deeply, madly in love with your cousin. Can you deny it?"

No answer.

"Why don't you own up now at once and be done with it?"

"Well, you know I can trust you, Jack. I am hopelessly gone, and what am I to do? I am happy, and yet I am miserable. I know I have not treated Miss Rivers as I ought to have done, but I am sure she will forgive me."

"With what object? Do you intend to be madly in love with Miss Steel and yet marry Miss Rivers? My advice to you is to go home and put a poultice on your head and get that nonsense drawn out. If you are in such a state make a clean breast of it to Miss Rivers."

"I am awfully sorry, Jack!"

"To tell you the truth, Fred, I am not!" and Jack calmly lit a cigarette.

"What do you mean?" asked Fred, as he saw a peculiarly joyful look on his friend's face. "Why do you say that?"

"Because it will enable me to come to your boating trip to-morrow, and I will ask Miss Rivers personally if she has any objection to my coming."

"Jack!"

"What?"

"Do you mean to say that——"

"Same as you, old man, and got it badly. I believe I will be able to relieve you of a terrible——"

"Come on, Jack! Shake hands, old man!" cried Fred. "I am glad it is over, and we understand each other."

The boating expedition duly came off, and when the party returned in the evening, judging from the happy faces and merry laughs, a most enjoyable day had been spent.

Jack Blyth declared he had been promoted to better than the best man at Miss Rivers' marriage; but Fred Wilmot and his cousin were too engrossed in their own happiness to see the joke

Alan MacGregor.

Miss Madge Morris' Marriage.

100 PIECES OF WEDDING-CAKE TO BE GIVEN AWAY.

READERS of *Short Stories* who were readers six months ago will remember the circumstances under which Miss Madge Morris came to conduct the "In Confidence" page. They will remember that she took up writing in order to make sufficient money to enable her to set up housekeeping. Her *fiancé* was not in a position to marry at the time, and had poor prospects of any substantial increase, so Miss Madge Morris decided to contribute her portion of the sum which would enable them to marry, by writing for the papers.

For the past six months she has conducted the feature known as "In Confidence" in this paper, and has contributed several articles to the other periodicals issued from the offices of *Short Stories*. The money which she has received for this work has been carefully saved up, and I am now pleased to be able to tell my readers that

Miss Madge Morris

WILL BE MARRIED ON

Tuesday, the 2nd of December.

She chose Tuesday because it is the day on which *Short Stories* comes before its readers, and she has to thank this little paper mainly for her success.

And now I have a rather startling offer to make. Miss Madge Morris, in the course of her duties, has frequently had dealings with readers who have seemed to her more like personal friends, and these readers number thousands. It is Miss Morris' wish that she should send a piece of her wedding-cake to all of these friends. But this, of course, is obviously impossible; it would require a cake as big as St. Paul's. We have, however, found a way out of the difficulty in the following manner:

We shall purchase a big wedding-cake for Miss Morris, and after the wedding festivities are over it will be cut up, put into boxes, and sent to certain readers of the paper.

Altogether a hundred delicious pieces of cake will be sent out.

Moreover, the beautiful centre ornament from the top of the cake will also be offered as a prize.

The conditions under which you will be entitled to receive a piece are as follows:

All you have to do is to sit down and write a short congratulatory letter to Miss Morris on the auspicious occasion of her marriage. The reader who sends what Miss Morris considers to be the best letter will receive the beautiful centre ornament from the top, and the senders of each of the next hundred best will receive a piece of the cake.

Send your attempt to Miss Madge Morris, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope "Wedding" in the top left-hand corner.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Lorn Natalian.

A SOUTH AFRICAN correspondent writes me to the same effect as did a Russian client recently. This gentleman, too, wants me to act as an intermediary between him and some English girl who would be inclined to accept an offer of marriage from an unknown suitor. He is in a good position, but has nobody to share it with him. To my friend, who calls himself "INTOMBI," I must answer as I answered the Russian gentleman. Do it through mutual friends. I am afraid I cannot undertake to be the agent in the matter, though my own personal sympathy is certainly with "INTOMBI." But surely there is not such a great absence of girls in Natal and the Cape that he, with a little enterprise, could not meet one likely to be as amenable to his attentions as any strange English girl with whom I might, with the best will in the world, be able to place him in communication?

Four is Company, Three None.

"ADA" is engaged to Frank, who sees her very often. Now "ADA'S" brother has a friend staying in the house, who has been very attentive to "ADA," without, however, becoming too pressing. The other day he suggested her going to a theatre with him, but "ADA" replied that she usually went to such places with Frank, who would not like her to go with anyone else. To which the other man replied, "Oh, do get him to come, too. We will all go." Now, Frank does not want to go to the theatre with the girl and the other man, and yet "ADA" does not want to be discourteous to the latter. How can she arrange the matter amicably for all parties?

* * * *

Certainly it would not be nice for all three of you to go. Why not ask a girl friend to accompany you, and make up a party of four? To this there could be no possible objection on anybody's part, and if your lover objects, he would be acting very much after the manner of the dog in the manger.

Another Photo Question.

I CERTAINLY thought, "M. H.," that I had dealt with your question regarding your friend and his photo, but possibly it was another of the same kind, and I associated it with yours. However, please accept my apology for the confusion. You made the acquaintance of a man on a sea trip, and he was very, very attentive to you. He hinted at love and marriage, but you, thinking it only a chance meeting, did not take him seriously. When you parted he asked you for your photo, which you complied with, and sent to him. He wrote back, promising to send his own as soon as he had it taken. Now two months have elapsed, and you have heard nothing from him. You cannot forget the man, and feel you care for him more than any other. Would it be wise for you to write to him, or do I advise you to wait till Christmas and then send him a memento?

That last is really quite a good idea. Why not wait till Christmas? Choose a card, or memento, which has a suggestion of a hint about those who are quick to promise and slow to perform. It would be a neat way of conveying the sentiment you feel. As he is the guilty party, of course if would look rather undignified for you to appear so anxious to secure his photo as to take the initiative in reminding him of it.

A Probable Flirt.

"FRANKO" suffers from ingratitude and mothers. He is twenty years of age, and for the sake of a girl to whom he has been attached, left his native town and lived in her neighbourhood. Promising to be always true to him, she has lately been accepting attention from another man (please, "FRANKO," don't use the word "gent"). This man has the approval of the girl's mother. When the girl writes to "FRANKO" she says she likes this other man, that "she is going to enjoy herself while young," and so on. To which "FRANKO" has replied, "Do as you like." Do I think, if she really loved him, she would have acted in this way?

* * * *

The girl, "FRANKO," is a flirt. She has behaved in a most ungrateful manner, and is not worth your concerning yourself further. As to her mother's connivance, I do not for one moment think that if a girl were really devoted to a man her mother's opposition could force her to accept the advances of somebody else. The opposition of mothers usually has the result of making a girl more and more fond of her own lover. No, she appears to have grown tired of you, and evidently is looking out for novelty. Let her go her own way. You cannot force her back to you. Perhaps, though, she may in time repent, in which case you should receive her again in a forgiving spirit. Meanwhile allow her to go her own way, as you appear to be doing, and await consequences.

An Anglo-Dutch Complication.

"PERPLEXED SUITOR" lives in Pretoria, where he is a book-keeper. He is twenty-three, and is very much in love with a girl of nineteen, who, however, has, since the beginning of the late war, resided in Holland, where her family went on leaving the Transvaal. In spite of the long period of absence, he still devotedly loves her, and she is aware of the fact. However, he fears she will marry in Europe. There is only a possibility of her coming back to the Cape in a few years' time.

* * * *

You are awkwardly placed. She is many years younger than yourself, and a girl's ideas often undergo great change between sixteen and nineteen. Tell her what your prospects are in Pretoria, whether in a year or so you will be in a position to offer her marriage and a comfortable home. On her answer should depend your course of action. It is useless for you to expect to hold under a bond any girl thousands of miles away from you, and living under entirely different circumstances, unless there is some such understanding between you.

* * * *

The other possible course is your being able at some future time to come back to Europe—even just for a visit—when you might make your proposal in person. Do you see the possibility of this within a year or two? If not, have you a friend who might be likely to see her on your behalf, and talk matters over with her? Meanwhile I advise you to think about making your way in the new colony, until such time as you are able to go to Europe and offer her marriage on your own account, or to establish yourself sufficiently well to ask her to come out to you, trying in the meanwhile to keep a hold on her affections by continuously writing to her and reminding her of your feelings.

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Short Stories.

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(See our Fascinating New Series. "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA," first page).

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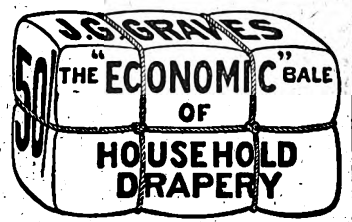

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Short Stories.

No. 724. For the Week Ending November 15th, 1902. One Penny.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

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LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Her enthusiasm is misinterpreted. Instantly all is confusion. The guide, however, snatches Belinda from danger, and hurries them away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, then suddenly with a cry of: "It is you, you! Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all. He's David Carr," throws herself into his arms.

The Duke Begins to Score.

Conceive, if you can, my feelings!

The situation was one words cannot adequately express. Here was a young girl, who, before the Duchess of Eastacres and the Duke of Eastacres had publicly embraced a dragoman! For a dragoman to all intents and purposes he was. The fact that under his disguise would be found one David Carr, a civil engineer, didn't affect the case at all. He had appeared before us as a native guide, as a native guide he should be treated.

"Belinda!" I cried in horrified accents, "are you mad? Come away from that person immediately. He may have

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cholera or small-pox, or some other dreadful disease. You never can tell what these natives suffer from."

"Why Lady Peggy, how absurd!" replied Belinda. 'David's an Englishman, he——"

I sternly interrupted her.

"That man," I said, "was hired by us this evening as a dragoman. I refuse to look upon him as anything else."

"Mousma" accepted the situation in a moment. He whispered something to Belinda—the nature of the communication I regret to say, I could not distinguish—then, with an exaggerated salaam, signified his readiness to conduct us to the hotel.

"Certainly not," said the Duchess, "I refuse to go another step in that person's company." She pointed the remark with a shake of her head—her bonnet, poor dear, was a little on one side, or I'm sure she would have looked dignified as ever, despite the distressing circumstances.

"Nonsense, mother," interposed Eastacres. "The streets are impassable to-night without a guide. The man will serve as well as any other." As he spoke the Duke took some silver from his pocket, and handed it to Mousma—nothing shall make me call the man David Carr!

That person, however, affected not to see his Grace's generous gift, but started off at a good round pace in the direction of the hotel. I followed close behind, with a firm hold of Belinda.

When we arrived at "The Continental," our dragoman had disappeared; Belinda seemed disappointed, but made no remark. She went upstairs at once to her room. I was about to follow, when the Duchess, in somewhat imperative fashion, demanded an interview.

"We'd better go to your sitting-room," she said stiffly; the dear creature had not a reception-room of her own, her

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jointure or her meanness would not permit of the extravagance.

"Lady Carstairs," she commenced, seating herself in a capacious lounge chair, "I think you are behaving badly."

"Really, Duchess——"

"Please hear me out. I am not accustomed to be interrupted. You gave me to understand that this girl, Belinda North, though of no birth and worse family, was not altogether impossible. In that belief, and having regard to Eastacres' inadequate income, I agreed if not to sanction, at any rate not to oppose your wish for a marriage between him and your—your charge. In view of what occurred to-night, in view of the indelicacy of the whole proceeding, I am bound to say you have behaved badly. You have, in fact, deceived me. The girl is atrocious, her conduct unspeakable."

Now this was more than I could stand. The Duchess had sent for her son by her own wish, not at my suggestion, and beyond mentioning the fact that North was a millionaire, and Belinda his sole heiress, I had given her Grace no information whatever. Besides, I wasn't going to allow anyone to call the girl I chaperoned "atrocious." Such an assertion threw discredit upon me. Other people besides Belinda had embraced a native—a real one, as the Duchess should learn.

"Very well, Duchess," I said stiffly, "if that is your opinion I have nothing more to say. We will consider all negotiations in regard to Eastacres at an end."

I rose as I spoke, and bowed in the direction of the door. The Duchess, who had expected penitence and pleadings on my part, was considerably astonished.

"I don't say that, Lady Peggy. Perhaps Belinda may improve. Still——"

"As to that, I can't tell," I answered. "Belinda met this David Carr on board the steamer. Her father warned me that she was smitten in that direction, but did not consider it more than a passing attraction. I saw Carr two days ago, and gave him to understand I would not tolerate his further acquaintance with Belinda. I told him also that the girl had passed her word not to communicate with or see him without my knowledge. That I suppose suggested the idea of a disguise. He appeared, as you know, as a dragoman, and we engaged him, and a very fortunate engagement it turned out for some of us. Those dervishes might have torn us in piecemeal, at any rate you seemed to think so."

The Duchess groaned at the remembrance.

"What do you propose doing in regard to this young man?" she asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. "It will not need much tact to get rid of him," I answered. "Things will evolve themselves. Belinda is young, and, like all girls, fond of admiration. She will soon forget him in the society of men his superiors in every way. But you must remember, Duchess, that a girl like Belinda, of great beauty and immense wealth, will be a prize desired by every *fortune hunter* in Europe."

I emphasised "fortune-hunter" purposely. It was well known that the Duke had proposed to two American heiresses.

"Belinda will be the centre of attraction wherever we go," I continued. "I am not unwilling to further your aims in procuring her fortune for Eastacres, but I cannot consent to criticism such as you have directed against me, because events turn out less favourably than you desire. There are others with a title as old as your own who would be genuinely desirous of winning Belinda. Eastacres is the first in the field, but I do not anticipate he will be the last."

"My dear Peggy"—the Duchess is wonderfully effusive on occasion—"you quite misunderstand me. I intended no criticism of you, your methods have always commanded my admiration. I merely expressed the horror I felt at witnessing Belinda's demonstrations of affection. One is compelled to swallow much to keep up a position nowadays. But," the Duchess shook her head, "I cannot swallow a dragoman! Besides, consider the example, the terrible example to Honoria."

"I don't think Honoria stands in need of an example," I returned drily. "It's only a week ago, the very evening that we paid a visit to Ilderim's bazaar, that I found your daughter in the arms of an Egyptian."

"What!" The Duchess bounded to her feet. "My daughter! Impossible!"

"It's very sad," I answered, "and I feel for you, dear Duchess, from the bottom of my heart. But, it is as I say. Mr. North and I, as you will remember, went to look for Honoria when she 'lost her way.' We found her in the garden of the old Moorish palace close to the Citadel. She was hugging an Egyptian—a real one, Duchess, not a white man in disguise."

The Duchess almost choked with rage. She was long past controlling her emotions, and begged me to ring the bell and summon Honoria forthwith.

That unfortunate young woman speedily appeared. She was dressed in a lank, green gown, and looked more than usually unattractive. The sight of her seemed to goad the Duchess into frenzy. In our set we do not trouble to conceal our feelings, or to veil our language when amongst ourselves. It is only to outsiders we are politely insolent.

"Come here," said the Duchess, "*here*," and she dragged Honoria under the electric light. "I am told that not content with disgracing me with your looks, your manners and your total inability to make a decent marriage, you are carrying on a disgraceful intrigue with a native—a vile, brown-skinned Egyptian!"

"He's not an Egyptian, mother. He's the son of a sheik, a pure-blooded Arab——"

"Good Heavens!" shrieked the Duchess, "do you dare to argue? What a pure-blooded Arab may mean, unless it refers to a horse, I don't know or care. But understand this—see this creature again, dare to degrade your name and family by such disgraceful conduct, and I shut you up. I mean it; your brother said you should have been put in a mad-house long ago. What!" as the wretched girl tried to defend herself, "do you defy me? You——" the Duchess bent towards her daughter, and with considerable violence slapped her face.

With a low cry Honoria stepped back, an ugly red mark on her sallow cheek. I half think the Duchess was tempted to slap her again, when the door flew open and Belinda, like an avenging goddess, swooped down on her Grace.

"You wicked old woman," she said. "How dare you! I heard you slap Honoria. Don't deny it"—the Duchess had no intention of so doing—"you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Don't cry, Honor, dear"—she turned to the weeping Honoria—"she sha'n't ill-treat you while I'm here. What's it all about? El Hamed, I suppose. Never mind, you shall see him all the same. I'll look after that. Only you mustn't promise not to or I can't help you."

She mopped up Honoria's tears as she spoke, and drew the limp figure close to her side. The Duchess, utterly aghast at this unexpected attack, glanced helplessly at me. I realised that the emergency required nice handling.

"Belinda," I said severely, "you have used most improper language to the Duchess. You must apologise at once. Rudeness at all times is vulgar, and when directed against a lady of her Grace's station it becomes unpardonable."

Belinda heard me with heightened colour, but her lips tightened into a straight line, and a mutinous look settled in the big, blue eyes. I realised I must deal with her in different fashion.

"Do you think your father would approve of your conduct?" I whispered. "Is it fitting that a young girl should speak in such a way to a woman old enough to be her mother?"—for that matter the dear Duchess might easily have been Belinda's grandmother.

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At the mention of her father the girl frowned. Then in a most unlooked-for fashion she capitulated.

"I ought not to have called you 'wicked,'" she said to the Duchess. "I apologise for that, but you shouldn't have slapped Honoria." She held out a slim brown hand, and her Grace reluctantly accepted the apology.

"I'm going to take Honor to my room for a bit," Belinda continued. "You don't mind?" She smiled at the Duchess, nodded to me, and whisked Honoria out of the door before there was time for anyone to protest.

The Duchess gasped and sank into a chair.

"Mark my words, Peggy," she said, "that girl will be a handful. I doubt if even you can manage her."

I smiled but did not discuss the question. I was quite sure of my capacity for managing Belinda, or any other young woman. Millicent had been difficult but I had broken her in at last. Diplomacy is the main thing required in dealing with young people. Give way to them in small things, never actively oppose them in big ones. Steady pressure tactfully applied will do all that is required. After a while I felt confident Belinda would respond to my will as easily as a thoroughbred obeys his rider.

I thought it better to supervise the interview between Belinda and Honoria, so leaving the Duchess to recover composure and to plan fresh ignominies for her daughter, I slipped away.

I found the two girls in the corridor. Belinda was engaged in parrying the Duke's inquiries as to what had happened to his sister. She—Belinda, I mean—was looking mischievous to a degree. Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks were tinted with a wild-rose flush. With short skirts and long hair—she only consented to put it up on state occasions—she was the picture of a wilful but a lovely seventeen.

As I hastened down the corridor a voice pursued me.

"Lady Peggy, Lady Peggy! just an instant."

I turned, and to my astonishment faced Lord Reginald Davenant—"Reg," as he was familiarly called.

"I thought you'd gone to Heidelberg?" I cried.

"Beastly cold place Heidelberg!" he replied with a shiver. "Had to come here—bad chest and things, you know. Who's that, Lady Peggy?" he glanced towards Belinda. "I must be introduced."

He advanced towards her as he spoke, and with a little thrill of gratification I introduced him. Reg gazed with undisguised admiration at the girl. He was renowned for his numerous flirtations and entanglements; indeed, an intrigue with Davenant carried with it a certain distinction; it was, so to speak, a certificate of smartness. I had my suspicions as to the reason that brought him to Cairo. The presence of Mrs. Murchison Lee—Midge, as the little American was called—had, I thought, as much to do with his coming as his chest! If Belinda should prove a successful rival to the dainty little Yankee, the girl's social reputation would be made at once.

Reg's demeanour had its effect on the Duke. Hitherto that nobleman, to use a racing phrase, had looked on Belinda as a sure thing. Her beauty and her millions were, he thought, his own when it should please him to claim them. Now, for the first time, he realised that the girl might have other suitors as distinguished as himself.

From that night he exerted himself to fascinate the girl And if his fascinations lacked freshness, Belinda was too ingenuous to know it.

The next morning the Duke's change of tactics became apparent. He looked us up directly after breakfast. Reg must have divined his intention, for he appeared shortly after nine—quite two hours before his usual time for rising. When he arrived, however, the Duke had already "scored."

Belinda had accepted Eastacres' invitation to join a party to the Pyramids. The Duke had asked her without referring to me, and the young lady had appreciated the compliment.

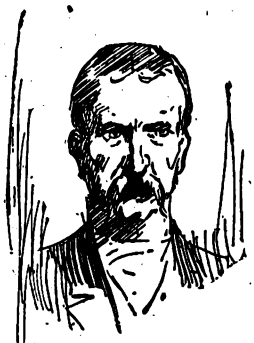
"It will be lovely!" she said, "only let us go on camels, *please*. It doesn't seem suitable to see the Pyramids in waggonettes. It's like a cheap trip to the seaside. Could we have camels, Duke?"

"My dear Belinda, what an absurd idea!" I exclaimed "No one will have courage to ride the creatures if you get them."

The Duke smiled tolerantly. "The more timorous can go in the waggonettes," said he. "Miss North and I prefer—er—camels."

To ride a camel was an immense sacrifice for him to make. Belinda for once had the grace to appreciate it.

"It's awfully good of you," she said enthusiastically. "Please may we spend a long time in the desert, or must we come back here to lunch?"



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

"I thought we might put up at the Mena Hotel; it's just at the foot of the great Pyramid, you know. If you and Lady Carstairs agree, we might stay there a few days."

"How delightful!" cried Belinda, with pink cheeks. She was only a beautiful child, after all, I reflected.

"It's really very kind of the Duke," she added; "isn't it, Lady Peggy?"

"The Duke's always charming," I said, smiling.

"*Always!*" remarked Lord Davenant from the doorway. "In what particular manner is his charm working this morning? A trip to the Pyramids—don't let him persuade you, Miss North; they're the biggest frost you can imagine. Three hours drive in a scorching sun to see a heap of stones! Much better come with me for a spin on your bike."

"I can do that as well," said Belinda politely, much to Reg's glee. His triumph, however, was short-lived.

"I am afraid you will have to forego that treat to-day, Miss North," said the Duke. "I shall want your help in choosing our steeds this morning; we ought to start this afternoon about three. I thought it would be a good thing to get to the Mena in time for *table d'hote*. What do you say, Lady Peggy?"

Belinda agreed with me it was a charming thought, and rushed off to get ready to go with the Duke, Reg pursuing her with offers of assistance.

"A charming girl," said the Duke, and pressed my hand.

I smiled, and gave a sigh of satisfaction. Matters were beginning to go as I wished. It would save me such a lot of time and trouble if Belinda married Eastacres.

My spirits were somewhat damped by the unexpected return of Belinda bearing a note.

"It's from David Carr," she remarked calmly. "I've only just received it. I suppose you'd better see what he says?"

I grasped the letter quickly, and, with much annoyance, read as follows:

"Look out for me to-day, dearest.—DAVID CARR."

"It's not very long, is it?" said Belinda regretfully.

"It's excessively impertinent," I returned.

"You see," she continued, "he doesn't say when, or where——"

"Or how you may expect him," I interrupted angrily. "Possibly he'll appear as a camel driver on this occasion."

Belinda chuckled. "Never mind, Lady Peggy, I won't tell the Duchess," and with an impudent smile she sauntered down the stairs.

I felt extremely vexed. Somehow or other these intrusions of David Carr must be stopped. I made up my mind as to that, though how it was to be done I could not think.

Crawley Drummond unexpectedly came to my assistance.

"That young man is coming here to lunch to-day, Peggy," he observed. "The dragoman, I mean—David Carr, you know. Sir Willoughby Tresham was speaking to me last night about him; says he's a very clever young fellow, bound to get on. Seemed immensely struck with him, in fact; and asked him here to lunch. Tresham's always interested in his own profession, you know; he's helped lots of young and promising engineers" .....

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I nodded my thanks to Crawley for the information, and with all haste made my way to the Duke's apartments. His mother's suite of rooms might be curtailed, not so his own. He occupied one of the largest and most expensive suites in the hotel, magnificently furnished and beautifully fitted up. My mission was of too delicate a nature to intrust to my maid; I had, perforce, to go myself.

I entered the drawing-room unannounced and apparently disturbed a family conclave.

The Duchess was seated by the window, gazing with ill-concealed dislike at the wretched Honoria. That unfortunate young woman was cowering on the floor, the Duke standing over her with a look on his face I did not like. I always deprecate extreme measures, though I know by experience what mothers have to suffer from recalcitrant daughters. Still, I daresay Honoria was very trying.

"Get up!" said the Duke. "Get up, I say!"

Honoria staggered to her feet. Her face was swollen with weeping, and there was a look of terror, wild, unreasoning terror, in her eyes.

"Now go to your room and stay there. And——" He paused. "Remember you are to be civil to Mark Striven when he comes this evening. You understand?"

The girl made no answer, but with the same wild look in her eyes left the room.

"Honoria was been favouring us with her views of my conduct," explained the Duke, "and intimated her intention of communicating them to Miss North. I don't intend that lady to be worried with my sister's nonsense. Honoria understands that now. By the bye, Lady Peggy, you know my cousin, Mark Striven? I hope to arrange a match between him and my sister. He'll be here to-night. Striven's a very decent chap."

Remembering the tales I had heard of Mark Striven I could not repress a little start. I even felt a touch of compassion for Honoria. However, it was none of my business, and certainly Honoria was aggravating. I decided to nip Belinda's friendship for her in the bud.

"I came to ask you, Duke, if you would arrange to have lunch to-day at the Gheyhizah Palace, or one of the other hotels? I want Belinda to see as much of Cairo as she can. That would bring you back here about half-past three or four—just in time to start for the Pyramids."

"I shall be only too delighted," he replied; "don't expect us, Lady Peggy, earlier than four."

I waited expectantly for luncheon. The Continental being the last place Belinda would expect to meet young Carr, she would be in no hurry to return. I pictured her glancing anxiously among the crowd in the bazaars, and down the Mooski trying to pick out David's tall figure from the throng.

The young man was evidently discomfited to find Belinda was not present. He gave an eager glance round the table, then, failing to find the face he sought, his own grew clouded. He was a very good-looking young man, dark as Belinda was fair, with brilliant eyes of a deep shade of purple and long black lashes.

I welcomed him with a sweet smile to a seat next to mine.

"Belinda was so sorry she could not stay to see you," I said softly.

"Did she know I was coming?"

"Oh, yes, we heard about it from Sir Willoughby. He's full of your praises, besides"—I looked him straight in the eyes—"there was your letter this morning, you know."

"Oh, yes, my letter," he repeated, obviously embarrassed.

"She's gone out to lunch with the Duke," I continued. "A pity you should have missed her." I sighed with sympathy, and turned my attention to my lunch.

David meanwhile discoursed on cataracts and viaducts and irrigation, with considerable fluency and eloquence. Sir Willoughby was evidently impressed with him. I made up my mind to use my influence with the engineering magnate to get a position for young Carr—an influential and well-paid position—somewhere in the wilds of Africa! Tresham would do it for me, I felt sure.

After lunch I suggested that David Carr might like a chat with me.

He acquiesced a trifle unwillingly, and it was with an obstinate, not to say a sullen look, that he opened the conversation.

"Lady Carstairs," he said, "it is only fair for me to say that I am just as resolved about Belinda as when I last saw you on the matter. Is it worth while, therefore, to enter on a discussion which can only end in one way?"

"Mr. Carr," I answered, "the discussion will end in an unexpected, not to say unpleasant, fashion, if you are not wise. I am Belinda's guardian; as such I have the right to choose her associates, and the power to enforce my choice. If you persist in persecuting my charge—for your conduct amounts to persecution—you will compel me to an unpleasant course. I shall be forced to appeal to the protection of the law. I mean it," as the young man started to his feet, "I shall apply to the representative of British justice here in Cairo, and ask protection for Belinda. You cannot set the customs and decencies of society at defiance with impunity, Mr. Carr, as you will learn. Have you no thought, no consideration, for Belinda's reputation?"

The young man smiled.

"Society, I know, is scandalous and cruel," he remarked, "but even Society would hesitate to cast a slur upon Belinda She's so young, so sweet, so——"

"Thank you, I am as well aware of Belinda's good qualities as you. I again repeat if scandal circulates concerning her, you will be responsible for it. You must give me your word to abandon all idea of seeing or speaking to her in the future, or I shall appeal to the law. Belinda herself has no wish to see you, she gave her word to her father and to me not to hold communication with you without my consent. And she knew quite well that consent I should never give. Your conduct is unmanly in the extreme. Belinda is beautiful, she is also an heiress——"

"You can spare me that sneer," he interrupted hotly. "If Belinda marries without her father's consent, she will not have a penny. That I know for a fact."

"And knowing that you would endeavour to persuade her into a clandestine marriage?"

"Not for an instant," he said quickly.

I smiled.

"Your marriage could never be anything but clandestine. Mr. North would not hear of it."

The young man became greatly agitated.

"I cannot give her up," he said, "and yet—" he paused. "Lady Carstairs, have a little pity for me, what can I do?"

"What we are all obliged to do some time or other, Mr. Carr, accept the inevitable. Resign yourself to give Belinda up."

The young man hesitated. Another minute and he would have given me his word, would have consented to put Belinda out of his life. But even as he hesitated, the words trembling on his lips, Belinda, most misguided maiden, suddenly appeared.

"David!" With a smile and a flush she flew to him with outstretched hands. He went towards her, and I shudder to think what might have happened had I not quickly interposed.

I stepped between them, laying my hand on Belinda's arm.

"Listen to me," I said firmly. "I'm not going to have a recurrence of what took place the other night. I did not blame you then, it was not altogether your fault. Now it is a different matter. Are you engaged to Mr. Carr?" I asked sneering.

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"N-no," said Belinda, blushing; "not exactly. But I should like to be."

"My darling!" interposed David.

"Belinda," I said firmly, "you and I must have an understanding. Either you promise, here and now, to obey me in regard to Mr. Carr, or I cable to your father to-night, and resign all care of you. I mean it. I will not be a party to deceiving Mr. North in the least degree. And you are deceiving him in intention, if not in fact. Tell this young man that you must decline to see him in the future, to receive his notes, to accept his messages, or to hold any communication with him whatsoever, or I cable to your father."

"Marry me at once, Belinda," urged David. "Your father will forgive you. Don't send me away, dearest, have courage to give yourself to me. It's our only chance of happiness. Something tells me that if we part now, we shall part for ever. *Belinda!*"

For a moment she hesitated. Her mouth quivered, her eyes filled with tears. Then—

"I can't, David," she said piteously. "I promised father I would stay with Lady Carstairs for a year at least. I cannot break my word."

"Promise me at least——"

Again I interrupted.

"I will have neither promises nor pledges. If Belinda gives you any, I resign my care of her. I owe it to Mr. North to prevent the least entanglement."

"Belinda, why not let Lady Carstairs cable to your father? If she gives you up he'll have to come and look after you himself. He won't be so hard-hearted, surely."

Belinda shook her head.

"He'd be worse, David," she answered. "Father would pack me off to the North Pole and get you sent to the South. And"—she paused—"I promised I'd stay with Lady Carstairs. It's no good, David, we must wait, that's all. Wait for a year. Then"—her voice shook, I thought she was going to break down. "I'll write to my father, David, and so can you, but I'm afraid it won't do any good."

"I shall stay in Cairo," said David fiercely. "If not at the Continental, then at Shepheard's. And I shall call here every day," and he glared at me defiantly.

"Best not, dear," said Belinda. "You can trust me, David. I must obey my father for a year, but *then*."

She clasped his hand, and for a moment the two young things gazed in each other's eyes. They made a beautiful couple, and in a play or a book I should have been quite sorry for them. As it was, I played the part of a cruel fate relentlessly, and did not even relax when David said farewell!

"Good-bye," he said hoarsely, "good-bye!" And the door closed behind him.

"For a year—only a year!" cried Belinda. "David, David, come back!"

She rushed towards the door, but I was too quick for her.

"Be quiet at once," I said sternly. "You're behaving very badly."

I left her to recover herself, and went to dress for our expedition with the Duke. A mere accident had been responsible for Belinda's untimely arrival. The Duke's watch had stopped. It might have had disastrous consequences; as it was, however, everything turned out satisfactorily.

Belinda had promised good behaviour for a year. And in a year many things would come to pass!

There were six of us going to the Pyramids. The Duke, Lord Davenant, and myself, Crawley, Midge, and Belinda. Honoria remained behind to give a welcome to Mark Striven.

We all assembled in the hall, all, that is to say, except Belinda.

Suddenly an awful scream rang through the house, a trampling of feet sounded in the corridor above—Belinda's corridor. And then a voice, hoarse with terror, shrieked.

"Help! Help! I tell you, help!"

That voice, that cry, merciful Heaven, was Belinda's!

(*What caused Belinda's terrible distress will be related next Tuesday.*)

Miss Madge Morris

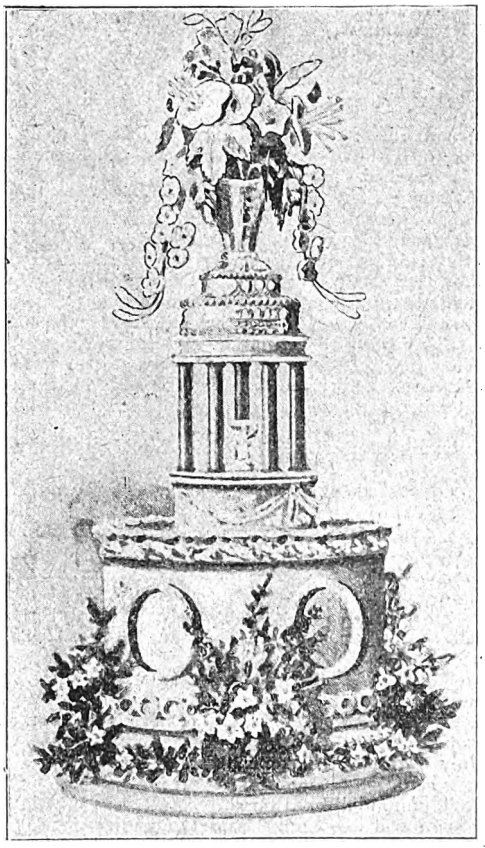
WILL BE MARRIED ON

Tuesday, the 2nd of December.

She chose Tuesday because it is the day on which *Short Stories* comes before its readers, and she has to thank this little paper mainly for her success.

And now I have a rather startling offer to make.

We shall purchase a big wedding-cake for Miss Morris,



and after the wedding festivities are over it will be cut up, put into boxes, and sent to certain readers of the paper.

Altogether, a hundred delicious pieces of cake will be sent out.

Moreover, the beautiful centre ornament from the top of the cake will also be offered as a prize.

The conditions under which you will be entitled to receive a piece are as follows:

All you have to do is to sit down and write a short congratulatory letter to Miss Morris on the auspicious occasion of her marriage. The reader who sends what Miss Morris considers to be the best letter will receive the beautiful centre ornament from the top, and the senders of each of the next hundred best will receive a piece of the cake.

Send your attempt to Miss Madge Morris, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope "Wedding" in the top left-hand corner, to arrive not later than Monday, December 1st.

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For Marion's Sake.

An Adventure on a Tandem.

The lonely white road wound up and up endlessly before me, the sun beat on my head mercilessly, and the flies buzzed into my face in a manner only cyclists can appreciate.

The tandem seemed to increase in weight as I plugged slowly forward, until I was almost tempted to think some demon of spite had got astride the vacant back saddle.

Over two miles of ascent still to go and then that little lane, a couple of hundred yards of level way, and Marion's home would be reached—my goal.

How I longed for it; once there, tea and tenderness would soon make amends for my hot ride, we should admire the tandem at our leisure, while planning future delightful excursions to be undertaken when my daily work at the Bank was over, for Marion was a first-class pedaller.

I should explain that the young lady in question was my *fiancée*, and that we were to be married towards the end of the year. She lived with her father and aunt in a pretty little house just beyond the brow of the hill up which I was toiling; at the foot of it, behind me lay Ellingham, while in the distance could be seen the haze of smoke which hung over busy Birmingham.

"A trying climb this, sir!" said a voice suddenly at my side.

A good-looking, clean-shaven young fellow was breaking into a trot to keep up with me.

"May I suggest, sir," he continued, "if you will excuse a stranger, that if you will allow me to mount, you will lessen your work, you would also do me a great favour, we are going in the same direction."

"By all means," I responded gladly, bringing the tandem to a halt at the side of the path. "I am going as far as Woodview."

"Woodview?" said the young man with a start, looking at me with sudden interest.

"Yes," I answered, growing suspicious in a moment; "do you know it?"

"Only by name," he replied carelessly; "I am almost a stranger here."

"Well, jump up," I answered.

"If you will allow me," said the young man, "I will mount in front, I am heavier than you are; it will make us travel better."

"Very good," I answered, seeing the force of his remark.

How that fellow could go! Onward and upward we flew; at length, in spite of the heat, his energy infected me, and I found myself ankling away eagerly.

He maintained a silence during the ascent. At length we arrived at the top where a cooling breeze greeted us.

Before us the hill dipped at a steeper gradient into the flat country beyond, while, just in front of us to the right, I could see the line of trees which ran along the lane to Marion's home.

"We are nearly at my destination now," I said, as he swung low over the handle bars and began to pedal more rapidly than ever.

"Yes, indeed," he replied.

"Hullo, man, steady!" I cried, "you will go past the lane at this rate."

"Oh, no, I shall slow up soon enough."

"I say," I cried again, "can't you pull up, here's the turn."

For answer he only worked harder. The machine swerved slightly as I endeavoured to guide it round.

"Steady," he roared, "or you will be killed." In another moment we were far down the road in a whirl of dust.

"What do you mean by this conduct," I exclaimed, now thoroughly angry. It dawned upon me that this was some reckless bounder, who wished to get a lift at my expense. "I see your game, but you will find you are dealing with the wrong man."

"Don't try to stop now," he answered doggedly; "we shall both be killed if you do, and that would mar your satisfaction at finishing me. But let me beg of you," he continued earnestly, "not to make a fuss when we get to the bottom. Don't tell anyone about this ride," he glanced over his shoulder for a moment; "for Marion's sake. I can't explain now."

"What on earth do you mean?" I cried in utter astonishment.

"I can't explain now," he repeated; "you shall know all later on."

He relapsed into silence. Indeed, there was little time or power for speech in that breakneck rush; all our energies went in holding on like grim death. The brake was on the front wheel and my companion did not use it.

Now a lumbering load of hay appeared before us, zig-zagging down the steep incline.

He rang the bell madly, but the lethargic countryman could not be aroused.

How the mad rider did it, I do not know; calculating the position to a nicety, he shot through the couple of feet of space allowed us, in safety, the hay sweeping stingingly against our faces as we did so.

We scarcely heard the growling exclamation of the driver, we must have been a quarter of a mile away before he had finished.

Then the descent became less steep as it sloped towards the level country.

Before us, a railway line wound through the fields, while the tall signal posts of a little wayside station rose on our left.

Suddenly my companion sat up, and the hiss of the brake told me that our journey was at an end.

Pulling up by the side of the road we dismounted, covered with dust and streaming with perspiration.

"We part here," said the madman, for that he was one, I was, by this time, firmly convinced.

"I am more grateful to you than I can tell for the assistance you have given me. You have, you will be glad to hear, done a service for one you love. Good-bye, sir"—stretching out his hand—"I am sincerely sorry for the trouble I have given you."

I found myself shaking hands with this strange man in silent amazement.

"But tell me——" I began.

"Nothing now," he interrupted promptly; "it would be neither advisable nor is there time."

A long whistle sounded down the line.

He started, and again wishing me a hurried "Good-bye," he ran towards the station.

The train came slowly to a standstill and I saw him spring lightly into it. He turned slightly as he did so, and I saw that he now wore a light beard.

What did it all mean? At all events here I was, I had to face a mile and a half of stiff hill, puzzled, dust-covered and tired as I was.

There was nothing for it, so I started stiffly to face my task.

In a short time I met the haycart coming slowly towards me. The carter gazed at me stupidly and pulled up his horse.

"Be you one o' they chaps that buzzed past me just now up there?"—he jerked his head backward

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"Yes I am," I replied.

"Be you mad?" was his next query.

"Well, no, I hope not," I answered half laughing.

"If you bean't, t'other chap wuz," was his ultimatum as he cracked his whip and resumed his journey.

Certainly I did not blame him for his deduction.

At length I arrived at Woodview. Marion was in the garden talking earnestly to her father.

As the gate swung open they turned towards me. What was this? No sign of pleasure on their white faces.

"How are you, my boy" said Mr. Duncan kindly. Then turning to his daughter, he continued: "Do as you think best, Marion, I can trust you to act rightly," and without another word, he entered the house.

"Marion, dear, what is the matter?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh, Jack, I can't tell you," said the girl with a sob; "but we mustn't be engaged any more—we mustn't really—it's for your sake Jack, indeed it is, but I must break it off."

"Marion, what is it?" I cried aghast.

"I can't tell you, dear, you'll know soon enough, to-night perhaps, but you must take this now"—and she drew a flashing circlet from her hand.

"Has it anything to do with the fellow I met on the road," I asked, my head in a whirl from all the strange events of the afternoon.

"What fellow?" said Marion eagerly.

I then told her what had happened and described the man I had met.

"Yes," she said, when I had finished; "that must have been Dick—my step-brother—you know I have often spoken about him—and you helped him"—after a pause—"yes, I do thank you—and now dear, please go; I want to be alone." And I went, sorely stricken and puzzled.

I walked back to the town slowly. The newspaper boys were shouting "Speshul" with more than ordinary eagerness.

"Great robbery in Birmingham. £10,000 stolen. Escape of the criminals!"

Hastily buying a paper I tore it open. I somehow felt that here was a key to the mystery.

There it was, sure enough, in white and black.

"A daring robbery has been perpetrated on the well-known firm of Messrs. Trucott and Willis, of Birmingham, whereby they have lost a sum of about £10,000. It appears that to meet some special calls, gold to the above amount had been placed in the firm's safe, the night before last.

"Besides the partners, but two men; Henry Thomas and Richard Trent"—Heavens! that was Marion's brother—"both trusted employées, had access to the safe. Thomas, the elder of the two, did not return to work after luncheon yesterday, but Trent, who lodged with him, finished his day as usual.

"The robbery was discovered before business hours this morning by Mr. Willis who went early to the office to have some letters typed. Somehow Trent must have got wind of this, for when the police went to arrest him at his lodgings, he had fled. He had, however, the audacity to address a letter to the firm, declaring that he was innocent."

That was all, but it was enough. I had helped a criminal to escape. I had seen his disguise as he entered the train. At all events I could put the police on his track. Stay!—Marion's brother—his words came back to me. "Don't tell anyone about this ride, for Marion's sake."

What was I to do? I hurried to my lodgings and threw myself into a chair. Marion had released me because she believed him guilty. Was it only a dodge on his part to work on my feelings—that mention of Marion's name? How had he known me?

I confess I never felt so perplexed in my life. Liverpool would swallow him up and hide him, as it had many before if I only held my tongue.

At length I resolved to do nothing. Marion, of course, was the chief factor in this decision, but somehow the man struck me as honest, and then there was his letter—perhaps there was more in it than the newspaper reporter supposed.

I rose next morning and set about my business with a heavy heart. I had never for an instant wavered in my feelings towards my *fiancée*, and, now that I knew all, I was determined to go out to Woodview as soon as possible and set things straight between us.

It was with a sigh of relief that at four o'clock I turned the key in my desk and set out on my mission.

Again I traversed that long white hill but in a very different mood from that of the day before. Then all was well, now a cloud of trouble hung over the house of my beloved.

There she was in the garden; I almost fancied that she was waiting for me.

I need not go into our conversation during the next half hour, it suffices to say that as we sat there together in the evening sunlight something again sparkled on the third finger of her left hand.

The gate swung open.

"A telegraph boy," cried Marion; "what can it be?"

"Miss Duncan, ninepence to pay for delivery," said the stolid youth.

Marion seized the envelope and tore it open with trembling fingers, then, with a glad cry, she handed me the slip of paper.

"*Have caught thief*—DICK."

"Here, boy, keep the change," I cried joyfully, tossing a half a crown to the youngster, who pocketed it with a grin.

"Father, father, come here, it's all right!"

Mr. Duncan appeared at the door.

"It's all right, father, Dick is innocent and he has caught the thief, see, here is his telegram."

"Thank Heaven," said Mr. Duncan fervently; "I am as glad for your sake my dear girl, as for him, and you, my dear fellow," he said, turning to me; "you did not desert us in our trouble."

For answer Marion shyly held out her left hand. "Ah, I see," said her father, smiling. "Well, Jack is no fair weather friend—now, I suppose, neither of you want me particularly just now."

The short account of his adventures, told us by Dick Trent himself, is the best way in which I can tell his story.

"You know I lodged with Thomas," he began. "A quiet, decent sort of fellow. On the day he bolted I went out before him, but, having forgotten my gloves, I ran back. I found him closing a small, strong leather bag. He seemed greatly put out at my reappearance, but I thought nothing of it at the time.

"When I returned from the office, as you know, he was not there. Although I had not the slightest idea of the truth, I took a look through his papers, to see if he had left any message.

"I found nothing but a scrap of crumpled paper with a Liverpool address on it, and a time table. I went to bed late that night. I could only think that he had been intrusted by the firm with some sudden and important business.

"Just as I was starting for work next morning a boy brought me a note. '£10,000 missing at office. T. and you suspected.—R. S.'"

"Who is 'R. S.'?" I asked.

"R. S. is the young lady typewriter," said Dick with a blush, but that is another story.

"I did not know what to do; if I gave myself up, I thought that the possible delay might let Thomas slip off, besides—I suppose I was a fool—I wanted to do a bit of good 'on my own,' if I could. I can see how it all worked out beautifully against me, now.

"Well, to make a long story short, I ran and walked from Birmingham to Ellingham. I knew that the stations were watched, and by the aid of my future brother-in-law, I managed to catch a train to Liverpool.

"There, at the address I had found—Thomas' only slip—I ran my gentleman to earth in a quiet lodging, with all his cash."

"How did you know I was Marion's *fiancé?*" I asked.

"By that little locket on your chain," replied Trent smiling. "I ought to know it, for Marion commissioned me to buy it."

That is the whole story. Dick Trent is now in Thomas' position, with excellent prospects. As for R. S., well, there is to be a double wedding some time about Christmas.

C. G. F. Chute.

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The Coward.

WHOSE BRAVERY WON HIM A WIFE.

A DREADFUL panic passed in an instant down the narrow-crowded street. Women screamed helplessly and fled, clutching at their children as they ran. Men shouted impossible directions while they fought blindly to reach a place of safety. Scarcely half a dozen people retained any semblance of self-possession, and even these were helpless against the surging multitude. The panic was terrible, the confusion became worse every moment.

"Stop! Hold it! Catch the bridle! Pull it back!"

The crowd, acting on blind instinct, divided into two portions scarcely separated from each other. Through the narrow passage thus formed, the runaway horse swept like a whirlwind, his nostrils distended, eyes bloodshot, neck and shoulders flecked with foam. The rider, a girl apparently not much out of her teens, had lost all control over the animal, and only retained her seat with difficulty.

About a hundred yards further, the street turned at right angles into a narrow footpath, and practically ended in a high stone wall.

A terrible cry arose from the crowd as they realised the almost inevitable tragedy. The girl herself seemed to lose her presence of mind, she began to sway helplessly in the saddle, her hands left the reins and grasped the saddle bow with despairing energy.

At that moment a man dashed forward and seized the hanging reins with his right hand and then with both. It was not a time for gentle measures. He pulled ferociously, savagely, as though he would wrench the animal's mouth asunder. He was whirled from the ground and swept forward apparently helpless. If he loosened his grip of the reins for one moment he would assuredly have been under the horse's hoofs the next.

But he hung on with grim determination, a quality quite as useful in mastering animals as men. The runaway fought on a few steps more, then hesitated, and finally stood still, his hide steaming, trembling in every limb. As for the man who had just conquered him, he sank to the ground, apparently seriously injured.

As soon as affairs reached this stage, the supply of heroes became greater than the demand. One assisted the girl to the ground, another attended to her refractory steed, while yet a third enlisted the services of a cabman.

Grace Lauraine accompanied her rescuer, bidding the man drive to the nearest doctor. This by good luck happened to be the medical adviser to the Lauraine family, and an aspirant, indeed, for a still closer connection with at least one member of it.

Doctor Horace Lloyd welcomed his visitors with great pleasure. He was very pleased Miss Lauraine had brought the gentleman who had saved her life to his house instead of to the hospital. Of course, anyone who had been able to do Miss Lauraine a service was a person to be courted—not to say envied, added the gallant doctor. Miss Lauraine had thought of—oh, nonsense! Wouldn't hear of such a thing. Mr. Dean Howard—he hoped he had the name correctly—must stay with him, for a while, at any rate.

He poured out all this and a great deal more at such a rate that Miss Lauraine was scarcely able to say a word, much less refuse his offer. It is probable indeed that in her heart she was grateful for his kindness, and, as this was exactly the reward which he coveted, the arrangement was satisfactory all round.

At this moment the housekeeper entered to say the bed-room was ready for the invalid. Miss Lauraine took her leave, promising to call next day, her rescuer was carefully carried upstairs and put to bed, and the doctor himself, after all these matters were satisfactorily arranged, returned to his study feeling he had at least turned into the unfrequented path—for it is *not* a highway, with all deference to the phrasemaker—which would lead him to success.

A small leather pocket-case lying upon the floor attracted his attention as he entered the room. He picked it up, guessing immediately that it had fallen from Dean Howard's pocket, as they lifted him from the sofa. A glance inside the pocket-case, while it verified his surmise, only increased his curiosity, a feeling which he had always subordinated to honour. He took a seat by the fire and carefully set himself to learn the visitor's history.

The first half-dozen papers he looked at were unimportant, except for the fact that they proved Dean Howard to be a gentleman both by birth and education, albeit fallen upon somewhat evil days. Presently, however, the doctor came to a letter written by a woman of considerable age, if the long, quavering loops, and the rigid appearance of the smaller strokes, could be relied upon.

The doctor read this letter several times, and each time with increasing astonishment. When he had thoroughly mastered its contents, he replaced it, and put the pocket-case in his desk to be returned to the owner at the first opportunity.

Doctor Horace Lloyd was a man who deceived himself almost as much as he deceived other people, which was saying a great deal. His desire to be the husband of Grace Lauraine sprang from purely mercenary motives, a fact he would be the last to admit, even to himself. He was a man who could play boldly when the stakes were sufficiently high to tempt him. In the present instance he judged that the frequent visits which he anticipated Miss Lauraine would make to his house, coupled with the remembrance of his kindness to her rescuer, could not fail to advance his wooing. In his own mind he tried to convince himself, with considerable success, that his hospitality was merely a proof of his generous heart.

As luck would have it, Mrs. Lauraine took a great liking to Dean Howard, that sort of wistful affection often evinced by ladies who are nearing the meridian, towards young men of their acquaintance.

So far the game was going exactly as the doctor wished, for the good lady developed a habit of making frequent visits to his house, accompanied by her daughter. On these occasions the invalid, who was fast becoming a convalescent, would be assisted downstairs, and the evening pass all too quickly.

This probably applied more to the invalid himself than to any of the others. He had only his own thoughts for company during the greater part of the day. These naturally led him

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to the occasions when the monotony of solitude was relieved by Mrs. Lauraine and her daughter. He began to anticipate their visits with dangerous longing, but it was only a chance remark by one of the others which revealed to his mind how much the presence of Grace Lauraine added to his happiness.

Affairs were drawing to a climax all round. The maternal eye of Mrs. Lauraine soon discovered the direction in which both the doctor and his guest were drifting, and although she appreciated in the state of affairs a compliment to herself (as indeed she did in nearly everything that happened, in which she was at all concerned), the situation was nevertheless perplexing. From the personal point of view she preferred Dean Howard, but then she knew practically nothing of his character or social position. He was curiously reticent on the latter point. On the other hand, the doctor was undoubtedly a rising man in his profession; steady, clever, well connected, but—Mrs. Lauraine had set her heart upon the other man.

Two or three evenings later Dr. Lloyd went far towards solving her difficulties. Under a pretext of showing her a new suite of furniture he had purchased, he led the way to his study. As soon as he had installed his visitor in a cosy armchair by the fire—

"My dear Mrs. Lauraine," he said soothingly, as though he were addressing a patient, "I have a very painful communication to make to you. Please don't move," he added, as she started in some alarm to her feet, "it won't take me long to say what I have to say. Afterwards you can judge for yourself whether I was justified in telling you."

Mrs. Lauraine had not belonged to the feminine sex for fifty years for nothing. She began to simmer in a state of gentle curiosity.

"It concerns our mutual friend, Mr. Howard," continued the smooth, hard voice. "He dropped a pocket-book in the hall the other day. The housemaid brought it to me, and thinking it belonged to a patient, I opened it in order to discover the owner. The first paper I looked at was a letter beginning 'My dear boy,' and signed 'Your disappointed mother, Catherine Howard.'"

"*His* mother," murmured Mrs. Lauraine.

"Precisely! Of course I only noticed the signature after reading the letter through."

"Yes, of course. And what did she—what was in the letter?"

It was a pity that the smile upon the doctor's face was not visible to Mrs. Lauraine, owing to his having purposely chosen a seat in a dark corner.

"In her letter," continued the smooth voice, into which there crept a faint ring of triumph, "Mrs. Howard disowned her son. She said he had disgraced the family for ever. He had made their name a byword in the county. He had committed an unpardonable crime."

Mrs. Lauraine saw her favourite being pulled to pieces; but she made no sign of protest. Her daughter's happiness was at stake, and, although the doctor's news hurt her more than she would have cared to confess, she steeled herself to endure, though she could not entirely conceal the distress she felt. Surely the feeling which caused her to push her chair back among the shadows was pardonable.

"They had obtained for him a commission in the 175th Hussars, in which he had risen to the rank of captain. When the South African trouble broke out, his regiment was ordered to the front. During the great fight at Glencoe he disappeared. It was thought he had been taken by the enemy, but after the battle he was discovered in his tent, white-faced and trembling. White faced and trembling!" he repeated, with merciless emphasis. "He said he had been taken ill; anyhow, he sent in his papers immediately afterwards and retired, but certainly not 'without a stain on his character' as they say."

Mrs. Lauraine sank still further back amongst the shadows, feeling that her latest ideal was irretrievably shattered. Herself the daughter of a soldier, and a V.C. at that, she had always been taught that cowardice was the one unforgivable sin. She remembered how Dean Howard had told her, only the other day, that he was the nephew of a retired general, whose displeasure, however, he had incurred. But even yet, though sorely assailed, her woman's heart refused to yield its faith without a struggle.

"He showed no signs of cowardice when he saved Grace's life," she said, speaking with the greater warmth because she instinctively felt her cause was unworthy of it.

"No one is either a hero or a coward all his life," said the doctor carelessly. "Human nature, or rather human character, is not unlike a pendulum."

"Did Mrs. Howard's letter tell you all this?" asked Mrs. Lauraine, firing her last shot, "I should scarcely have expected her to go so much into detail."

"She did not do so. The letter merely showed me where to look, and I obtained most of the information from an old newspaper file. But, my dear Mrs. Lauraine," he said earnestly, trying in vain to banish the ring of triumph which ran like an undercurrent through all he said. "I hope you understand how painful this duty has been to me. In these few weeks he has become more to me than many friends I have known all my life."

"It's very creditable to you," stammered Mrs. Lauraine, who was completely upset, "I am sure—it has been a shock—quite a shock—of course it's utterly impossible—now—I must tell—must arrange——"

"I thought it my duty to let you know," continued the doctor, gauging her weak, good-natured face with professional accuracy. "They are alone now," he added, as though speaking to himself.

"Come," said Mrs. Lauraine, speaking with that unnatural energy sometimes displayed by easy-

The girl was swaying helplessly in the saddle, when suddenly a man dashed forward and seized the hanging reins with both his hands

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going people, "let us return to the drawing-room, they will think we are lost."

The inevitable reaction overtook her as she entered the drawing-room, closely followed by the doctor. She felt a vague desire to sit down somewhere by herself and have a good cry. Then a sudden anger possessed her against the man who had so upset her peace of mind and disturbed the harmony of affairs generally.

But all these vague fits of petulance disappeared in a moment before the shock of another surprise, greater if possible than that she had already experienced.

Dean Howard advanced slowly to meet her, leading Grace by the hand. One glance at her daughter's face told its unerring tale to Mrs. Lauraine. She turned towards the doctor with a mute interrogation, in which dismay and triumph were curiously blended.

"With your consent, Mrs. Lauraine, Grace has promised to become my wife." Then he turned his honest eyes towards the doctor. "We have no secrets from you, Horace," he added, "you have been more than a friend to both of us."

The doctor dashed the proffered hand aside. For once in his life he was completely taken by surprise. The inherent brutality of his nature broke away from all restraint.

"I congratulate you," he sneered, "on having surprised me. I did not think it possible. As for the other matter, I will reserve my congratulations until Mrs. Lauraine sanctions them."

Dean Howard and Grace looked from one to the other in utter bewilderment. Mrs. Lauraine made a slight forward movement in answer to the doctor's challenge.

"I think—would you—will you come into the next room, Mr. Howard," she said, "if Dr. Lloyd will kindly allow us?"

The doctor bowed and smiled. But it was not a pleasant smile by any means.

At this moment the door was suddenly opened from the other side. The little housemaid, trembling with a sense of sudden importance, announced the arrival of General Sir Poynter Howard.

The gallant general was in the room almost before she had reluctantly allowed the last syllables of his name to pass from her lips. He bowed vaguely to them all, but it was towards Dean Howard that his glance was mainly directed, and it was Dean Howard's hand he grasped in a decidedly friendly manner.

"My dear boy," he cried presently, when the introductions were complete. "Why on earth didn't you let me know of your illness? I only heard of it accidentally. Always risking his life for other people," he added, turning to the astonished doctor, "ever since he was an Eton boy."

Mrs. Lauraine began to feel more and more mystified. Surely the General would scarcely speak of his nephew in this affectionate, almost admiring way if the latter were indeed a coward. She glanced appealingly towards the doctor, but was met by a stony stare.

As a matter of fact, that worthy was beginning to feel more uncomfortable than Mrs. Lauraine herself. His native shrewdness already suggested the mistake which had been made, and the same useful quality was presently employed in considering how best to extricate himself all round.

With the arrival of the General, the question which had previously caused so much commotion appeared to have been temporarily postponed by general consent. Dean Howard, who was too honest himself to distrust other people easily, had already satisfied himself in his own mind as to the probable reason for his friend's sudden fit of rudeness, and when the doctor presently seated himself beside Grace, he smiled with renewed pleasure. Probably Horace wished to beg her pardon, he thought. Well, he knew she was not hard-hearted, and especially not at that moment. And as for himself, he had won the prize for which they had both striven, and the winner can always afford to be magnanimous.

"Can you ever forgive me for my boorish display just now?" murmured the doctor to Grace.

"I hardly expected it from you of all people," she said reproachfully, "and after all your previous kindness."

"You can surely guess the reason?" he whispered excitedly. "The news was quite unexpected; I had hoped—no matter what; I have no real excuse, and can only throw myself on your forgiveness. I have lost everything else."

Dr. Lloyd excelled in two useful arts. He was a consummate actor, and he understood the ramifications of that wonderful maze—a woman's heart—to perfection. In the present instance he said just enough for his purpose and not one word more. And as he expected, and indeed intended, he was forgiven as thoroughly and heartily as only a woman can forgive.

"I suppose you'll be leaving us all now and setting up house in great state near Dean's uncle," he said presently.

Grace shook her head doubtfully. "I don't know how the General will take the news of our engagement," she said; "he seems friendly enough now, but it seems he practically disowned Dean only three months ago."

"Hard luck," murmured the doctor, trying to restrain his eagerness, "College bills, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, nothing of that sort. Do you remember a few years ago reading in the paper about a young soldier named Howard, who was practically dismissed from the Army for cowardice at Glencoe?"

The doctor bent his head thoughtfully to one side ere he replied with a doubtful affirmative.

"Well, that was the General's only son. After the scandal the son left home. The General gave him five hundred pounds to leave the country, and then asked Dean to take his place as the son of the family and heir to everything. Dean refused, out of a feeling of honour towards the scapegoat. The General was very choleric and—and they parted."

The thought of that misleading letter lingered still in the doctor's mind. "I suppose the mother didn't like her son being sent away, coward though he was?"

"Dean showed me a letter she had written to him—to her son," she added, "saying how disappointed she was. She addressed it to Dean in mistake, being in such terrible trouble, and so upset at the time. It reached him on the same day he saved my life, and he has since returned it."

The doctor had had quite enough of explanation by this time, but one thing more remained to be done. He made his way across the room and explained the mistake to his fellow conspirator, binding her over to secrecy in their joint interest. Mrs. Lauraine was only too pleased to promise anything so long as she could keep her good opinion of Dean Howard.

"By-the-bye," said the General presently, producing a newspaper cutting with great pride and handing it over to his nephew, "Your cousin has turned out all right after all. Joined the ranks of the 14th Hussars and sailed with them to the Cape. And now he's been mentioned in despatches and promised a commission, and will probably get the V.C. as well," added the old soldier, unable to retain his pride. He turned towards his nephew with a sudden remembrance—"It's as well you didn't take me at my word the other day. The old homestead will go down in regular succession now, I suppose, but anyhow, the Grange at Silstead is yours whenever you like to settle down there—find a wife and that sort of thing."

The young man sprang to his feet at this unexpected but delightful offer.

"I have already found a wife, uncle," he said, "if her mother will only consent."

Mrs. Lauraine raised no objections this time. And the General, who had taken a fancy to Grace from the moment he entered the room, smiled approvingly all round.

Frank Wall.

KIND PARTY: "Why are you crying like that, my little boy?" Little Boy: "Cause it's the only way I know how."

"I NEVER give money to beggars in the streets," said the pedestrian. "But, my dear sir," returned the beggar, "I can't afford an office these hard times. You expect too much."

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HOLD YOUR PEACE.

A Tale of a Modern Enoch Arden.

"Tell us a story, Gentleman Joe—unless we are all to cut each other's throats in this awful heat."

The sun had gone down, a ball of liquid fire in piled up cloudsoforange, tipped with bronze. The sky was like copper. In all the wide plain not a breath of air stirred. The weather was of that quality that works madness in men's blood; slight provocations brought about quarrels to the death.

Gentleman Joe turned slowly round from his contemplation of the camp fire we were bound to keep going because of the beasts that roamed the plain at night. We made it as small as we dared.

"Tell you a story, mates? My best are all told."

Gentleman Joe passed his hand through his scanty, grey locks, and mopped the perspiration from his face. He looked round the group with keen, kindly eyes, and smiled.

"Dig something more out of your memory, old man," Big Dan said eagerly, "give us a yarn to make us forget this blooming plain." Well, his language was not as mild as I have put it, I tone it down for civilised folks.

"Yes, go on, old chap. Who's got a chance of sleeping on a night like this? Give us something to think of besides the heat!"

A great red moon climbed into the copper sky over the edge of the plain. Away to the south, angry voices of beasts disputing over their prey were carried to us on the breathless night. Someone threw a stick on the fire to keep it smouldering. Then we lay still—as still as the heat would let us, whilst Gentleman Joe yarned to us. We had always called him that ever since he joined us. God knows whether he had a real right to the title, but our roughest chaps paid him a sort of deference. We never knew what his antecedents had been—none of us ever knew.

He was silent a moment before he began that yarn. His eyes looked far away over the greyness of the plain under the red moon. Then he said:

"Reminds me of a harvest moon at home."

Some of us stirred uneasily. Queer recollections came to most of us, I expect, but nobody spoke, and he went on:

"I haven't got any of the usual tales in my head to-night. I guess that moon—and—and other things, make me think of old England, and of something that happened to me. 'Twas a queer sort of a business, and I don't say that I was right in what I did. I don't say I was wrong either. I've often thought about it since, and wondered. I did what came into my mind to do at the minute. God knows I acted for the best—but sometimes I wonder whether I did right—or wrong.

"I'm getting on in years now. It all happened many and many a year ago, but it comes back to me to-night as if it was yesterday. I was a young chap—when I last saw a harvest moon rise over a cornfield at home."

He stopped for a minute, and I could have sworn somebody choked and gulped. Men get a bit foolish when the heat takes hold of their brains, and they begin to think of green lanes, and trees, and of grass that isn't as brown as the sand on the sea shore.

None of us said a word, and Gentleman Joe went on. I believe he had forgotten the place where he was, and the still, deadly heat, and everything, except that cornfield somewhere in old England.

"I was courting in harvest time," he said; "we would walk together across the field of wheat in the sunset—she and I—and the wind would sweep down from the heath a quarter of a mile away, and bend the ears of corn, and make the red poppies bow their heads. Beyond the wheatfield was a field of barley—gold and silver she used to call them, when they shone in the sunset light as the sun dropped behind the elms in the lane.

"She was only a slip of a girl, and I was little more than a boy, but we were to be married in October. Her home and mine lay close together; I had known her always, and I—well, I was mad about her. I can see her now—walking over the cornfield, and looking back to laugh at me and call me sentimental. Ah! I was a hot wooer, and an impatient one. Her eyes were blue as the speedwell in the hedges, her face was like a briar rose—I was mad about her," he repeated slowly, "I thought—she cared for me the same as I did for her. Perhaps—she did—then. Perhaps it isn't ever fair to compare a man's love with a girl's.

"I only know I walked in Heaven those days. Sometimes we went over the fields in the evening, after the corn was cut, and it stood in sheaves among the stubble, and a great red moon came up over the elms. The world was fairyland to me—then.

"We were to be married in October, and then I was to go out West to a ranche that was waiting for me. In the Spring I was to come back and fetch Kitty. That was the plan. But plans don't always pan out right, any more than other things do." His usually gentle voice suddenly sounded hard, but it softened again at once.

"Well, we were married in October—Kitty and I—and I was the happiest chap in the British Empire that day. She looked—I can't tell you how she looked on her—wedding day. Her white gown shone as she came up the church to my side, and the sun came in through the coloured glass of the windows, and made great purple splashes over its whiteness.

"An old chum of hers and mine—Dick Lane, I'll call him—was my best man. I never guessed—not then—that he had felt for Kitty something of what I felt for her and that she——

"Never mind about that. She and I were married. We walked down the church path together, man and wife—and the yellow leaves of the chestnut tree made a carpet for us to walk on to the lych gate.

"There was a cottage down the lane. Kitty and I went there, and for a month I was happy as a king. Nothing came to spoil my happiness. Life seemed to stretch before me like a path of gold.

"And then I went away. I left my wife there, in our little home, where she had old friends about her, and my mother just up the road to take care of her till I could fetch her in the Spring. Her own people, too, were close at hand; I felt she would be safe. It gladdened me to leave her as my wife; I had had hard work to persuade her to marry me so quickly, but she had agreed at last, and I thought that she was as happy as I. But the parting was bitter—the parting was bitter.

He was silent again after those words—a long, long silence.

"I went West," he resumed abruptly, "and got started with my ranche. I prospered mightily. Nothing has prospered so well with me since. Perhaps I have never had much heart for it! When I was getting ready Kitty's home, everything went well. I felt myself just the luckiest chap alive. I could have sung all day for gladness. I counted the days till Spring should come, and I panned out just how everything would be when she and I drove up to the ranche together.

"That didn't all pan out the same as I meant either. There's

a funny sort of muddle sometimes about this business we call Life.

"I built my house, mostly with my own hands, my mate on the ranche giving me a help now and then. I tell you I made that house a cosy place for my little girl, and the room that was to be her sitting-room was the one I spent most thought and time over. I tried to see it all with her eyes—the eyes of a girl fresh from the old country—and I don't believe she'd have been dissatisfied with it if she'd got there.

"But she never came—she never came."

Another long, long pause whilst the red moon climbed higher in the copper sky, and turned slowly into a golden ball that seemed to hang far down into the plain.

"Life out West was wild in those days—wilder by a long chalk than it is now," he said at last. "You've heard my tales about the times we had with Indians. But you never knew before, that when I was raided there on the ranche, and taken to the Apache camp, I had a wife waiting for me in England. I never told you that, I didn't seem able to talk about it before even though it's half a lifetime and more ago—half a lifetime and more ago," he repeated like one in a dream.

"I haven't got to go into all the story of that raid again, you know about that. You know, because I've told you over and over again how they came upon me when my mate was away in the township and I was alone. They drove off my beasts, and they burnt the house I'd built for Kitty, and they carried me away—and for seven long years I never heard my mother tongue nor saw a white man's face.

"It's no use to tell you about those years. Most of it you know already. What I haven't told, I can't tell now, and that's the awful agony I went through thinking of my girl waiting for me in the old country, and fancying what her anguish must be. It won't bear talking about—even now. Then I got free—you know that tale too—and my first thought was to make tracks for England, and put my poor little wife out of her torture. Mind you, I was certain it must be the same torture for her as it had been for me—only worse, because she had had the burden of suspense to carry.

"Many and many a time my heart grew sick with longing in those weeks before I set foot in England, and started on the last bit of my journey. I had to tramp it. Maybe I was foolish—maybe wise, but something inside me prevented me from sending to let my friends know that I was coming. An awful terror that they might be dead, and Kitty too, made me dread to write to them. I thought I would just tramp home to see for myself.

"It was Spring time when I reached the village.

"The cuckoos were calling across the cornfield, and the larks sprang from under my feet, singing as only English larks can sing. The elms were bursting into leaf, the high hedges in the lane were covered with primroses, in the cottage gardens I saw great clumps of daffodils.

"Round the old church the rooks wheeled and cawed. Everything looked so exactly as it had looked when I went away, that I took heart and began to think I'd been a fool for my fears.

"But something still held me back from going straight to the cottage where I had left Kitty. Maybe I was afraid she wouldn't know me now I was a rough-looking tramp with a beard into the bargain.

"I noticed that the people who passed me in the lane showed no sign of recognition, it brought back my fears again.

"Presently, as I came to the lych gate, I saw a lot of people in the churchyard, folks going and coming, and a kind of look of bustle. The chestnut tree that was yellow when I went away was putting out green fingers now. It made my heart beat to see them!

"A boy slouched up to the gate. It was nobody I knew, so I said to him:

"'What's to do in the church to-day?'

"'Wedding,' he answered, all short, country fashion.

"'And whose wedding might it be?' I asked, wondering whether it was one of my old friends.

"'Widder Craven's wedding,' he said.

"Then I gave a great jump and looked at him.

"Craven was my name—or, rather, the name I'm giving you for mine—and I thought it must be my mother he meant—my mother who had been a widow for years and years.

"'Widow Craven?' I said, after him.

"'Yus, widow Craven, she's going to marry Muster Dick Lane. She lives in the cottage down the lane. Her first husband he went to foreign parts, seven years ago, and he was killed by the Indians—scalped they do say.'

"I caught at the gate and stared hard at the boy. I couldn't say a word, something struck me dumb.

"'What's up, muster,' he said, eyeing me uneasily, 'did you know poor Muster Craven?'

"'Yes—no—at least, I've heard of him,' I said, pulling myself together under the lad's fixed gaze. 'So he's dead, is he?'

"'Yus, he's dead right enough. His widow, she waited to know for sure that he was dead, and his mate brought home some of his things to her, so they say. So she's going to marry Muster Lane. Some say he was her first love. Maybe you'd like to see the wedding, muster? They're coming down the street now.'

"I turned and looked up the village, towards the cottage by the cornfield where I had said good-bye to Kitty, and I could see a party of folks coming along the highway, and I felt something inside me freeze into stone as I looked.

"I could have begun by knocking the lad down when he told me that tale, now I just felt dumb.

"I turned away from him, and walked up the churchyard path and into the church. It was full of people, as it had been for my wedding seven years before, but though many heads were turned as I went in, nobody knew me. I crept into a place beside the door and waited.

"I could see my mother far up the aisle. She looked older, but there was no sign of recent sorrow on her face. She had got used to my loss by that time, I supposed!

"I heard one woman say to another.

"'Poor old Mrs. Craven, this day will call her son to her mind.'

"'Aye, poor old lady,' said the other, 'twas sad too her son dying like that amongst the savages. But Muster Lane he's as good as a son to her, takes care of her rarely well, and he's waited faithful for young mistress Craven, there's no doubt of that.'

"'And 'tis true she cared for him before ever she married the other, so they say for a fact,' whispered the first woman. 'She only married young Craven because she couldn't fight against his wooing, and because her father and mother were so set on the match. This time her heart goes with her vows.'

"The freezing feeling inside me became acute pain.

"'This time her heart goes with her vows.' I tell you those words rang in my ears like a funeral knell. I wondered if they were true. I tried to tell myself that they must be false—but when I saw Kitty's face as she came into the door, I knew that I was wrong and the women were right.

"Kitty's face had never worn that look for me. I sat in the dark corner by the door and watched my wife go up the church, and that freezing feeling in my heart was like the tortures of the lost.

"She looked more of a woman—my girl did—she had grown taller, and it seemed to me that she carried herself with a kind of pride, as if she was going to a triumph. Her eyes shone like two stars; the blue in them called to my mind the blue of the summer sea. There was a smile on her lips—a smile of such love and happiness as made me feel like laying my head down on the seat and sobbing my heart out.

"She didn't wear shining white this time. Her gown was grey, and all soft and flowing. It set off her gracefulness, and made you see more plainly the blue of her eyes, and the pink colour that came and went in her cheeks.

"The sunlight came through the windows in purple splashes and fell across her dress, the same as it had fallen on our wedding day, and one sunbeam struck on her hair, and turned it to gold.

"And I sat there stock still, watching, watching, watching.

"I saw her stop by the step, and Dick Lane moved down beside her, and took her hand. I could have screamed to him to

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drop it—to give her up to me—but that band of ice round my heart kept me silent—I only looked, and looked, and looked.

"Then the parson began to speak, but I never heard a word of what he said, till he came to the words that went into my brain, and seared it like a red-hot iron.

"'Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.'

"He said those words very slowly, and he stopped after he had spoken them, as though he were waiting to see if anybody *would* speak. And I clutched at the seat, and the thoughts that went through my mind seemed like the thoughts of months instead of only those few seconds.

"'Let him now speak, or else for ever hereafter hold his peace.'

"'Speak now—speak now,' a voice kept saying in my heart, 'speak straight out, and you'll get your wife again, and your home, and everything you care about on this earth. She is yours by every law of God and man.'

"I opened my lips to speak those words, but they would not come. I thought of Kitty, as she had been seven years ago, and I thought of what she would look like if I said those words that must bring her back to me. I tell you I seemed to see the colour fade out of her face and the happiness die out of her eyes, and the words I had heard the woman say flashed before me.

"'This time her heart goes with her vows.' If I spoke out now—I should break my girl's heart!

"'Or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.'

"'Hold thy peace—hold thy peace.' Some voice seemed to take up those words and swing them to and fro in my brain till I could hear nothing else.

"And the band of ice inside me snapped, and a fever of love and longing for Kitty ran through my veins instead, till I felt like rushing from my place, and going up the church to claim her as my own."

His voice had worked up into rapid, excited tones. All at once he became very quiet.

"It's queer how the big crisis of your life slips by, and you hardly know it's gone. I didn't move out of my place—I never uttered a sound. I said to myself, very fast and low, 'Keep still, you blithering fool. Hold your peace, and let your girl find happiness.' I wasn't going to break my darling's heart for anything in this wide earth, but I tell you it took some gripping of that seat to keep me quiet. My hands were torn and bleeding afterwards.

"'Else hereafter for ever hold thy peace.' The echo of those words still rang round my brain, when I heard the parson's voice begin again, and I knew that what I'd done, I'd done for good and all.

"I didn't know then whether I'd acted rightly. I don't know now. I just dropped down into the seat when the parson said very loud and clear:

"'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder'—and then, because I couldn't bear any more, I got up and stumbled out of the church.

"It was all tramping for me for many a day afterwards. I'd made up my mind that nothing should ever take me back to the village again. They thought I was dead—I would be dead to them. I've not told you their right names—there's no tracing either me or them. I shall never trouble their lives any more—never any more.

"I don't want any one to judge me for what I did. Maybe I was right, maybe I was wrong. God knows. But whether right or wrong, I've kept to those words faithfully. 'Else hereafter for ever hold thy peace.'"

None of us said a word as Gentleman Joe finished. Only somebody gulped and choked again—and Big Dan put out his hand and gripped Gentleman Joe's hand hard.

Then we lay there silent, till the great yellow moon dropped over the rim of the plain, and the grey dawn crept out of the east, and day awoke in the country which is so very far away from the green old land that all of us call—Home.

L. G. Moberly.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

November 11.—The year will be rather quiet for those celebrating their birthdays on this date. Better for those in employ and elderly people. Girls will have some secret enmity working in their love affairs.

The day is good for dealing with landlords, farmers, builders, and those in authority. Don't travel or remove here.

A child born this day will be ambitious, thoughful, and persevering; fond of change, and will do best in the employ of others.

November 12.— A favourable year for business and money.

Be prepared for strong competition in business.

Young girls will need some caution and prudence with opposite sex, especially with married men and those not free to marry.

The day is good for buying and selling; defer asking favours.

A child born here will be fortunate in most things. The mind will be cheerful, active, and capable.

November 13.— The year will bring much anxiety and worry in business and general affairs to those whose birthdays fall to-day. Beware of accident and fire; give extra care to the health.

Girls born between 8 and 9 a.m. meet with disappointment in love matters.

The day is one on which to keep quiet and let others make the first move. Guard against mishap from 2 to 4 p.m.

A child born here will be fond of travel, and always unsettled.

November 14.— An unfavourable birthday. Do not speculate, and be cautious with writing and agreements.

Girls must beware of deceit from opposite sex.

The day is evil for speculation, writing letters, and doing business with young people.

A child born to-day will be careless, and a bit deceitful. Will not be fortunate in life.

November 15.—A mixed year, many ups and downs; sickness and bereavement may be expected in the family circle.

Girls meet with a lot of anxiety in love affairs. If born near 9 a.m. any engagement may be broken.

The day is good for dealing with land and houses; visit doctors, chemists, or military men. Evil for marriage and pleasure.

A child born here will be active, ambitious and daring, but will meet with many obstacles all through life.

November 16.— A good year is promised.

Favourable for new enterprises and changing residence.

Girls will find love affairs rather quiet.

A child born this day will be fortunate in most matters. The mind will be steady, penetrating and ingenious.

November 17.— Go quietly, for misfortune and loss are threatened. Insure against fire and accident.

Girls born between 2 and 3 p.m or near 10 a.m. will need much care in love affairs.

The day is evil for buying, selling, signing papers and travelling.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate in life; improvident, irritable, moody, and unsettled.

Asturel.

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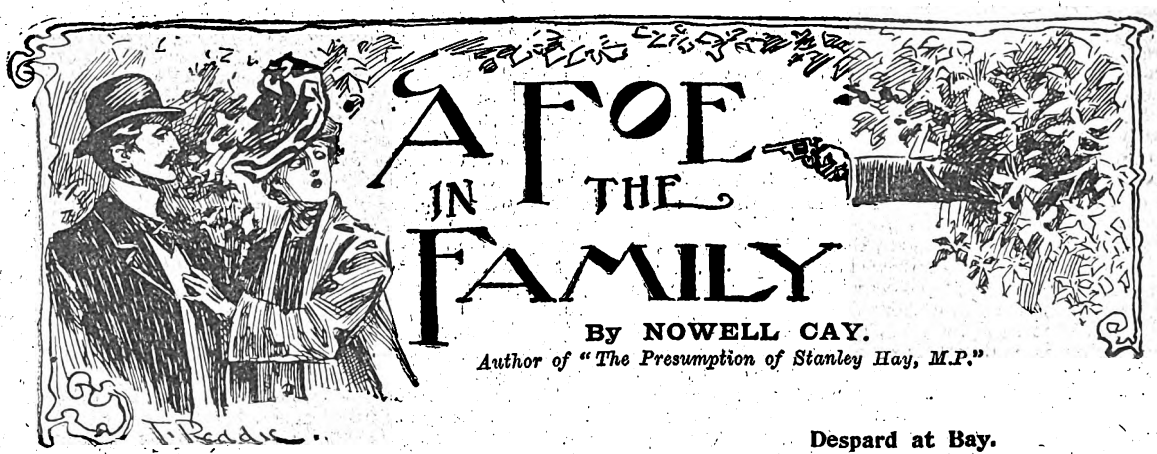

A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Plot to be Frustrated.

GEORGE ILDEN, Baron, of Ilden Castle, while staying with his uncle Jasper, at Pennybrook Hall, suddenly discovers that several suspicious events which have taken place during his stay at the Hall, point to the existence of a plot against his life. He has been shot at, poison has been placed in his pocket-flask, and other attempts, fortunately futile, have been made on his life. He confides in Cathie Hay, his cousin, and they agree that as many members of his own family would materially benefit by his death, the attempts must have their origin in that direction. They suspect Percival, Ilden's cousin. Ilden asks Cathie to marry him, as a means of circumventing his enemies' designs, but she has to refuse.

At about this time he meets Florence Courthorpe, the sister of an old college chum who was drowned while boating. She is very poor, and has taken a situation as governess at Witterby, a village not far from Pennybrook. In seeking to escape his foe, Ilden inadvertently settles down just opposite Florence's temporary home.

Late one night Florence sees a man attempt to enter Ilden's bedroom window with evident criminal designs. She leaves the house clad only in dressing-gown and warns Ilden of his danger. For this exploit her employer dismisses her.

She now has no home, so next day leaves Witterby to stay with some friends at Lallerton. Ilden accompanies her. Arrived at Lallerton, however, they discover that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left suddenly, and no trace of them can be found. Florence, of course, is greatly distressed.

Ilden, however, feeling that he is responsible for her position, and desiring to baulk his enemy, proposes to her, is accepted, and marries her secretly. An announcement in the papers informs his family of the wedding.

Shortly after their marriage Ilden receives a message urging him to return to Pennybrook, his uncle Rupert being dangerously ill. Leaving his wife at the apartments he has taken in London, Ilden leaves for Pennybrook. He is met at the Hall by Cathie, who informs him that his uncle is dead, and that he is again exposing his life to danger.

Cathie informs him of her belief that Guy Despard is in the plot, and insinuates that his own wife, being a friend of the Despards, is possibly implicated.

That night her fears for his safety are shown to be well founded. For in the middle of the night the alarm bell is violently rung, and as Ilden opens his door to ascertain the cause, an attempt is made to stab him. Ilden immediately gives chase to his would-be murderer, and, catching him, throws him down, and is half-strangling him when Grant appears with a light, the rays of which show Ilden's captive to be none other than his cousin Percival.

(The above is a short synopsis of the opening chapters.)

Despard at Bay.

GRANT was gripping his shoulder.

"What the dickens are you doing, Ilden? You are killing him."

George glanced round to where a huge clasp knife still stuck in the woodwork of the door.

"As he deserves to be killed," he said, rising to his feet. "That knife was meant for me, and it makes the sixth try that the scoundrel has had at my life. I have tried to believe that it could not be you," he went on, addressing Percival, who still lay on the floor gasping and breathless. "I knew that you have always been jealous of me, and have never lost an opportunity of doing me a bad turn, but I could not believe in my heart that an Ilden could stoop to murder. But there's no disbelieving it now."

Percival rose sulkily to his feet.

"Don't be a fool, Ilden," he said impatiently, "of course I shouldn't stoop to murder. I thought that it was Despard."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"Despard? And why should you think that Despard was coming out of my room?"

"Because I saw him getting in at your window. How the dickens was I to think that it was you taking five minutes to unlock your door as if you were afraid of making a sound and opening it like a thief—and with the alarm bell ringing all the time. I had not a moment's doubt that it was the thief himself, and that if I did not have the first blow he would."

His voice, even to Ilden's prejudiced ear, had the ring of sincerity, and once more a feeling of physical sickness oppressed him. It was bad enough to believe that his own cousin had tried to murder him. It was almost worse to think that he had suspected and accused him without a cause.

Instinctively he struggled against the idea.

"You say you saw Despard getting in at my window? Why did you not warn me?" he asked, his tone still incredulous.

"I was just going to when I heard him, as I thought, at the door. I was roused by the bell, and looking out of my window saw a ladder raised against your window, and a man whom I took to be Despard going up. I ran down to warn you——"

Grant interrupted him.

"The man must be in the room now, unless he has got away while we're wasting time here. If the ladder is there, Ilden, you can't but believe what Percy says."

George nodded.

"Yes, if the man is there, I will offer you my apologies, cousin Percival."

He was turning to the half-open door as he spoke, but Catherine, who had stood by silent and perturbed, caught at his arm.

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"Not you," she whispered. "It is you that he wishes to injure."

Grant caught the words, and his handsome face darkened.

"I'll go first," he said—"I do not matter."

Percival was hanging back, evidently nervous.

Cathie flushed.

"Of course you matter. It will be better for me to go."

As a matter of fact the three pushed in together, Percival following them cautiously.

"I left the window closed," said Ilden. It was wide open now. The sash must have been thrown up during the struggle in the corridor, for no sound had been heard from the room as they talked together.

Ilden was striding across. There was no ladder raised to the sill, but as he looked down he could see two or three men struggling with it down below. They were some of the outdoor servants, who, roused by the bell, had caught sight of the ladder raised against the house, and were moving it away to cut off the supposed burglar's retreat.

The head-gardener called up an explanation when he saw heads at the open window.

Ilden turned to the room.

"Then the fellow must be in here. Will you lock the door Percy."

Lady Mary Hay, with one or two frightened servants, was entering as he spoke. They had been wandering over the house, asking each other what had happened and been attracted by the sound of voices.

"I think that you had better stay outside, Aunt Mary, and take Cathie with you," said Ilden. "If there is a man in the house he must be hiding in this room, and we have to hunt him out. I wish that you would go and stop that bell, Wardle. We don't want the whole neighbourhood here to help us with one man. We are three men to one here as it is."

In his own mind he was very doubtful whether they had even the one man to deal with. His suspicion against Percival was strong still. He noticed that his cousin was fully dressed, although he claimed to have been roused from sleep by the bell. It seemed to him as likely as not that he had placed the ladder against the house himself as an excuse for his attack, and when Catherine showed herself reluctant to accompany her mother, he raised no objection. She, Percival and Grant alone remained with him when he had locked the door to commence their search of the room.

Grant was already drawing aside curtains and throwing open wardrobe doors. Ilden was watching Percival who had seemed in two minds whether to retreat with Lady Mary and the servant-women. Percival made no pretence of searching, although his eyes followed Grant's movements with a nervous anticipation which George was inclined to put down to his certainty that the search would leave his story uncorroborated.

He was on the point of accusing him of having placed the ladder in position himself when an excited cry from Catherine made him turn quickly to find the search ended.

Drawing aside a curtain that hung before a recess near the window, Grant had revealed the figure of a man crouched back against the wall, a figure which Ilden recognised instantly.

Guy Despard had evidently been hoping to the last to avoid detection. His white, twitching face and strained eyes gave signs of the ordeal of suspense through which he had passed. He seemed a poor cowed creature as the light fell on his crouching figure.

But as Grant's exclamation and Catherine's cry showed that he was discovered, his face changed, and instead of fear came the fierceness of despair.

He pushed aside the curtain himself to spring out into the room, and Catherine uttered another cry as she realised that he had a revolver in his hand and was levelling it at Ilden. For a moment it was directed straight for his breast, the next Grant had struck it out of his hand, and with another blow which raised the poet not a little in his cousin's esteem, had sent the would-be murderer reeling back against the wall. Before he could recover himself the three were upon him, holding him down.

Not that much force was necessary. Grant's well-aimed blow from the shoulder seemed to have left him dazed and helpless. George ran his hand over his clothes.

"The fellow has no other weapon," he said, picking up the revolver. "There is no need to hold him. I have to thank you, Cousin Grant, for the way you tackled him. A moment more and he would have had a shot at me."

"It was splendid," broke in Catherine. "Grant, I admire you."

The poet flushed.

"It was nothing," he said, "but I think Ilden owes Percy an apology now for what he said outside."

George did not need the reminder. He was realising keenly that the apology was demanded. The discovery of Despard had left him without a single tangible excuse for the accusation he had made. In a sudden revulsion of feeling he had asked himself whether his suspicion itself had not been absurd and unjust.

Percival, it was true, had more than once tried to get out of some scrape or other by saddling him with the responsibility for it, but that was a different thing from plotting against his life, and he made his apology almost sincerely.

The three men were standing now at a little distance from their prisoner, who leant back against the wall glaring at Ilden like an animal at bay. The idea that the man was not wholly sane recurred to the latter's mind as he met his ferocious glance, which could not have been more hostile if he had been his greatest enemy.

"Well, the question is," said Grant, "what are we going to do with our friend now that we have got him? It is not worth while taking him over to Wentworth Gaol to-night. I propose that we lock him up in the cellar or somewhere, and get back to bed. I suppose Uncle Jasper will prosecute."

"Yes, let us get the fellow locked up and Uncle Jasper can decide what to do with him to-morrow," put in Percival, who, after his cousin's apology, still seemed nervous and ill at ease.

Something of eagerness in his manner tended to revive Ilden's suspicion against him, momentarily laid aside.

"It strikes me that it is more my business than Uncle Jasper's," he said. "And I should like to cross-examine the fellow, if he will talk."

"What is the good?" said Percival. "He will only make up some cock-and-bull story to try and hide the fact that he meant to rob you."

"I think that it is Uncle's affair," said Grant, and was surprised when the prisoner, who had stood till now absolutely silent, answered for himself.

"Lord Ilden is aware that it is a matter between himself and me. If he were not a coward he would settle it with me alone, without asking you to protect him."

George smiled.

"Possibly I might, if I had the slightest idea what the matter is; but I am glad you can speak for yourself. If you are sensible enough to tell me what I want to know, it is possible that I shall let you go. You came here with the direct intention of taking my life, I believe."

"Yes, and I will kill you yet, Lord Ilden, if

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I have to follow you to the end of the earth before I succeed."

"Well, that is straightforward, at any rate," said Ilden. "I may take it, may I not, that you fired a shot at me from behind a hedge at Ilden Castle nearly six weeks ago?"

"Yes."

"And another at Kirby when I was out shooting."

"Yes."

"Well, that is honest. You also had a try at me here in the fir coppice a fortnight ago, and the next morning tried to poison my pocket-flask."

"Yes."

"May I take it that it was you also who waited outside my room at Witterby intending to shoot me, if I had not luckily been warned?"

"Yes; you have an infernal luck."

"You are a poor shot, you mean, and have less pluck than ingenuity. You see, I think, Grant, that this is more my matter than Uncle Jasper's."

Grant was listening to the long list of attempts with evident satisfaction, and it seemed to Ilden, too, that Percival was affected by it.

"But, if the man has been tracking you like this, why on earth have you not had him arrested long ago?" cried Grant.

"Because I did not remotely guess till this evening who my assailant was. Now that I have discovered him, you can understand my curiosity to know what his motive is."

"You know well enough, Lord Ilden, why you have deserved death at my hands," said the prisoner fiercely.

"I am hanged if I do."

"Then you do not know my name?"

"Pardon me. I understand that it is Mr. Guy Despard. Lady Ilden informed me of the fact a fortnight ago after I had seen her travelling with you from Pennybrook to Rickerby. But what your name can have to do with it I can't conceive. To the best of my knowledge I never heard it before my wife told me about you. I have some inquiries from her to make about your sister, her friend. But that can wait. What I want to get at——"

Percival interrupted him.

"What is the use of talking to him? The fellow is evidently mad."

"I am hoping that he is sane enough to make a bargain," said Ilden. "Look here, Mr. Despard. I have no feeling of resentment against you, any more than you can have any real resentment against me. One cannot feel resentment against a person one does not know. But I mean to get at the motive of these attempts on my life. If you are willing to help me, I will overlook what you have done, and let you go. I'll do more. If you will tell me who has employed you to take my life, I will see that you do not lose money by changing sides. If you don't, of course, I shall prosecute you. I am not vindictive, but I have to protect myself, and if you do not choose to give me the names of your accomplices, and disown them, I will take care that you are kept out of the way as long as the law can keep you—twenty years, I should guess. I'd prefer to scotch your principal, but if you prefer to shield him, I'll take good care that he shall lose the services of his agent. Come now, who has paid you to attempt my life?"

MR. DESPARD.

An expression of troubled bewilderment was stealing over the wild, desperate face of the man at bay.

"You know that nobody has paid me," he said sullenly. "You know what there is between you and me, Lord Ilden, and that only your scoundrelly life can satisfy my claim."

"Come, the man is mad," said Percival impatiently again, and reminded his cousin that some slight connection at least existed between the two.

"Does the satisfaction of this claim, whatever it may be, demand that you shall murder my cousin, Mr. Ilden, as well as myself?" he said with a glance at Percival. "He tells me that you have been following him about too."

Percival's eyes shifted uneasily under the prisoner's gaze.

"I have never seen your cousin. I have never heard his name," said Despard.

"Well, he knows yours, and seems more afraid of you than I have ever thought of being," said George, angry with his cousin for not admitting openly what his knowledge of the man really amounted to, and the bewildered look on the prisoner's face became more marked. Percival was ghastly.

"I suppose you think, Ilden, that I have put the man on your track to get into your shoes?" he said sharply. "Why don't you ask him outright? Or I will if you are afraid of putting your hints into honest words. Tell Lord Ilden, Despard, or whatever your name is, whether I have paid you to take his life. You need not be afraid to say it—he will pay you more than I could ever offer you."

George interrupted him.

"I have already apologised for my suspicion, Percy. You are not the only person who would benefit by my death. And if you would only help me by telling me what you really know of Despard, I might discover which of them is employing this fellow. I suspect that it is some money-lender who has risked too much for Uncle Jasper's reversions. Come now, you told me you thought he was a dun—who did you imagine was employing him?"

"I tell you I know nothing at all about him," said Percival angrily.

"But you knew his name. How did you learn that?"

"I asked Potter at the inn what the name of his guest was."

Percival's known partiality for the society of the village inn made the explanation a sufficiently satisfactory one, and George was surprised when the prisoner took the trouble to contradict it.

"That is not true. Nobody here knows my name," he said with an excitement that seemed to Ilden uncalled for, and he noticed that the furtive glances he gave his cousin showed now almost as much animosity as those directed against himself.

Percival had met the contradiction with a shrug of his shoulders and repeated his favourite assertion that the man was mad.

"Well, I don't see what you gain by this talk," Grant broke in. "If the fellow has accomplices, it is evident that he does not mean to give them away, and if you are not cold, Ilden, we are. Catherine will catch her death while you and Percy wrangle. I think myself that Percy is right. The fellow is simply a dangerous maniac, and ought to be dealt with by a magistrate—if you can really think of no possible grudge that he could have against you."

The tone was dubious enough to make Ilden answer emphatically:

"I swear that I never remotely heard of the man till a fortnight ago, after he had begun to follow me. But he does not seem inclined to win his freedom by telling me what I want to know, so there is nothing to do but lock him up. I am sorry I forgot how cold you must be, Cathie. I'll have another try at the fellow to-morrow."

A peremptory knock sounded at the locked door as he spoke, and Grant put an end to the informal examination by throwing it open to admit the Honourable Jasper, followed by

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practically all the occupants of the house, including the housemaid, who, happening to look out of her window in the night, had first caught sight of the man with the ladder and flown to the alarm bell to rouse the house.

Its master had at last with difficulty been awakened and made to understand that a dangerous housebreaker was in the place, and his arrival put an end to the suspense of the wondering crowd, which had waited outside the locked door trying to guess what was passing within.

The Honourable Jasper, himself a magistrate, was for dealing out condign and immediate punishment to the offender, but permitted himself to be persuaded to have him locked up until morning, which would find him in a more magisterial state of mind.

A crowd accompanied the unresisting prisoner to one of the empty wine cellars, which, with only a little grating in place of a window and a strongly-bolted oaken door, made a secure enough prison for the night.

George saw him locked up somewhat regretfully.

"If I could only make him speak out," he said to Catherine.

"*You* do not think that he is mad?" she asked, and George shook his head. After all his efforts to understand and meet a supposed plot he could not accept the idea that after all he made the object of a maniac's motiveless enmity.

"In the morning I think I shall persuade him to admit that there has been method in his madness," he said confidently.

The Bird has Flown!

THE clocks in the house were striking two as Ilden went back to his room, very well content with the night's work.

His idea that the actual attempts on his life were all the work of one man had been confirmed, and the man himself was safe under lock and key. It was true that a great deal of mystery remained. He had many things left to discover, including the identity of the prime mover of the plot, and the nature of the connection which certainly existed between his cousin Percival and the prisoner. The more he recalled what had passed the more puzzled he became. Despard's denial of all knowledge of his cousin had seemed sincere, and yet it was certain that Percival knew more of the prisoner than he would admit. Given that his explanation of the attack in the corridor was a truthful one, he must surely have been in a strange state of nervous panic to meet even a presumed burglar with a blow at the heart before he discovered whether he was even armed.

Yes, there was plenty of mystery to be cleared up, but Ilden looked forward hopefully to its elucidation.

If Despard were sane he must surely realise that he could gain nothing by silence. He would see him without the disturbing presence of his cousin, and it would be strange if he could not induce him to talk. Morning would probably see him in possession of the whole plot, and he could return to Florence with the news that their danger was at an end and that she could take up her position at Ilden Castle as its mistress. The prospect was not without its charm, although his conscience busied itself again asking whether the charm would last.

If Despard were proved to be an irresponsible madman, well, the plot would trouble them no more, because he would know that it had never existed. He deliberately closed his mind against an explanation that would render all his conjecture and planning ridiculous, and leave his marriage itself unjustified by necessity.

No; Guy Despard knew what he was doing, and had a sufficient motive. In the morning he would discover what it was. All his restless thoughts turned to the coming examination of the prisoner in the wine-cellar.

At the first streak of dawn he rose and dressed. He would get the business over and settled before any of the others were down.

Inside the house all was silent, as he made his way downstairs; but, going round to the stables, he found, as he expected, that some of the men were up and about, and he selected one of them—a young giant of a groom, with the physique of a prize-fighter—to return to the house with him. It was just as well to take every precaution.

"I am going down to have a talk with our friend, the housebreaker," he said. "I should like you to mount guard outside in case he makes any attempt at escape. You can bring a stick with you, although, as I am armed and he is not, I do not suppose there will be any need for your services."

The young man's face brightened at the commission.

"I wanted to follow him up the ladder last night, my lord," he said, "but Sanders would not hear of it. He thought it would be better to take the ladder away, and catch him inside."

"Well, I fancy it was lucky for our friend in the cellar that they did not let you get at him," said Ilden, smiling at the lust for battle that showed itself in the young giant's face. "Step lightly, there is no need for us to disturb anybody."

They were entering the house as he spoke, and made their way down to the cellar in silence. Ilden was busy arranging the arguments with which he would persuade the prisoner to make full confession. He did not speak until they had reached the solid oaken door of the temporary cell, secured by its huge outside bolts.

"You can wait here on guard," he said, as he drew them back. "I will call you if there is the slightest need."

He smiled again at the groom's eager face. Tobbitt was evidently hoping that the prisoner would prove violent.

The wine-cellar, lighted only by its tiny grating, was still in complete darkness, and Ilden struck a match as he entered, regretting that he had not brought a candle or lamp with him.

Then as the little flame flared up he stared round the bare chamber in blank dismay. The place was empty.

He struck another match to make absolutely sure of the fact, and strode out moodily to where Tobbitt, with his cudgel in position, awaited him with questioning eyes.

"The man's gone," he said without emotion. The only emotion of which he was conscious—and after the first moment of realisation it was certainly not surprise—was one which he could not show to a servant.

Tobbitt was dumfounded.

"Gone! But, my lord," he gasped, "he can't have got through that grating, and we found the bolts all right."

"Which looks, doesn't it, as though he has had a friend to assist him," said Ilden with a queer little laugh. "You need not tell anybody what has taken place—or stay, it is bound to be known, so you can say what you like. While you are here we may as well see whether all the doors and windows are secure."

He made a tour of the house perfunctorily, the groom following, to find every means of egress from the house apparently untouched.

"He must be hiding in the house, my lord," said Tobbitt.

"Or he has a friend inside who has taken the trouble to relock the door after him," said Ilden, with his puzzling tone of indifference.

The end of their tour of inspection found the household awaking. Some of the servants were coming down, and Ilden spread consternation among them by sending up a message to his uncle to tell him what had happened.

Then after dispatching Tobbitt to the station to watch

the departure of the first train, almost due to start, he strode upstairs to Percival's room with set lips and a dangerous light in his eyes. He was going to find out now or never how much his cousin knew about this man Despard. Percival made a bad pretence of being roused from sleep as Ilden entered his bedroom unceremoniously.

"What's the row?" he asked with a yawn.

"You have let Despard loose. That is all," said George.

Percival raised himself on an elbow.

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I mean that Despard has gone, and that he has been let out by somebody who is still in the house. That 'somebody' is yourself, and you can't deny it."

His cousin replied with a fine show of indignation.

"Look here, Ilden. I have put up with a good deal from you. But you are going too far. I am not going to quarrel with you, or have a family wrangle, while my father is lying dead in the house. You seem to think that it is a good opportunity to attack me. You know that I can do nothing until the poor Governor is put under the ground. But after that we will have a settlement. You shall see whether you can make any vile charge against me that comes to your lips. The last thing that the Governor asked me was that I would try and be good friends with you and I meant to do my best for his sake. But if you make it impossible, I am not to blame. But I shall respect his wishes while he is above ground. Say what you like. I shall not strike you back."

In spite of his suspicion that the man was protecting himself by an infamous hypocrisy, Ilden felt shamed. In the excitement of the last few hours he had practically forgotten his uncle, and he was touched on his tenderest point. He had shown himself wanting in respect to the dead and to the family honour.

"Very well," he said coldly, "we will postpone our understanding until the day after to-morrow. But I should like you to understand that if Despard attempts my life in the meanwhile, it may go hard with you. There are others beside myself who know that you are better acquainted with him than you are willing to admit, and the man who set him free this morning makes himself an accessory to any crime he may commit."

Percival made no reply. His resigned silence was a reproach, and George turned away with a shrug.

"All right. Our reckoning can wait, but it will be just as well for us not to meet again till we are ready for it. *You* cannot leave the house, so I shall. You will not see me again till the funeral at Mordenhale."

The escape of Despard had exhausted his patience, and he would have left the house without a good-bye to anybody, if Catherine had not managed to waylay him as he started.

And Catherine only made him feel angry. She could not disguise the fact that the capture of Despard had increased her suspicion against Florence, and it made her anxious to think that George was returning to his wife.

"You need not alarm yourself," he said, "I care too much for my wife's safety to return to her yet, and give our enemies the chance of discovering her whereabouts."

The fact that she found it more difficult now to suspect Percival made her sympathy of less account to him than ever, and although she insisted on accompanying him to the station again in dread that Despard might be lying in wait for him somewhere on the way, they had little to say to one another.

An infinite space of time seemed to divide him from the time when she had been his only confidante, and he told her his plans, such as they were, almost reluctantly. For the present he was going to the Castle where he would stay until his uncle's funeral, at which he was still determined to be present.

His tone prevented her even attempting to dissuade him.

"After the funeral," he went on, "Percival shall tell me plainly what he really knows about Guy Despard, or admit himself his accomplice. In the latter case, I shall put the matter into the hands of a detective while I take my wife abroad. I have kept the matter in my own hands so far for the sake of the family honour. I could not have all my father's relatives suspected and watched without a single tangible piece of evidence against one of them; but we have got something to work on now. I want Despard's antecedents looked up, and, if Percy does not choose to render it unnecessary, his dealings with my cousin. He has put himself out of the pale of consideration by this night's work."

"But supposing that Percival did not let the man out?" suggested Catherine.

But George was in no mood to debate his cousin's guilt. His mind was made up, and he would not let it revert to the old uncertainty.

Ilden was leaving the Hall, as he had come, on foot. It seemed safer than to expose himself in a carriage, if, as was probable, Despard was lurking in the neighbourhood to make another attempt on his life.

Catherine was full of nervous apprehension, and started at every sound.

"It is horrible to think that you are in just as much danger as ever," she said. "Last night I told myself that it was all over; and, after all, we have gained nothing. You are just where you were before."

"Not exactly. It is a great thing to know who my actual assailant is; and Despard cannot follow me openly. He knows that I shall have him arrested if I catch sight of him; and the fact that he is known will make him afraid to attempt my life again. If I am shot now, everybody will know who has done it. Before, he had only to avoid being caught in the act, and nobody would have thought of suspecting him. The game has become too dangerous for him."

"But he did not seem to me a man who cared whether he was caught or not, so long as he killed you," said Cathie. "And he did not seem a bit like a paid assassin. He seemed full of personal hatred against you. Are you quite sure that you have not injured him in some indirect way, perhaps through somebody that he loves. Grant says that if the man is sane, it is the only explanation of his attitude."

Ilden laughed sharply.

"The way in which we dear cousins suspect one another is delightful. I might have guessed that it was my turn, and that the person finally responsible for these attempts on my life would be made out to be myself. And who does dear Grant imagine would take the trouble to set the fellow free."

Cathie coloured.

"Of course he is absurd," she said, "but he thinks you set him free yourself to prevent him making his story public."

They reached the station as she spoke, and George was not sorry to find their *tête-à-tête* put an end to.

"She half believes it," he said to himself. "Thank goodness my wife has a little faith in me, or I should be left without anybody to believe in me."

Which was no doubt unjust to Catherine, who was in a panic lest Despard should be lying in wait about the station.

But the train came in and started again without any sign of the surreptitious attack which Catherine was half-expecting.

"No such luck," said Ilden to himself. "The fellow will not give us another chance of capturing him."

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He had given Catherine the impression that he was returning direct to the Castle, but he had other plans of which he had not spoken to her, since it would entail his telling too much about his marriage, and giving details which could only increase his cousin's suspicion of his wife.

At Shipton Gate he left the train, and set out for Lallerton, feeling that at last he had a starting point from which to begin investigations.

The game had changed, he told himself, as he made his way on foot to the pretty village which at every turn brought back some pleasing recollection of his wife.

He went first to the cottage where Clara Wimple, the former servant of the Despards had been living. With the new light which had come to him with the detection of Despard, it had seemed to him probable that he would find in the girl his mysterious friend of the Lallerton country-road. Living as she had done in the Despard's house, she was the most likely person to have heard that his life was in danger from the brother of her mistress, and he was disappointed on calling at the cottage to find nobody there to answer his knock. He waited there until it became quite apparent that the cottage was quite deserted, and then returned to the inn where he had stayed with Florence to make inquiries. If anything had been learnt in the village about the Despards during his absence he would be sure to hear it at the inn, and he made his way across the green, framing questions for the garrulous landlady.

Here there was to be no disappointment for him.

"Now this is strange, sir," she said, "if you had only come in an hour earlier you would have saved me sending a letter."

"A letter? To whom?"

"To yourself, sir—or rather to your wife. I posted it less than an hour ago."

His mind leapt quickly to connect the rather surprising announcement with his quest.

"You have learnt something then about the people for whom I was making inquiries," he said, "Mr. and Miss Despard?"

The landlady looked surprised.

"I have seen Mr. Despard since you were here. But I did not know you would like me to write and tell you about it. He was here early this morning."

Here was more exciting news than George had expected, and his evident interest made the good lady enter well-pleased into details.

It seemed that quite early, before the tavern was actually open, and before any morning train had arrived at Shipton Gate, Mr. Despard had presented himself, looking weary and dishevelled, as if he had been up all night. He had ordered breakfast and eaten it ravenously, after which he had hired the pony-trap to drive to the neighbouring village of Castledale. The landlord himself had driven him, and had not yet returned.

"As likely as not he has driven round by way of Shipton Gate and put the gentleman down at the station there," she said. "But even if he has done that he ought to have been home before this. It is more than three hours since they started."

"And how far is this Castledale?" asked Ilden, debating mentally whether it would be better to start there at once in pursuit, or wait for the arrival of the landlord with news that might make the pursuit to the next village unnecessary.

The distance to Castledale was less than three miles, it appeared.

"Do you know whether Mr. Despard has friends there?" he asked, and the landlady shook her head.

"I have never heard of his having any friends, or Miss Despard either, except Mrs. George."

Ilden started at the name. It was that under which he and his wife had hidden their identity at Sydenham!

(Further developments of the plot are recorded next Tuesday.)

Your Editor Chats.

By the time you have read this number you will no doubt have formed an opinion as to the merits of the new series of articles by Lady Peggy Carstairs, and you will be doing your Editor a great favour if you will drop a post-card and let him know whether you like "How I Chaperoned Belinda" or not.

In reference to the previous series which has just closed H. P. M. writes:

"I have been intensely interested in 'The Confessions of Cynthia,' more especially in that part which dealt with the attempt of the society doctor to blackmail Mrs. Norton, and in the manner in which this woman's crime was hushed up. I have never seen this sort of thing exposed before, and no doubt it will read to a good many people as rather overdrawn. I have been behind the scenes for many years now, and I have come across many a case of almost the same sort in which a wealthy and prominent society person has committed a crime which money has been able to smooth over. There are to-day scores of society doctors who are in possession of secrets that would bring many prominent members of society into the police courts. Many of these doctors are prompted by professional etiquette to say nothing about the matters; others, ess scrupulous, find the knowledge a fine source of income to them by blackmailing the principals. I think it is very courageous of you to expose these things, and I look with interest for further revelations in the new series."

And I don't think that H. P. M. will be disappointed. I know for a fact that many of the statements made in the last series were looked upon by readers as fiction, simply because they were so startling as to be almost impossible to believe. Yet the articles were a clear and true description of the way in which the members of the "smart set" pass their existence, and the new series in equally correct. In the one case, Society was seen through the eyes of a young guileless girl, and in the other, it is seen through the eyes of a middle-aged woman of the world.

I AM delighted to hear from so many hundreds of readers that the new serial story is so much appreciated. I wish to thank most heartily all those who have troubled to write me in the matter.

YOU will find on another page a picture of Miss Madge Morris's wedding cake. It is very beautiful, is it not? And I am sure that it will prove good eating. The dainty ornament on the top is all white and silver, and is fit to grace any parlour window. With it, of course, will be sent a piece of wedding cake. It is not many prizes that are supposed to bring good luck; there are none which can bring greater luck than a piece of wedding cake, and the 101 readers who are fortunate enough to secure a piece of that sent by Miss Madge Morris will be particularly fortunate, and ought to have a happy year.

Your Editor.

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His was the Power.

"ARE you a Tsar that you conduct yourself thus autocratically?" demanded the girl as her father tossed her young man into the street. "No," rejoined the old man, "I am simply the power behind the thrown."

He was the Beast.

SHE: "This fur rug is very beautiful; to what beast does it belong?" He (candidly): "To me."

Her Point of View.

TOM: "Have you read 'Two Men and a Girl'? What do you think of it?" Kitty: "No; but I think the girl must have had a good time."

The Candid Friend.

ALICE (looking at her portrait): "Don't you think that Van Brush has managed to make a rather pretty picture of me?" Edith: "Yes, he really has; what a remarkably clever artist he is!"

Gave the Game Away.

TOMMY: "Mr. Yabsley, sister Laura said at the table this morning that she thought you had the prettiest moustache she ever saw." Yabsley: "You oughtn't to tell things you hear at the table, Tommy." Tommy: "But she's going to give me sixpence for telling you."

Cautious Parents.

"WHY did Barlow and his wife go abroad on different steamers? Quarrel?" "No. Mrs. Barlow thought it would be pleasanter for the children. Two steamers were not likely to be lost, and if one of them had gone down the children would have had one parent left."

Unreasonable Man.

"BUT, my dear," protested Mr. Young when Mrs. Young showed him her purchases for the day, "why have you bought four dozen clothes pins when all the washing is done at the laundry?" "Oh, Harry, how can you be so horrid?" began Mrs. Young tearfully. "Why, they were bargains."

Sis was Unimpressed.

A YOUNG man home from college, wishing to inspire his little sister with awe for his learning, pointed to a star, and said: "Sis, do you see that bright little luminary? It's bigger than this whole world." "No, 't'aint," said Sis. "Yes, it is," declared the young collegian. "Then why don't it keep off the rain?" was the triumphant rejoinder.

Kept His Word.

"I USED to think that you were not a man of your word, Jones, but I've changed my mind." "Ah, you understand me now, friend Smith. But what led you to change your mind?" "You remember that £10 you borrowed from me?" "Yes." "You said if I lent it to you you would be indebted to me for ever." "Yes," "Well, you are keeping your word like a man."

What She Thought and What She Did.

SHE said the men were "horrid" with an energy emphatical,
And built upon a very dreadful plan; And when one jarred upon her, with a gesture quite dramatical, She said: "Well, if that isn't like a man!" Until there came a fellow with a proposition practical, That made her cheeks turn very, very red. "You can have me," she said to him, with pout that was attractival, "But—I wish you weren't a horrid man!" she said.

The Religion for Him.

KATE: "No, Hettie does not attend any church; she says she is her own religion." Harry: "That is a religion I should like to embrace."

The Man who Cared.

ETHEL: "Since she has married again, I do not believe that she deplores the death of her first husband at all." Maude: "No, but her second husband does."

The Fall of Man.

MR. STEBBINS: "Statistics go to show that the male proportion of the world is fast falling off." Mrs. Stebbings: "Gracious me! Isn't there some way of tying them on?"

Giving Him Practice.

ASPIRING POET: "I'll set the world ablaze yet." His Wife: "I do hope you will, dear. Would you mind making a fire in the kitchen stove—just as a matter of practice, you know."

Seeing, Yet Not Seeing.

"BUT, Ethel, how do you know that this young man loves you? Has he told you so?" Ethel: "Oh, no, mamma! But if you could only see the way he looks at me when I am not looking at him!"

Found it Economical.

SMITH: "You say you write dunning letters to yourself and sign them with fictitious names. What do you do that for?" Jones: "You see, my wife is always after me for money, and when she reads those letters she becomes discouraged."

A Sweetheart Provided.

LADY OF THE HOUSE (to new girl): "I cannot allow you to keep a follower of your own. There is a corporal who comes to our house every Sunday; he is accustomed to our ways, and all my former servants have had him for a sweetheart; you can have him, too."

Had Caught His Fish.

MRS. NEWLYWED: "You never ask me to go out and have a drive like you did before we were married." Mr. Newlywed: "That's so; but you never see a man running after a 'bus when he has overtaken it, and you never hear of a fisherman giving bait to a fish he has caught."

The Test of Love.

"AND are you sure you love him?" "Am I sure? Do you see this dress?" "Of course I do. What of it?" "Will you kindly tell me if it bears the slightest resemblance to the present styles." "Well, really it—er—it——" "It doesn't," "No." "And I'm wearing it because he likes it."

She Knew Housemaids Too Well.

EDWIN: "What do you think of that artist who painted cobwebs on the ceiling so naturally that his housemaid broke her heart owing to her ceaseless and vain efforts to remove them?" Angelina: "Well, there may have been such an artist, but there surely never was such a housemaid."

Would Run No Risks.

MR. SIMPEL: "Will you be mine, darling?" Miss Strongmind: "You must first ask papa's consent, Harold." Mr. Simpel: "But—but I dread to do it. I am extremely nervous, and, so to speak, so easily sat upon that——" Miss Strongmind (hurriedly): "I'll be yours, Harold! Never mind about papa!"

Why She Was Disappointed.

MISS MABEL (in tearful burst of confidence): "Mamma, I'm so disappointed in Horace! You can't think!" Mamma: "What's the matter now, dear? Have you quarrelled?" Miss Mabel: "No, but when I told him my birthday came on December 25th, he said, 'Dearest, let us be married on that day!' I do believe he was thinking how much money he would save in making presents if all our anniversaries came at Christmas."

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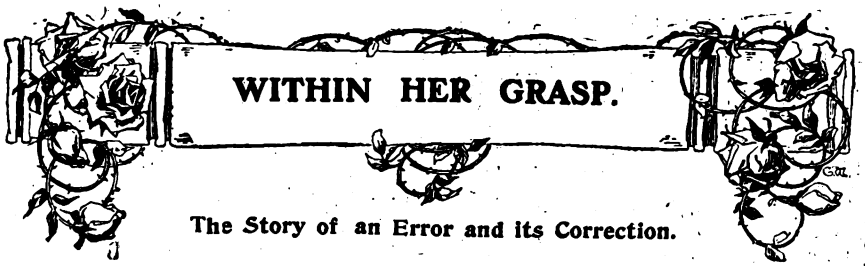

WITHIN HER GRASP.

The Story of an Error and its Correction.

It was the race week at Marlahabad, in India, and a motley crowd thronged the course.

Flower-bedecked hats and delicate coloured gowns contrasted picturesquely with the dusky faces and gorgeous raiment of the native spectators.

Stately Helen Lomax was there with Mrs. Mitford, the collector's wife. As usual, she was surrounded by admirers; but of her two most faithful ones, Mr. Burrell, the Commissioner, and Major Wardrop, only Burrell was by her side.

"I have won on every race, so far," said Winnie Maitland, Mrs. Mitford's niece, a bright-eyed girl of seventeen, just out from Scotland.

"I do hope Major Wardrop will win this, don't you, Helen?"

The girl addressed looked up quickly. She was some years older than Winnie. Those who didn't admire her, called her handsome, in a cold, statuesque way; but those who knew her well understood the warm-hearted, impulsive nature, and could perceive the latent fire which lurked in the dark, dreamy eyes.

"Of course I do," she said quietly.

"I don't believe you really like Major Wardrop," persisted Winnie, "and yet he seems to admire you so," said the girl, a little wistfully, looking up at her companion.

She had, all unknowingly, touched upon a tender spot. For though Helen liked and admired Mr. Burrell, and looked upon him as a real friend, she loved Gerard Wardrop with all the strength of a reserved, passionate nature. No love-making had passed between them, but each had known, through that mysterious telepathy that is independent of speech, how strong was their feeling for each other.

Helen had made the acquaintance of both men whilst her father was stationed last year at Marlahabad, but he had been suddenly moved away a few months previously, and until this week they had not met again. How well she remembered her first introduction to Major Wardrop. It was at a gymkana and she was just going to ride in the ladies' bicycle race, when Mr. Burrell brought him up, saying he was a very old friend of his, and was chumming with him.

After that they had met almost daily. But unexpectedly he had been sent away on duty for a few weeks, and had not even seen her to say "Good-bye."

Would she ever forget how she felt on returning from a picnic at which Major Wardrop had not been present when she was handed a little note from him explaining the reason of his hurried departure, and saying how much he should look forward to their meeting on his return.

During his absence her father had been ordered to a distant station, and thus they had not met since. But so far the meeting had been full of disappointment. She had been at Marlahabad now for ten days, and in all that time she had never been alone with Gerard, although he had eagerly sought her society on all possible occasions. Her hostess was a veritable dragon, and she was beginning to suspect her of preventing any private conversation.

Was it possible that she wanted Winnie to marry him? The little girl seemed quite ready to lose her heart to him, and he was evidently attracted by her youthful prettiness. Here her train of thought was interrupted by a cheery voice behind her saying—

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Lomax."

She looked up and saw young Teddie Gordon, a boyish, but very staunch admirer.

"Oh, they are worth more than that to me, Teddy, so I'll postpone the recital of them till you make me a better offer."

"Well, I came to ask you if you would like to watch this next race from the water jump. I expect we shall see a few spills, for it's such a big field."

"Oh, I hope not, I am sure," said Helen hastily, as she thought of Gerard, "but I will go if you like. It will be a change from the stand," and she rose from her seat.

Looking back, she noticed that Winnie was, for the moment, alone, and called to her to join them. The girl started up eagerly, and they hurried across to the jump.

"There they are, going to the post," said Teddy.

"Doesn't he sit that chestnut splendidly?"

"I think Mr. Carpenter will win myself, for he rides equally well, and has a splendid mount," said Helen perversely. "I'm afraid you'll lose your gloves, after all, Winnie."

"Now they were off—No, it's a false start! Yes, there they really are off this time. I do think Major Wardrop will win," and Winnie clapped her hands, her pretty blue eyes dancing with excitement.

Nearer and nearer came the horses, they seemed to be all together, would they all clear the jump?

An instant's suspense, and Mr. Carpenter was over, quickly followed by Wardrop on the chestnut. Those two were ahead of all the rest, and it was a neck-and-neck race. Only one more hurdle. Which would win? A sickening crash.

"By Jove! He's down!"

Horror stricken silence fell upon the group. They could not see what had happened at the distant hurdle. Only that Wardrop's horse had swerved, then jumping wildly had fallen heavily. After a short struggle he regained his feet, and went cantering riderless away.

"Oh, he has fallen—is he killed?" and Winnie covered her face with her hands.

Helen tried to reassure her, for though she herself was white to the lips, she was more successful in hiding her anxiety than her younger companion.

"Don't distress yourself, Miss Maitland," said Teddy. "I daresay he's not badly hurt. No, see there he is, walking away. Let's go back to the stand; we shall learn more about him there," he added kindly, for the girl's evident distress touched him. He felt sure from her anxiety that she must care very much for Wardrop, though seeing that he must be at least twenty years her senior, the lad wondered a little at it.

Helen, too, was wondering. Was it only natural dread of seeing suffering that had moved her so, or had the handsome Major awakened a tenderer feeling in her innocent heart?

Presently a sympathetic murmur greeted the appearance of the victim of the accident himself upon the stand. He made his way at once to where Winnie was sitting, feeling a little ashamed of her sudden display of feeling.

"I'm awfully sorry to have lost you the bet, Miss Winnie, and I can't even lay claim to a broken limb to excite your compassion."

"You really gave us a dreadful fright; both Helen and I thought you were killed."

Major Wardrop turned to Helen, who was standing a little behind the others. She flushed slightly as she met his eye, but gave no other sign of discomposure.

She felt reassured of his love for her, and for the time being her doubts and fears vanished. Only, however, to return in full force a few days later.

The Race ball was to take place that evening. Helen was feeling tired and languid, and in preparation for it prolonged her afternoon's rest beyond its usual limits.

However, the desire for tea aroused her at last, and leaving her room she stepped into the verandah to look for Winnie, when she stopped short suddenly. Trembling all over, her

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knees almost gave way under her, for Winnie was there, standing on the step, her hand in Major Wardrop's, a general appearance of happiness in her air.

"I'll do my utmost to make you happy, little one," he was saying, "and to-morrow I shall come and have the dreaded interview with Mrs. Mitford. Mind you keep plenty of dances for me to-night, I shall be obliged to be a little late." And, with a wave of his hand, he jumped into his dog-cart and drove off.

Helen moved mechanically back to her room, and sat down dully conscious that she had received a blow, and would awaken presently from the stunned sensation which mercifully follows a blow, whether it be mental or physical.

The ayah came to dress her for dinner in the filmy pink robe, which she had chosen with such care, that she might look well in his eyes. But she motioned her away. Then Mrs. Mitford came to the door. She must exert herself now to think, to make up her mind to hide the blow, and to appear delighted when she received the news of Winnie's engagement. She opened the door a little way, trusting to the fast fading light to hide her face.

"I am going to lie down, Mrs. Mitford. My head aches so that I thought perhaps you would let me have some dinner quietly here. I am so afraid of not being able to go to the ball!"

Her hostess was all sympathy, and promised to send her in some dinner, "and you must drink some champagne, my dear. Perhaps it will cure your headache, for it would never do for you to miss the ball," she said kindly.

The daintly little meal appeared in due time, but Helen ate as if each mouthful would choke her. Only the desire to play her part well enabled her to swallow anything.

The champagne, however, pulled her together, and when she made her appearance in the ball-room she looked a queen indeed.

The deep rose-pink draperies, with their filmy laces, suited her to perfection. Her glorious dark eyes rivalled in brilliancy the diamond star which shone in her hair. Her programme was over-full, but Major Wardrop's name was not there, for contrary to her usual custom Helen had kept none for him.

She appeared to be in the highest spirits; and even those who knew her best, agreed that never had they seen the stately Miss Lomax looking so brilliant.

Helen had been standing on the verandah with one of her partners, and on re-entering the room she saw Major Wardrop. He came quickly towards her, with an eagerly expectant air, and asked her for a dance. Shaking her fan gaily at him—

"Too late, Major Wardrop," she said, "my programme is full, there is no room for 'loiterers by the way,'" and with a smile and a nod she passed on with her partner, leaving Wardrop speechless with astonishment.

What had happened? Why had she kept no dances for him? It was always an understood thing between them that she should do so. Why had she departed from her usual custom?

The rest of the evening passed like a dream to him, he watched her surrounded always by an admiring coterie of men. Dancing gaily through the programme, her most favoured partner was his own friend Burrell.

Opinions were freely expressed as to her probable acceptance of his suit, and it caused but little surprise to the society of Marlahabad when Mrs. Mitford announced at the club next evening that they were engaged. Only on Wardrop did the news fall like a thunderbolt.

"I swear she loved me," he muttered to himself as he paced his verandah unable to sleep through the long hours of the night.

"If it had been any other man than Burrell—mine own familiar friend, I would try even at this late hour to put things right between us. But I can't try to spoil his life. After all she had her choice. She must have known that I loved her, so she deliberately chose between us."

And what of Helen? Was she happy? She had saved herself outward humiliation by accepting Mr. Burrell as her lover, but would she ever forget that she had given her love where it was scorned as she imagined? Ah, well, that sweet dream was over henceforward she must put Gerard, the man she had so dearly loved, out of her life. But she felt that she could not endure to stay longer with the Mitfords when she must see him almost daily. Mr. Burrell was pressing her to name an early date for their marriage so his wishes furnished her with an excuse for returning home.

As Mrs. Mitford wished her an affectionate "Good-bye," she said mysteriously, "I expect you will soon hear some news of Winnie, which will surprise you, but things are not really settled yet."

"Well, wish her joy for me, please, Mrs. Mitford, when the time comes. Ah, we are off!" And as the train moved out of the station Helen waved her hand to the group assembled to bid her farewell.

And so, in the midst of blinding tears, she left the place where she had hoped for so much happiness and where instead she had suffered such misery.

She had only seen Gerard once since her engagement was announced, and he had formally congratulated her, but beyond those few conventional words they had barely spoken to each other. And now the next time she went to Marlahabad it would be as Walter Burrell's wife.

* * * * *

One morning shortly after the Burrells had settled down in Marlahabad, Helen received a "chit" from Winnie, inviting herself to tiffin that day "for," she wrote, "I have some great news to tell you which I think will surprise you. Things were only really settled yesterday."

"I suppose I must say 'yes,' but, oh, how can I bear to hear her talk of her happiness with Gerard? How shall I ever hide my own feelings? Still, it must be done, so here goes," and Helen sat down and wrote a few lines to Winnie saying she would be pleased to see her.

In spite of her trouble Helen looked lovelier than ever in the eyes of her admirers. Sorrow had added a touch of softness which some thought she had lacked before, and there was a gentle dignity about her which was very winning.

She welcomed Winnie warmly when she arrived.

"Well," she said gaily, determined to play her part thoroughly, "and what is the great news, dear? Or can I guess it, is it that you are going to be married?"

"Yes, but what in the world made you guess so quickly?"

"My dear child, hasn't Major Wardrop been your shadow for weeks? It was easy to see what was going to happen!"

"Major Wardrop?" gasped Winnie, "Major Wardrop?" and she burst out laughing. "Why he is a regular dear and only for him I shouldn't be going to get married, but you *must* know that you are the only woman in the world he cares two straws about—Why, what is the matter, Helen, are you ill?" For Helen had turned white as her dress and for a moment could not speak.

"It is nothing, dear, nothing, I only felt a little faint, go on. Tell me who it is you are going to marry."

"Fred Darell, whom I have known all my life. The funny part of it is that Major Wardrop is his uncle and it is all through him that my people have allowed us to marry."

"Yes," murmured Helen.

"Well, you see, he hasn't much money and so father would not hear of our even being engaged, but when I told Major Wardrop all about everything, he said he would do his best to make me happy."

Alas! Helen remembered these words only too well, hey had been her undoing. But she must not give way to thought, so, with an effort, she said:

"Tell me, Winnie, how has he helped you?"

"Why, Fred had a chance of becoming a partner in the firm he worked for if he could put in a certain sum of money. This he couldn't possibly do, and that dear Major Wardrop wrote and told father that he was perfectly willing to give Fred the necessary amount if he would consent to our marriage. There was a good deal of bother one way and another, but the letters received by this last mail finally settled it all, and now I'm to go home as soon as possible and begin getting my things. Isn't it all too lovely for words?"

and in her joy Winnie hugged her friend enthusiastically. Girl-like, Winnie went on chattering of the joys which awaited her, too absorbed in her own concerns to notice how quiet Helen was, but at last even she noticed her companion's face which was pinched and drawn with pain.

"Helen, I'm sure you're ill; do let me do something for you."

"I don't feel very well—I think if I were to go and lie down quietly for an hour or two, perhaps I shall get better; you won't think me unkind?"

"Of course not, Helen, how could I? I will take myself off and leave you to rest."

Once alone, Helen's forced composure left her and she wept bitterly. "Oh, what must Gerard have thought of her—*How* could she have had so little faith in him? And how she loved him, why, why, why had she not trusted him?" and so on her thoughts went round and round till she felt giddy and dazed. There was no hope, no light anywhere. Her husband loved her dearly, on her part were respect and liking only. Both good enough things in their way, but they do not take the place of love. For hours Helen lay motionless, conscious only of the pain which overwhelmed her.

Fortunately Mr. Burrell was away for a few days, so she had time to think, before she must make the effort and pull herself together to face life with the added sorrow, caused by the knowledge that Gerard must think badly of her. That he must think her the thing she most despised, a flirt.

Ah, God, it was more than she could bear. To have her happiness within her grasp and to have let it go.

* * * * *

But time, the great healer, softened Helen's sorrow, and as the years went by she grew contented, and almost happy.

So it was with sincere grief that she mourned her husband's death, when it took place, suddenly from cholera.

She felt very lonely, for she had no children, and both her sisters were lately married.

For nearly two years she travelled all over the world, but in time she tired of wandering and made up her mind to return to England, and, taking a house, try to settle down. But first she was to pay a long visit to Winnie Maitland, long since Mrs. Darell. Her husband had prospered in the business to which his uncle had helped him and they were living in a charming house in Berkshire.

"Why, Helen, my dearest, you look younger than you did seven years ago," exclaimed Winnie, as she greeted her friend affectionately. "What have you done to yourself?"

"I have wandered about the world feeling a very lonely woman, if that is a good thing to restore youth," replied Helen laughing.

But in truth the years had left her beauty untouched, and the sad droop of the mouth and a far away expression in her eyes, had not made her less lovely in the eyes of those who cared most for her.

"You will have a very quiet visit, Helen, for I was selfish and wanted you to myself. So we have no visitors excepting Gerard (for he won't let me call him uncle), who is here on ten days' leave.

Helen felt as if her heart had stopped beating.

"Gerard," she said, "Gerard Wardrop?"

"Yes; you recollect him, don't you?"

"Very well indeed—Winnie"—laying her hand on the other's arm—"does he know that I am coming?"

"Yes; of course." Then as their eyes met a light dawned on Winnie.

"Why, Helen, is that what it is? Is that why he has never married?" For once in her life, Helen broke through her reserve, and told Winnie the story of those old days, when her want of faith had parted her from the only man she had ever cared for.

* * * * *

A few weeks later, a quiet wedding took place in London, Gerard having overruled all Helen's objections to the shortness of their engagement.

For he declared he would wait no longer for the happiness so long delayed.

Giles Wheatley.

Have you a Gramophone? No?

Then here is your opportunity to win one!

We are offering this week ten more of our now famous Gramophones for competition among *Short Stories* readers. All you have to do is to go in and win, and when the prize is delivered at your door, call in your friends and, having placed in position one of the two records with which every instrument is provided, explain to them that you gained the wonderful talking, singing, and playing instrument they are listening to by the fact of your being a reader of *Short Stories*, adding that they might go and do likewise.

There is really no limit to the attractions of our Gramophones. On a cold, wintry evening you can sit in your armchair by a cosy, warm fire, and listen to the voices of our best singers and to the performances of our finest orchestras to your heart's content.

The competition for these entertaining instruments consists in constructing a sentence from the words contained in the titles of the stories appearing in this number. No sub-titles must be used, and, of course, no word which does not appear in the titles.

The ten competitors who send in sentences which in the Editor's opinion are the best, will each be rewarded with a handsome Gramophone.

Attempts must be made on the backs of postcards only, marked "Title," and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Postcards must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday, November 18th.

Result of the First "Serial Story" Competition.

In the above competition Gramophones have been awarded to the following successful competitors:

LONDON—

Mrs. Carpenter, 4 Greencroft Gardens, South Hampstead.

Mrs. R. Slater, 7 Seagers Cottages, Lawn Terrace, Blackheath.

UNDER 100 MILES FROM LONDON—

T. E. M. Neale, 65 Sparkenhoe Street, Leicester.

C. Biggleston, 10 William Street, Herne Bay.

OVER 100 MILES FROM LONDON—

Miss F. Rayner, Girton, Sea Road, Boscombe, Hants.

S. W. Lang, 6 Mendip View, Causeway, Fishponds, Bristol.

SCOTLAND—

R. Ure, 6 Dunedin Terrace, Clydebank, Glasgow.

A. Low, 41 Dishland Street, Arbroath.

IRELAND—

Miss Annie Brangan, 4 St. Joseph's Place, Dublin.

D. E. Jones, 69 Beechfield Street, Belfast.

The correct sentence was:—"'Who drove him?' asked Ilden, nervously kicking his heel." Page 454, col. 2, line 56.

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Ambition's Defeat.

The Story of a Frustrated Scheme.

THE London season was well advanced; in fact, it was the week before Ascot, yet Harry Wainwright had only been in town a few hours when he strolled into his club for dinner. He took his letters from the hall porter with the air of a man to whom all correspondence is a bore, and rapidly glanced through them, till he came to one the contents of which caused him the utmost astonishment.

It ran as follows:

MY DEAR HARRY.—*It may surprise you to learn from me that I intend shortly to be again married. As this will make a considerable alteration in my mode of living, I wish to see you as soon as possible. My breakfast hour is half-past ten, as usual. Your affectionate father,*

CHARLES WAINWRIGHT.

Such was Sir Charles Wainwright's brief announcement of his engagement to his only son. The only son's answer was equally brief:

MY DEAR FATHER.—*I have only come up to town this afternoon, when I found your letter waiting for me. I will call upon you to-morrow morning at half-past ten.—Your affectionate son,*

HARRY WAINWRIGHT.

From these two letters it will appear that the relations between father and son were not of a confidential nature. It would be impossible to imagine two more different characters.

Lady Wainwright had died when Harry was hardly more than a child, and since her death, Sir Charles had led an ordinary lazy bachelor's life. Both the house and the shooting on his country estate at Winterford had been let, and Sir Charles spent most of his time at his bijou residence in Mayfair. A few country house parties were quite sufficient to satisfy his taste for field sports, which had never been very ardent. At the present time he had the reputation of being the best-dressed, the most gentlemanly, and the most selfish man in London clubland.

To such a man a son must be an incubus in any case; but when the son is a keen sportsman, and possesses an utter disregard for all the conventionalities of life, the incubus becomes too great to bear. Fortunately for Harry Wainwright he had an income of five hundred a year under his mother's marriage settlement, and his father gave him another two hundred and fifty on the tacit understanding that he did not annoy him. So far the arrangement had proved satisfactory to both parties.

* * * * *

"Well, Wainwright, come to town at last? You don't seem very pleased with it, either."

The speaker was Lord Pelham, eldest son of the Duke of Harness. He was one of Harry Wainwright's greatest friends. They had been at Oxford together, and since then had ridden the same horses, shot the same coverts, and carried on harmless flirtations with the same woman—important factors in concentrating modern friendship.

"Yes, it was a nuisance to have to leave the salmon this weather, but I had to come up to town on business. Seen or heard anything of the governor, Pelham?"

"Do you mean Sir Charles?"

"Yes."

"Not much; except that they say he has been paying a lot of attention to a new beauty."

"Well, he has got engaged to somebody. Read that. The worst of it is that I came up to town to tell him that I am engaged, so I expect there will be a muddle."

"H'm! But tell me about yourself, old man. In the first place, I congratulate you, and in the next, let us order dinner."

Harry Wainwright's story was soon told. He had been staying in a country house in the north for the salmon fishing, and had fallen in love with, proposed to, and been accepted by the daughter of his host, a girl named Maud Blossom. Pelham knew her intimately, having often stayed in the house, and again warmly congratulated his friend.

"Now tell me something about my future step-mother."

"Well, to speak the truth, I don't know very much about her; she is an American widow, with lots of cash, named Mrs. Stanley. As I have already said, she is sufficiently handsome to have become a fashionable beauty. Of course, she must be clever, or Society would not have taken her on credit, so to speak, for nobody seems to know anything of her antecedents. But you will soon be able to judge for yourself. By-the-bye, are not the Blossoms coming up to town?"

"Yes; they are coming up at the end of the week for Ascot, and have got rooms at the Langham."

Even "the pink wine of France" failed to dispel the gloom which the news of his father's engagement had cast on Harry Wainwright's mind. He knew that vanity and selfishness were the two chief traits of Sir Charles' character. It was a hard confession for a son to have to make to himself, but it was the truth, and Harry Wainwright, now that he was engaged to be married, knew that he should have to look the truth sternly in the face.

He left the club soon after dinner, and went back to his hotel. What a difference twenty-four hours can make in a man's life! On the previous night Wainwright had retired to rest with the prospect of enjoying every happiness that love can bring. To-night he had already begun to realise that the path of that love would not be strewn with roses.

He was at his father's house in Mayfair punctually at half-past ten on the following morning, with a spirit which, though depressed, was resolute. If the father should sneer at the son's engagement, it was more than probable that the son should forget his filial duty and sneer at the father's.

There was no cordiality in Sir Charles' greeting. He received his son with the same polished politeness with which he would have received an utter stranger, and during breakfast neither made the slightest allusion to the subjects which filled each other's thoughts. Yet, although they talked on the ordinary topics of the day, a careful listener would have noticed that they resembled two boxers, each of whom was waiting for an opening.

Breakfast being finished, Sir Charles lit a cigarette, pushed his case towards his son, and, sinking into an armchair, said, in an indolent tone of voice:

"You gathered from my note, Harry, I suppose, that I intend to marry again? Of course, my marriage will alter considerably my present mode of living. I shall make Winterford my chief residence, where, my boy, you will always be welcome. Indeed, both Mrs. Stanley—that is my future wife—and myself would be glad if you lived there altogether."

Sir Charles had an idea of making his son his estate agent, with instructions to superintend the stables and the shooting.

"I am sorry, sir, but I am afraid the arrangement would

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be impossible. I really came up to town yesterday to tell you that I had become engaged to be married myself."

Sir Charles was silent with surprise for some seconds. Only those who knew him intimately could have recognised how angry the news had made him.

"H'm!" he answered pettishly. "Then I am afraid that the plans I had made for your happiness are destroyed. As a married man, I could not afford to give you the liberal allowance which I have been giving, while the prospect of a married step-son and his wife in the house would hardly be pleasing to my wife."

"Nor to mine, sir, for that matter."

"And may I ask who is this lady you intend to make your wife?"

"Miss Blossom. I believe you were at school with her father."

The indirect allusion to the baronet's age added fuel to the fire of his irritation, but he only said:

"Ah, John Blossom. A very dense boy. I remember him at Eton."

"And may I ask who my future step-mother may be?"

"Certainly; Mrs. Stanley. I dare say you may have heard of her."

"I must plead ignorance to the name."

Sir Charles stood aghast. The name of Mrs. Stanley as a fashionable beauty had been on everybody's lips during the present season, yet his own son had not even heard of it.

"Mrs. Stanley's attractions are well known in Society circles," he said stiffly, with a strong emphasis on the word Society. "I am generally considered a fortunate man for having won her affections."

"Indeed. Then I congratulate you. Who was the late lamented Mr. Stanley?"

The veins on Sir Charles' forehead were swollen with passion, but he replied calmly:

"I cannot see that it matters in the least to you or to anybody else who he was. I asked you here this morning to tell you of my engagement and to accept your congratulations. You have thought fit to show your annoyance at my engagement, both by words and your manner. There is only one thing now that I have to ask you and that is to keep your annoyance to yourself. It is the worst possible form to let family quarrels become public property. In regard to the private allowance which I have hitherto given you, that will have to cease entirely. You have an independent income of your own, and if you choose to marry with that income, it is your affair, not mine. I only know that I would not risk matrimony on the same terms."

"Is not that a question for Miss Blossom to decide?"

Sir Charles shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps so. At all events, it is not for me to decide. Now, in order to prevent any vulgar gossip, I wish you would call upon Mrs. Stanley. I, on my part, will call upon Miss Blossom. It is a matter of mere formal politeness; that is all."

"Certainly, sir; there is no need to tell the outside world if we disagree."

"When will you call?" Sir Charles asked abruptly.

"The sooner the better. This afternoon, if you like."

"Very well. If you will call here about three o'clock, we will go together. Is Miss Blossom in town?"

"No, sir; but she is coming up on Monday for Ascot."

"Very good. Then I shall see you at three."

Such was the meeting between father and son; no affection, no sentiment, no anger had been expressed. Both were glad the interview had been got over without a scene. The son had lost a third of his income; the father had lost a good estate agent. Both knew that the gulf that separated them had been widened.

* * * * *

Mrs. Stanley was certainly the beauty of the London season. She had shot forth like a rocket over the firmament of Society, but from what star she had emanated, and what was the propelling power of the emanation, were secrets which Society had not succeeded in unravelling.

Society did know that she had made her *début* under the wing of Lady Highclass; that she had a charming house in Grosvenor Place; that she went everywhere, and that everybody worth knowing went to her "At Homes." That was sufficient for Society; it was not sufficient for Lady Highclass.

At the time of the interview between Sir Charles Wainwright and his son, another interview was taking place between Lady Highclass and Mrs. Stanley, in the latter's boudoir. There was one point of resemblance in the two interviews; both were equally unpleasant.

"You remember the compact perfectly well. You were to give me five thousand pounds if you got married."

"Exactly, Lady Highclass, but, then, I am not married."

"As good as married, anyway. I am pressed for money, and am leaving town directly after Ascot. It can make no difference to you whether you pay me now or in a month's time, and it makes every difference to me."

"But it does make a very considerable difference to me. I have my expenses as well as you have. You have already been paid more than sufficient for your services."

"Take care, Clare Stanley. I am not a woman to be insulted with impunity. If I have hitherto exercised my social influence on your behalf, I can also exercise it against you."

"And let Society know that your influence is to be bought by the highest bidder. The British aristocracy will be proud of you."

"Perhaps. One thing is certain; that Society will believe me and won't believe you."

"Might not Society wonder how you, with your income, manage to live at such an expensive rate? No, Lady Highclass, the part of the bully does not suit you. You know perfectly well who would be the sufferer if we were to quarrel."

"I don't want to quarrel," her ladyship retorted. "But I want money, and must have it."

"But suppose that I have not got it to give you!"

Lady Highclass looked astounded.

"It is the truth, I have not five thousand pounds in the bank at the present time. I will give you a cheque for a thousand, and you must wait for the rest till it is due."

Lady Highclass protested. Then she changed her tone to one of intreaty. But in vain. Mrs. Stanley was inflexible, so, as there was nothing more to be got, her ladyship took the cheque for a thousand pounds and left.

Mrs. Stanley leant back in her chair, and a smile of contempt came over her beautiful face.

"Yes, my lady," she muttered to herself; "if I had given you five thousand pounds you would have blackmailed me for more before my marriage. Bah! How I wish the whole farce were over."

Possessing a physical beauty which was as near perfection as possible, and a fascination of manner which was well-nigh irresistible, it was not surprising that, once launched into Society, she should have sailed forth in front of all rivals.

The chief surprise about her career was that she should have accepted a baronet like Sir Charles Wainwright. He was considered two or three rungs too low in the ladder for a girl who had a royal prince dancing attendance on her.

Some few of the old loungers about clubland said that Mrs. Stanley was too clever not to know her own business best, and then Wainwright might not be quite such a lucky dog as people thought.

TURN AT ONCE to first page and read "How I Chaperoned Belinda."

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Their opinion would have been strengthened if they could have seen her as she muttered: "Bah! How I wish the whole farce were over."

Harry Wainwright called for his father at the appointed time to go with him to Grosvenor Place. He was curious to see this beautiful woman who was about to become his step-mother. He had already made up his mind that she was only marrying his father for his position and determined to watch her narrowly.

Nothing could have been more gracious than Mrs. Stanley's manner of receiving him. She affected to take a great interest in his engagement, and asked him several questions about his *fiancée*. Sir Charles listened with astonishment. As he said to her afterwards, he had never known a woman draw Harry out so much before.

"My dear Charles, as we are so closely connected, is it not better that we should be firm friends?"

"Of course, Clare! I only said to Harry this morning that there was nothing more odious than a family quarrel. Still, it will not be necessary for us to see a great deal of him and his wife."

"I wonder what she is like, and whether we shall get on together?"

"This Miss Blossom? I suppose she is the ordinary country girl of the milk-maid type. But she is not an interesting subject; let us talk about ourselves."

Although she did not say so, Harry Wainwright was a subject of great interest to Mrs. Stanley. She was resolved to make him fall in love with her, and, in spite of his engagement, had not the slightest doubt that she would succeed. In truth, so far from cementing family friendship, it seemed extremely probable that she would be the cause of a very pretty family quarrel.

* * * * *

Mr. Blossom was a model of a country squire. Nobody in their sane senses could have taken him for anything else. Even when he was sitting in his stall in the theatre he exhaled a scent of the country, which made his neighbours picture him shooting partridges amongst his own turnips. He disliked town life, and if it had not been for his wife and daughter would never have come to London. As it was, he generally spent his days at Lord's or the Oval, unless there was a race meeting within easy distance. But during his present visit he found that he had other duties to perform. He had been obliged to dine with Sir Charles Wainwright, and he had come away with a very poor opinion of his host. He had been taken to a formal dinner-party at Mrs. Stanley's, and had expressed the candid opinion afterwards that there was no fool like an old fool, which was not flattering to the baronet.

"I tell you what, Janet," he said to his wife one evening; "Harry Wainwright is as good a fellow as ever crossed a horse; but how the dickens he came to have such a father is a mystery to me." To which his wife sensibly replied that Maud was going to marry Harry and not his father.

To Maud Blossom, however, this visit was one of continuous pleasure. She was proud of having Harry Wainwright for an escort. Mrs. Stanley had been more than polite to her, and would insist on calling to take her driving in the park, on bringing her home to lunch, and on rendering those thousand and one little civilities which pave the way to friendship between women. Maud was far too innocent to detect the treason which lay hidden in the heart of her new acquaintance.

But it was Ascot week, and the Cup day had arrived, the day which Society has chosen as the meridian of the London season. Sir Charles had dressed himself with more than ordinary care for the great festival, and the result was a triumph of the tailor's art; but he was far from pleased at the arrangement which had been made for the day.

"Clare knows how I hate anything like a family party!" he said to himself, as he slung his field-glasses over his shoulder; "yet she insists on asking the Blossoms to join us. Then she is perpetually telling me to do the agreeable to Maud, while she talks to Harry. Confound it all! I wish I were married! I'll take good care that we have none of this nonsense at Winterford."

The truth was that Mrs. Stanley having determined to make Harry Wainwright fall in love with her, had already commenced a flirtation with him under the guise of friendship. Both to him and to Maud she represented herself as a kind friend, anxious to prevent any family quarrel; and so she got rid of the somewhat tiresome attentions of Sir Charles, won Harry's confidence, and checked any distrust on Maud's part. She knew beforehand that her married life could not possibly be a happy one, and that it was her policy to have her stepson on her side in the future disagreements between herself and her husband, which were certain to take place.

Now, at Ascot many were the field-glasses pointed in the direction of Mrs. Stanley; many critical eyes looked at the beauty of the season. One man evidently took a special interest in her. Although he was backing horses for large amounts in Tattersall's ring, yet when his attention was not taken up with racing, he was always looking at Mrs. Stanley with a puzzled expression on his face. That he was a well-known man in betting circles was apparent from the deference shown to him by the bookmakers, not a few of whom wondered at his present absent-minded manner. At last this leviathan among backers beckoned to a quietly-dressed man, and talked earnestly to him for some two minutes. The quietly-dressed man listened, occasionally nodded his head, but never spoke a word until his companion had finished, when he merely said:

"All right."

"Then I shall see you to-morrow at seven?" inquired the backer.

"Yes," replied the quietly-dressed gentleman; and they parted as mysteriously as they had met.

Meanwhile, Sir Charles Wainwright, as he had predicted, was spending a very unhappy day. Both Mr. and Mrs. Blossom took an unaffected interest in horseflesh, and made constant excursions to the paddock, leaving the rest of the party to amuse themselves.

Now a crowd of friends and acquaintances were always hovering round Mrs. Stanley, and as that lady also took care to keep Harry Wainwright at her side, Sir Charles was obliged to attend to Maud and to suffer the pangs of jealousy at the same time. Maud Blossom belonged to the class of unsophisticated country girls for whom Sir Charles had no admiration; so when he had laid two "ponies" to one on the favourite for the Cup, and seen it beaten by a short head, what little good temper he did possess had taken wings and flown away from him.

"Harry," he said petulantly to his son; "I am afraid I must ask you to take care of Maud for a few minutes, as I have to go into the ring."

It must be remembered that Sir Charles' love for Clare Stanley partook more of the nature of pride than of affection. If she had not been the centre of admiration he would never have given her a moment's thought. But as some men are ambitious to ride the most showy horse in the Row, so others are ambitious to be engaged to the most beautiful woman of the season. Such was the case with Sir Charles; so it was extremely galling to him that Clare should give him the cold shoulder at such a place as Ascot. He thought that Society would notice it, and so it did.

"I say, Mrs. Stanley doesn't seem to be very spoony on her elderly beau, does she? Who is the young fellow with her?"

"Oh, that's young Wainwright, her future stepson."

The first speaker whistled in surprise.

YOU CAN BEGIN "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA" TO-DAY.

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"He's all right. He is one of those sporting fellows who would like to spend their lives shooting big game in the Rockies. Besides, he's to be married himself."

"Is he? Then I pity the girl."

This, and much more, said Society.

But Harry Wainwright had no suspicion of the remarks which were being made about him. Mrs. Stanley had told him that she wished to lessen the breach between him and his father! She had been very kind to Maud, to whom she had told the same tale. So if she did not deceive the scandal-loving world, she deceived this innocent pair. Partially, though not altogether, she deceived Sir Charles when they returned home.

"I don't know what I have done, Clare, but you would hardly speak a word to me to-day."

"And I thought I was doing exactly as you wished. If you want to spoon in public like John Thomas and Mary Jane——"

"Don't be absurd. You know what I mean. You would not let me come near you, and, worse still, made me look after that milkmaid."

"Now, Charles, you have lost your money and are cross. At least, you have me all to yourself now."

She kissed him as she spoke and soon coaxed him into a good temper.

"Wait till we are united, love, then we can see as little of our Phyllis and Strephon as we choose. Now, Charles, say you are not angry with me before you go."

* * * * *

Mr. Carte, of Chicago, the leviathan amongst backers on the turf, sat in his private room in a private hotel in Albemarle Street at seven o'clock on the evening following the Cup day, waiting for the quietly-dressed gentleman. It was the first year that Mr. Carte had patronised the English turf, and certain bookmakers hoped it would be his last. He had come over with plenty of dollars and a system; the system had succeeded and the dollars had increased! Socially he had confined himself entirely to racing circles, and had not even evinced any ambition to enter the precincts of clubland. This was the reason why he had not seen Mrs. Stanley before the previous day, but now that he had seen her she occupied a considerable share of his thoughts.

"Well, Dick," said Mr. Carte, as the quietly-dressed gentleman, whom we will introduce as Richard Lee, entered the room, "it has been a glorious week; another regular knock-down blow for the ring, my lad. Pleasure first and business afterwards. Come to dinner—I am as hungry as a cowboy."

Dinner is a lengthy affair amongst racing men who are obliged to be abstemious during the day, and it was after eleven before the two friends returned to Albemarle Street. An hour was spent in going through the betting-book. Then, throwing himself into an arm-chair with an air of relief, Carte said:

"And now, Dick, how about this Mrs. Stanley?"

"She is Nell Robinson, widow of John Robinson, who was shot down Texas way some two years ago."

"I more than suspected that yesterday; but how the thunder has she managed to come over here and raise Cain in Society?"

"Well, she is the 'cutest woman I ever ran across. Her beauty speaks for itself."

"I know all that. But who was Stanley? And where did she get the shekels from? I don't know much about Society, but I do know this, that American widows don't catch on unless they are considerably gilded."

"Then if you want to find out that, you will have to trace her career since Jack Robinson's death. Personally I don't suppose that Stanley ever existed, except in the lady's imagination. All I know is that she came over to England at the beginning of the year, and was run by a certain Lady High-class, who seems to be a bit of a boss. But what is the good of finding out? You don't want to spoil the woman's game, do you?"

"Certainly not; unless there was something to be gained by it."

"What can you gain? You don't want money."

(*Continued on next page.*)

LIVING SKELETONS.

An Illustration from Life.

WE are all familiar with the living skeleton, or professional lean man of the side show, whose leanness is due partly to bad nutrition, and partly to the fact that by means of purgatives he expels the food from his system before it has time to be fully absorbed.

In his case the emaciation is intentional, but there are scores of cases where it is quite the reverse, and brought about entirely by imperfect digestion and general ill-health. In such cases Charles Forde's bile beans will be found a sure and speedy remedy, as the following plain statement of fact goes to prove. The story comes from Mr. George Blanchard, of Morley Street, Kettering, and was told by him to a "Kettering Guardian" reporter. He said:—"For seventeen years I suffered from acute indigestion, which steadily became worse till at last my doctor gave me up as incurable, and I came to be looked upon as dying. I had violent pains in my sides and stomach, which latter was always distended with wind; and though I belched incessantly I found no relief, for the simple reason that the wind kept forming as fast as I could get rid of it.

"Every morsel of solid food I swallowed seemed to turn to wind, and also brought on severe fits of vomiting, which shook my whole system. I had to leave off taking solid food altogether, and subsist entirely on liquids. As a consequence I became so weak that I could hardly drag one foot after the other, while my limbs wasted away till they were no thicker than those of an infant! To add to my misery, I suffered also from dizziness and profuse sweats.

"As I have said, I had medical advice, but derived no benefit, and after a time was told by my doctor that he could do nothing more for me, and that I should never again be well. At this I abandoned hope and made up my mind for death. I was in this pitiable condition when my wife chanced to read of the marvellous cures effected by Charles Forde's bile beans, and we got a box. I began taking them, and soon realised that I had at last found the right thing. The stomach pains ceased gradually, as did also the vomiting. The flatulence and dizziness disappeared, and I began to regain strength. All this time I had been taking bile beans regularly, and continued to do so, till now I am well and strong again, and feel better than I have done for twenty years. I can strongly recommend Charles Forde's bile beans to anyone suffering as I did from indigestion, dizziness, stomach pains, vomiting, or weakness. Their effect is truly wonderful."

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EXTRA CREAM TOFFEE

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"I don't know, but useful information is always worth something or other. Let me see, you went down into the Argentine for a few years or so, after the Robinson affair, so couldn't know anything about her."

Dick Lee nodded.

"Who is this Sir Charles Wainwright, whom she is going to marry? He is not one of the regular racing fraternity."

"Man about town," the other answered laconically.

"Got any shekels?"

"Yes, and a country seat called Winterford."

"Fancy Nell Robinson as a baronet's wife and the mistress of an old English country house! By Jove, I've hit it! Sir Charles shall go on the turf, and I'll manage his horses."

Carte was so pleased at the idea, that he did not notice the look on Dick Lee's face. If he had, his joy would not have been so boisterous as it was. He talked exultingly for some minutes as he fancied himself an owner of racehorses. He might have fancied himself a member of the Jockey Club if Lee had not suddenly interrupted him.

"You seem to ignore the consent of Sir Charles."

"Bother Sir Charles! He would consent, to prevent the exposure of his wife. Or I might approach the wife first, and she would coax him into consenting, to save herself."

"Both contingencies are extremely improbable."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that you have nothing to expose. Listen to the case. You happen to know that Lady Wainwright is the widow of an American gambler, and you disclose the fact to her husband, who is probably aware of it already, demanding as a price of your secrecy that you should enter into a racing partnership with you. He would either laugh at you, or have you horse-whipped. So much for the first contingency! The second is worse. The lady would defy you to do your worst, and ring the bell for you to be shown out of the house."

"Then I would let Society know what sort of woman it has made its idol."

"Society would not believe you, in the first place, and you would gain nothing by it, in the second. You might have some influence if you chose to make a complaint to the Jockey Club, but you are powerless to make a complaint against a reigning beauty."

"But how did she get her money? The woman must have some secret."

"Probably she has," replied Dick Lee curtly. "But then you don't happen to know it."

"I must say you don't seem very keen on the matter."

"Because I don't see anything to be got out of it. Sorry to destroy that charming castle you were building in the air, but there is not the slightest chance of its ever having an earthly foundation. Take my advice, and think no more about it. I must be off to bed now; meet you at breakfast. Good-night."

But Dick Lee did not go to bed. He sat up smoking and thinking till the first streaks of dawn lit up his room. In the stillness of the night many plans suggested themselves to his mind, only to be tossed aside as worthless as soon as they were formed. On one point only was he satisfied, namely, that he had put Carte off the scent of Mrs. Stanley's history. He alone of all men in London knew that history, but he was doubtful how to make use of his knowledge, or, indeed, whether to make use of it at all.

"If I were sure she would be happy, her secret should die with me," he said to himself more than once. Strange thought for the hero of over fifty duels. If it had been expressed aloud, nobody who knew the man would have believed in its sincerity. Could this be the same Dick Lee who had beaten the Red Indian in cunning; who was the deadest shot in the Southern States; who had never been known to spare either man or woman? But he had never shown to any living creature the one deep wound in his heart. Until that day he thought himself that it was cured, but now it was bleeding as copiously as ever. The love which he had deemed dead was again full of life; but how different was the nature of that life! What had been passion was now compassion; jealousy had become generosity; the burning ardour of the man was changed into the tenderness of a child.

* * * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Blossom, having enjoyed their annual visit to London in their own peculiar fashion, left town, and also left their daughter behind them. Maud was now the guest of Mrs. Stanley, much to the disgust of Sir Charles, who, with the selfishness of all lovers, whether they be twenty-one or eighty-one, wanted to monopolise the society of his *fiancée*. Mrs. Stanley, however, thinking that she should have as much of Sir Charles' society after marriage as she wanted, had elevated Harry Wainwright to the position of her "tame cat."

It was a proof of the woman's cleverness that she had done this without exciting the jealousy of Maud. London life, with its dissipations—its Hurlingham, its Sandown, its dances in Mayfair, and its "At Homes," in Belgravia—were such novelties to the country girl, that her mind was in a constant state of bewilderment, and she never paused to consider that her lover's attentions were becom ng daily less ardent. Even if she had had any doubts about Harry Wainwright, Mrs. Stanley would have instantly dispelled them during those curlpaper confidences which women love to indulge in.

"My dear Maud, Harry's devotion is really too tiresome. He sat out two waltzes with me to-night, while you were dancing with Lord Pelham, and his conversation consisted of Maud, Maud, Maud, nothing but Maud."

Then the girl's eyes would brighten. She had thought at the time that Harry might have been more attentive to her, now she blamed herself for thinking him wanting in devotion. Certainly Mrs. Stanley ought to have been satisfied at the success of her deception.

She knew that she was on the verge of a precipice and that at any moment she might be hurled into the chasm of shame beneath. But this she had known when she had started on her adventurous career, and this was the reason why she wished to hasten her marriage with Sir Charles, and to make Harry Wainwright her lover, so that he might protect her in her future troubles. Her social success had been greater than she had ever anticipated. But she had sacrificed her love at the altar of her ambition, and had found out in the quiet moments of her solitude that the artificial veneer had not stifled the woman's heart with which Nature had endowed her.

She was sitting one July afternoon in her boudoir thinking of her old life, and feeling some little remorse that she had ever forsaken it. It was not the life in Texas that she was dreaming of, but of the two years which succeeded it—two years spent with the husband whom she loved, amongst the most luxurious scenery of South America—two years of unbroken bliss.

Where was that husband now? Was he alive or dead?

She was alone. Maud had gone with some new friends to a *matinée*, and Sir Charles was in the City on business. Suddenly Harry Wainwright was announced.

She received him with her usual fascinating manner—a manner which was charming him on to destruction as it had charmed many before.

The man sat down beside her on the sofa, and yielded himself up to her influence. Occasionally his conscience had smitten him about Maud, and then he would drown conscience in wine. Now the voice of conscience was dumb; he drank in every word which came from her lips; he gazed upon her beauty and was intoxicated by it.

"Clare, my friendship, my love is yours," he said as he bent over her. "My darling——"

A knock at the door arrested his words, and a servant entered with a note. Mrs. Stanley looked at the handwriting and turned as pale as death.

(*Continued on page 638.*)

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ON PAGE 613.

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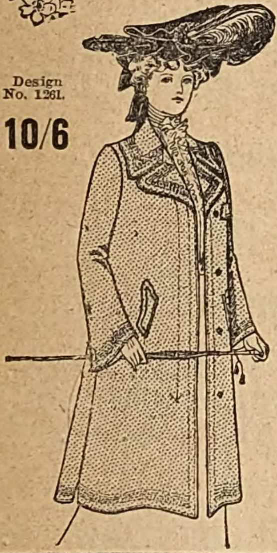

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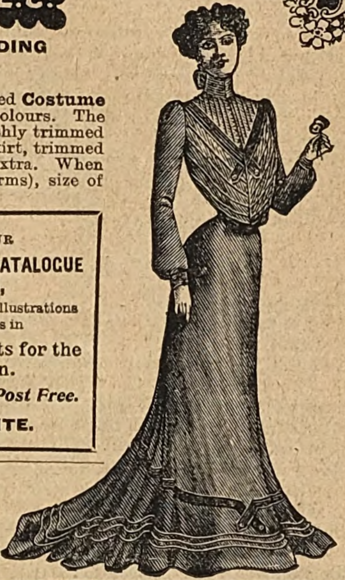

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"There is a man waiting for an answer, madam."

She tore open the note and quickly read the contents. Then she went to her writing desk.

"I will be with you at the time you mention," was all she wrote, and, addressing the envelope, handed it to the servant.

"Clare, darling what has made you worried?"

She rose angrily.

"What right have you to call me darling? You, who are engaged to another woman. No, Harry," she added, more softly, "forgive me, for it has been my fault. Leave me now; forget me and all that you have said to me. It is not too late. Go to Maud. She loves you and believes in you. Your place is by her side. This infatuation for me will be past in a day, and your love for Maud will be stronger. Go now, I wish to be alone."

He went out without a word. The dream was over. The veil was lifted from his eyes.

And the note which had caused this sudden change in Clare Stanley? It simply ran:

Meet me in the Broad Walk at Kensington at six.—

DICK.

It was already five o'clock. There was no time to be lost. She hastily changed her elaborate tea-gown for a plain serge dress, and was soon being whirled down to Kensington. She had had no minutes even for thought. Her brain was too dizzy to enable her to judge how to act.

She trembled as she walked up the Broad Walk, glancing nervously about her. At last a quietly-dressed gentleman stepped out from behind one of the huge trees.

"Nell!"

"Dick!"

Dick Lee held out his hand and she took it, though her eyes were downcast. They walked along a few yards in silence.

"Nell," the man began, and there was a note of the saddest compassion in his voice; "I am not here to reproach you, nor to molest you in any way. I only want you to answer me one question. Are you happy?"

"I am the most miserable woman on earth," she replied sobbing.

They strolled away from the madding crowd, though few would have recognised them as the Society beauty and callous gambler.

"Can you ever forgive me?" she murmured.

"I can and do forgive you. I forgive you so much that if you ask me to leave you now, your secret shall never pass my lips. If you wish me to remain, Nell, it is not too late now to return to the old days of happiness."

"How can I thank you for your generosity? How can I atone to you for the past? I was and am your wife. I will be your slave."

And thus she sacrificed her ambition at the altar of her love and duty.

In the course of the evening Sir Charles Wainwright received the following note, together with presents which he had made Mrs. Stanley:

DEAR SIR CHARLES.—*Circumstances have occurred which render it imperative on my part to break off our engagement. I am sorry for any pain that this letter may cause you, but you would have suffered more if I had married you. Do not try to see me, as henceforth I am dead to Society. Wishing you happiness in the future, I am, yours sincerely,*

CLARE STANLEY.

* * * * *

On board an Atlantic liner two people, whom the passengers have agreed to be a newly-married couple, are sitting side by side. Love is visible in the face of both; but in the face of the man it arises from the sense of protection, in the face of the woman from heartfelt gratitude.

L. Payne.

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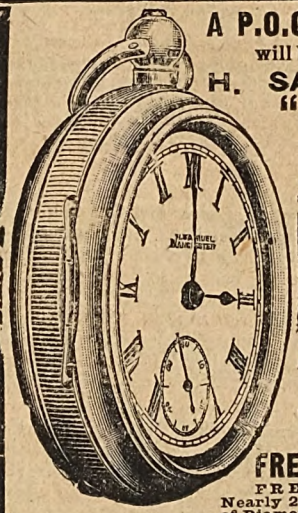

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Absent Mother.

"ETIQUETTE" has known a certain girl for two years, but is not engaged. He, however, is in the habit of constantly visiting her at the lodgings in which she lives with her mother, who is a widow, and a trained nurse, and therefore constantly away from home. What "ETIQUETTE" wants to know is, "Is it right for him to call on the girl and sit with her for hours during her mother's absence, and not in the presence of third parties?" People have, apparently, been saying things, after the manner of "people."

* * * * *

It would save embarrassment to the girl, if "ETIQUETTE" became engaged to her. Living in apartments, obviously people would be inclined to make remarks at such visits in the absence of proper chaperonage. There is no alternative for "ETIQUETTE" save to announce their engagement, or else to discontinue his visits when the mother is absent if he wants to avoid gossip.

'Twixt Two Girls.

"WILFRED" is about to propose to Lily. But he has learnt from an indirect source that Isabel, a friend of his family, has conceived a deep affection for him. Lily, however, whom he deeply loves, does not care for him much.

* * * *

I suppose "WILFRED" will not propose to Lily unless he has some kind of token of her returning his affections. At any rate, he should certainly get some sort of confirmation before doing so. Perhaps it would be well for him to ask her outright if she thinks she could return his love. A definite negative would, though, perhaps, mortifying to "WILFRED," at any rate leave him in no doubt. As to Isabel, if he has no feeling towards her, he had better avoid all meeting rather than provoke an impossible fancy on her part.

A Case for Faith.

"PETAL" is engaged to a man, and they are to be married in twelve months' time. But he seems to have turned cold to her lately. People tell her that he has been paying attention to a pretty girl friend of "PETAL'S," but the latter does not want to mention the matter to her as they have always been very great friends. In spite of this, Ralph (the sweetheart) persists in saying his love for "PETAL" is unchanged, and that he hopes to marry her "some day."

* * * *

Don't believe what your friends say, "PETAL." Ralph may be simply momentarily attracted to the girl friend, and, perhaps, has simply been polite to her. She is, you say, very pretty, and even engaged men cannot resist being attentive under such circumstances. As the girl is a great friend of yours, I am sure she would not attempt to steal the affection of your sweetheart. In fact, she is much more likely, if she is a real friend, to resist any overtures on his part. You might take the opportunity to hint to her that it would be a terrible blow to you if you thought anybody was drawing him away from you. Why not ask her advice on the matter, and thereby find out her own feelings? In any case if he still protests his affection, believe him before others, who are probably speaking only from hearsay, and perhaps a little bit of mischief.

Grievance of a Go-between.

"MAUDIE'S" brother has taken a fancy to a girl friend of hers, but they have been quarrelling a good deal. When the girl quarrels with him she goes to "MAUDIE," but when they make it up, she seems not to want her company. What would I advise?

* * * *

Is it not always the fate of neutral parties that when the enemies are agreed, they find themselves left out in the cold? You had better refuse to sympathise with the girl when she quarrels with your brother. Naturally, you cannot know who is right and who is wrong, and should not take either side. Tell her next time that she must fight out her troubles with your brother on her own account. If you can pave the way to making it up, do so, but don't take either side if you wish to remain friends with either when they are reconciled.

A Changeable Lover.

WHAT is a man to do when he breaks off an engagement with one girl, to make one with another, and then discovers that it is the first girl after all that he really loves? Such is the plight in which "PERPLEXED" (South Africa) finds himself. For three years he had been attached to Sylvia, but on his travels he met Dorothy, with whom he fell in love, and started correspondence with her. Finally, he found that he was fonder of Dorothy, and got his release from Sylvia. He has since discovered that it is Sylvia after all that he really loves, but Dorothy still believes in his sincerity towards her, while he has already promised her marriage.

* * * *

Now "PERPLEXED" is evidently in two minds as to which girl he really loves. He has had a spell of Sylvia and evidently wearied of her, and, after taking turn with Dorothy, finds a similar result. I think myself that it is probable he does not really love either girl, or he would never have been drawn away from both in turn in this fashion. Now, if "PERPLEXED" finds that he no longer loves Dorothy, and that, apart altogether from any entanglement with Sylvia, he could not really be happy with her, it is right that he should make the matter known to her, but in as discreet a way as possible. He should make the severance gradual, and as he is a commercial traveller it should be possible for him to see her less frequently. Let him free himself of Dorothy, clearly and completely, and then start the position anew with Sylvia. I am not giving this advice in any sympathy with "PERPLEXED," as his conduct, which he himself admits, is not to be admired. But if his love towards his present *fiancée* has ceased, the engagement should not proceed if it can be broken off in a way which would not greatly injure either party. How to do that must depend on "PERPLEXED'S" tact.

Another Indictment.

THANKS, "E. W." (Paisley) for your remarks. However, I have nothing to add to my reply to the correspondent mentioned under the heading "Advice Misinterpreted." I am sorry you should have gained the impression that I am partial to women in my advice. But you will agree that it is not fair to select one paragraph from an article in support of this. If, in the instance you cite, I have selected the case of a "stupid man," in the same article, a little higher up, a similar reference was made to a "stupid woman." And this rule I have always tried to observe. If, on one occasion, I find myself compelled to sympathise with a woman in a trouble; on another, as you will see by glancing at any of my columns, I at once find myself in agreement with a man. That correspondents generally do not think me prejudiced where men are concerned is shown by my letters, three-quarters of which are from men.

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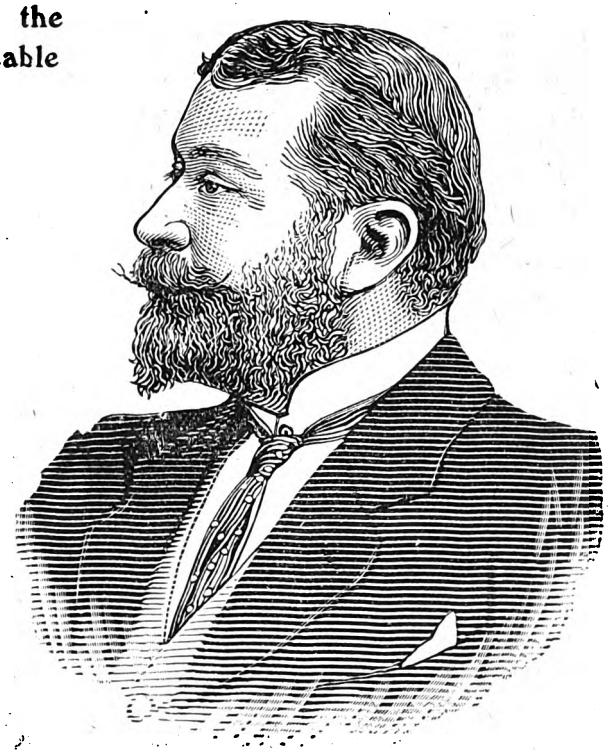

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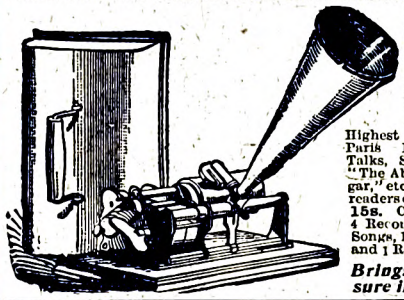

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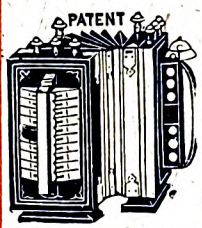

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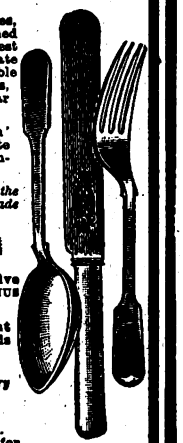

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Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Her enthusiasm is misinterpreted. Instantly all is confusion. The guide, however, snatches Belinda from danger, and hurries them away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, then suddenly with a cry of: "It is you, you! Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all. He's David Carr," throws herself into his arms.

The dragoman is dismissed, and back at the hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes Lady Peggy to task for the occurrence. Lady Peggy retorts that not long ago she saw the Duchess' own daughter Honoria in the arms of a real Egyptian. The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and after storming at her, is slapping her face when Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room. Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

We Visit the Pyramids.

I wasted neither time nor thought in wondering what had happened, but went swiftly up the stairs and across the corridor towards Belinda's room, Crawley and Lord Davenant following close behind. Doors flew open, anxious faces watched, eager voices questioned as I passed. "What did it mean, what could it be?"

Once more the cry of "Help!" rang out, but by that time I had reached Belinda's door, had turned the handle, crossed the threshold.

And then!

In the middle of the room I beheld Belinda, with terror-stricken eyes and white, blanched face, struggling with Honoria, struggling to gain possession of something that the distracted girl clasped tightly in her clenched hand, clenched with a strength and tenacity I had not thought her capable of showing.

In a flash I grasped the situation, and promptly took the initiative. I smartly shut the door and turned the key. Then, falling upon Honoria, with Belinda's help, forced her to unclose her fingers, which were convulsively gripping a small phial.

I uncorked the bottle, smelt the contents, and put it down with a queer, sickening feeling. A terrible tragedy had only just been averted. The bottle contained laudanum of sufficient quantity and strength to kill a far stronger woman than Honoria.

She, poor wretched girl, lay in a heap upon the floor, giving utterance to low, broken cries that brought tears to Belinda's beautiful eyes, and made me for a moment weaken. The next, I had pulled myself together.

"What does this mean?" I asked sharply. "Belinda, stop crying at once, and help Honoria on to the bed. Now," I demanded when my directions had been carried out, "will you please explain yourself?"

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Honoria sat upright and gazed at me in an excited sort of way.

"I meant to take poison," she said slowly. "I came here, to Belinda's room, because I have no peace, no quiet in my own."

"What could have put such a wicked, such an awful idea into your mind?" I asked.

Honoria's thin lips twitched.

"*You* know," she said sullenly. "You know quite well my brother says I am to marry Mark Striven. Oh!" She shivered and her lips grew white. "I am frightened, *frightened!* Don't let him hurt me. Keep him away. Belinda"—she threw out her hands and clung piteously to the young girl.

"Surely, Honor, you are not so silly as to think of killing yourself because your brother says you are to marry a man you don't like?" said Belinda indignantly. "Don't marry him; refuse point blank, that's all you have to do."

"You don't understand," whispered Honoria. "How should you? Girls like you know nothing of the lives women like me have to lead. Listen," she grasped Belinda's wrist, bringing the fresh young face close to her own, "if I don't marry this man, my brother will have me sent away, shut up in a strange, terrible place, where I shall see no one but strange, terrible people. He has said so, and he meant it. And I am powerless to go against him. What can I do? There is nobody to help me—to care for me. Nobody but Hamed, and I dare not send to him. Look at me," she turned her head, and the light fell on her face, with its weak blue eyes, tremulous mouth, and indeterminate features. "No one wants me, or cares for me," she went on bitterly. "I'm neither pretty, nor clever, nor rich. My mother has always been ashamed of me, and my brother dislikes and despises me. They want to be rid of me, but there's only one way of doing that—marriage, and," she paused, "no one will marry me," she said, a flush in her cheeks. "No one but Mark Striven. I can't work," she put out her white, helpless-looking hands. "I should have to starve if I depended upon myself for bread. And I don't want to starve; *that*," she glanced towards the bottle that I still firmly held, "that is the easier way!"

"Honor, don't talk like that," beseeched Belinda. "I'll help you, dear. I'll be your friend. I'll lend you all the money you want, so that you can go away by yourself to some place where no one can find you except me and Hamed. I'll write to Hamed for you if you wish. I'll——"

All further undertakings on Belinda's part were nipped in the bud.

"You will please understand, my dear," I said calmly but firmly, "that I cannot countenance you in assisting Honoria to disobey her people. Her mother and brother are the best judges of what is for her good. How can a young and inexperienced girl like you understand what is fitting?"

"Honor doesn't wish to marry this person," retorted Belinda. "I can understand *that*, at any rate. If I can help it, she shan't marry him. Lady Peggy," she turned towards me swiftly, "perhaps the Duke doesn't understand how much Honor dislikes the idea. She finds it difficult to express herself at times, poor dear. Let me talk to the Duke? He was very nice to me this morning. Perhaps I may be able to persuade him. May I go, Lady Peggy?"

I smiled discreetly. Nothing could have pleased me better. Belinda's errand would give Eastacres a splendid opportunity for ingratiating himself with her. He would yield to her persuasions, and by doing so, imply the extent of his regard. My pretty, blue-eyed charge was knotting the end of the noose round her own neck.

I did not show my satisfaction at the proposition, however, but shook my head.

"The Duke would resent your interference, Belinda. Besides, it would be in vain. He is a very determined man, and most difficult to move!"

"I'll try, at any rate," and without waiting for permission, Belinda hurried off.

Awaiting the result of her mission I sat by Honoria's side and gave her good advice.

"You're fond of Belinda?" I observed.

A dispirited "Yes," came from the pillow.

"You wish to retain her friendship and companionship?"

Honoria turned an agonised glance upon me.

"You're not going to say she mustn't speak to me?" she gasped.

"Certainly not—unless you persist in being foolish. Belinda may remain your friend on one condition, that you don't tell her ridiculous stories about your brother—stories that are likely to influence her against him. Eastacres will probably marry Belinda. You understand?"

"You don't really mean to let her marry him?" she asked. "He said something about it this morning, but I didn't believe it. Lady Peggy, it's too dreadful to think of! He is a bad, cruel man; you don't know how cruel. He'll break Belinda's heart before she's been his wife a year!"

"Nonsense!" I returned sharply. I knew Eastacres hadn't an amiable disposition, but I didn't want to be reminded of it. "They'll be a most devoted couple if you don't prejudice Belinda against him. Anyway, understand this, Honoria, if you say a word against your brother I shall forbid Belinda to speak to you. If necessary I shall leave Cairo to avoid you. If, however, you behave properly, I've no objection to her seeing you occasionally."

Honoria sighed.

"I ought not to consent," she said. "Belinda's been very good to me, but I suppose I must. I'll say no more to her about Lawson, Lady Peggy."

"I'm glad to hear it, Honoria. If you would be as sensible in other matters you'd get on much better with everybody, Eastacres included. Take my advice now, and be nice to Mark Striven when he comes to-night."

"I can't," she moaned. "*I can't!*"

I had no energy to waste upon the foolish girl, so I did not further combat her obstinacy, but waited in silence until Belinda reappeared. She returned in triumph, with a fine colour in her cheeks.

"Your brother's come to see you, Honor," she said. "May he come in? He's been so kind, and he is so sorry that you're ill. Try to be nice to him," she added, as the girl showed signs of aversion at the mention of his presence.

"Come in, Duke," called Belinda. "Honor's better now."

In the short scene that followed, I must confess the Duke enacted his part to perfection. He assumed the affectionate yet grieved brother, and gently yet earnestly rebuked Honoria, till the silly thing was genuinely moved.

"You had better rest this afternoon," he said kindly. "I'll send some books up to your room. I shouldn't come down to *table d'hote*; you can have your food upstairs. Don't worry about Mark. Mother will look after him till I come back. Good-bye, Honoria, and don't worry." He stooped and kissed, yes, actually kissed his sister's forehead. Honoria sighed as he left the room, and Belinda, flushed with delight at her successful impersonation of a peace-maker, showed every sympathy.

The Duke and I held a short conclave in the corridor.

"Honoria won't say anything indiscreet to Belinda now," I whispered. "I've seen to that."

"A thousand thanks," said the Duke, smiling.

"And"—I laid my hand upon his arm—"try to be patient with your sister. Belinda——"

"I will be the most loving and considerate of brothers," he said, with a little sneer, "for the present. And now about the Pyramids, Lady Peggy. When are we going to start?"

"It's a little late to-day," I said dubiously, "it's just on five."

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"We shall be at the Mena about eight," he answered anxiously. "I don't want to put it off. People will talk enough as it is," and he glanced angrily towards the room which, for the moment, sheltered Honoria from his wrath.

"Very well, Duke, it shall be as you wish, as you say our going will help to stop the gossip."

A quarter of an hour after our cavalcade set forth, thereby escaping something of the shower of questions and surmises that Honoria's escapade called forth.

"Matter, my dear?" said I to Midge, who was gasping with fright or annoyance, I can't say which. "Nothing at all. Honoria had a bad fit of hysterics and Belinda took fright, that's all."

My explanation or the reappearance of Reggie calmed her. She mounted her camel and ambled after Belinda and the Duke, already disappearing in the distance, while Crawley and I took our places in a carriage as more befitting our age and ideas as to comfort.

I leant back in my seat with a sigh of content. Life was going smoothly with me for the present, and in the future—the near future, I was certain of £20,000!

I quite blessed Honoria for her attempt at suicide. She had been the means of bringing Eastacres into close touch with Belinda. The Duke's ready acquiescence to her wishes had undoubtedly gratified the girl's vanity, and as a wise man remarked, "look after a woman's vanity, and her love will take care of itself."

We drove swiftly through the desert, fanned by a breezy wind that tossed the sand into tiny billows, and bent the tall heads of the distant palms. It had been a terribly hot day, and the cool of the approaching evening was very pleasant. The sun crept lower and lower towards the horizon. In its slanting rays the Nile gleamed a blood red, fading suddenly into a dusky grey. The sun had set. The grey crept from the river to the desert, deepening swiftly into night.

We found the rest of our party comfortably established on the verandah of the hotel, enjoying the view; Belinda and the Duke, with Reggie on the other side; Midge, a short distance away, was talking volubly to a good-looking boy in glasses.

"It's quite absurd, the way one meets people in Egypt," said Midge, pointing airily to her companion. "Long lost relations claim you as kith and kin, missing parents are unearthed by their sorrowing offspring, and prodigal sons are discovered playing with the fatted calf. Whoever could have dreamt of finding cousin Randolph right here at the Pyramids?"

She smiled in dazzling fashion at the hapless Randolph, who surrendered then and there to the little lady's charm. If Midge hoped to rouse the fire of jealousy slumbering in Davenant's heart by this manœuvre, she was grievously disappointed. Reggie appeared resigned, if not delighted, at the finding of the cousin; Randolph would free him from attendance upon Midge and give him time for attentions to Belinda.

There were a good many people at the Mena, Americans and English mostly, with a sprinkling of Egyptian officials. As usual, everybody stared at Belinda when we entered the dining-room, one man going so far as to pause in the discussion of an excellent omelette to study the lines of her profile.

She accepted the homage with her usual calm indifference, and exchanged remarks with the Duke in her clear voice with the greatest *sang froid*.

"Not go up the Pyramids to-night?" she cried, "Oh, Duke, this is unkind of you. It won't be any fun at all if we have to wait till the morning. I want to walk up like a human being, not wait to be hauled to the top like a bale of goods by a crowd of chattering, grinning Arabs."

"My dear girl," said Eastacres, "It is hardly safe to venture without guides after nightfall. You might stumble, catch your foot in a stone, or something equally dreadful."

"I'm not likely to fall," laughed the girl. "I can climb like a goat and jump, well, almost as high as a kangaroo. I shall be all right; besides, you'll be there to look after me?"

She gazed at him with a directness that robbed the speech of all suggestion of coquetry.

"Of course I shall, if you're bent on going."

"I must see the Great Pyramid to-night, at any rate," she said decisively. "Will you come, Lady Peggy?"

I smiled and shook my head. The Duke, I thought, would make a very efficient substitute. I had need of rest. I was compelled to change my views, however, when I heard that Reggie had determined to accompany the pair, with the unkind intention, I am sure, of spoiling the Duke's opportunity for private conversation. I appealed to Crawley to save the situation and pair with Davenant, but he refused to stir, and Midge haughtily declined even to consider the suggestion.

For a moment I was in despair. I hated the idea of a ridiculous and undignified scramble up an absurd heap of stones, but it seemed I should be forced to the sacrifice. Crawley, however, doubtless to appease his conscience, told me that a party had started for Cheops, generally called the Great Pyramid, just before we arrived.

"You'll meet them coming down, Peggy. You can insist on questioning them. That will insure you and Davenant a rest, and the Duke——" Crawley grinned and nodded his foolish head.

Reggie seemed hardly pleased when I appeared on the verandah.

"I'm coming too," I said, "it's such a lovely night," and with a gentle smile I slipped my arm through the young man's and held it lightly but firmly.

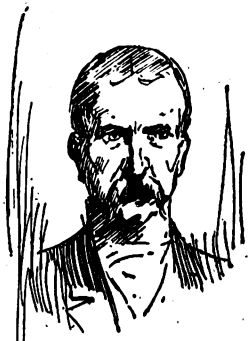
I suppose had I been as young as Belinda I should have felt as deeply stirred as she by the wonder and beauty of the scene. The desert, the wild free sea of sand that surrounded the hotel—an oasis of civilisation—was steeped in the wonderful white light of the African moon. Before us darkly frowning up against the sky rose the Pyramids, tombs of the great, immutable as death itself, changeless as eternity. Here and there grew clumps of spiky mimosa bushes, and in the moonshine a few stunted palms flourished their branches. And surveying it all with mystic and unfathomable smile, the face of the Sphinx looked over the desert, the People, and the Pyramids—the new world and the old.

In the distance the smoke of an Arab fire curled up to Heaven, tall, shrouded figures gathered round the blaze, while from the Mena came the click of the billiard balls, the sound of the mandoline, the ripple of a woman's laugh.

Belinda's enthusiasm grew as we approached the Pyramid. She hurried the Duke at such a pace that I had difficulty to keep up with them. Reggie, however, insisted I should make an effort, and, much against my will, assisted me with such earnestness that we did not once lose sight of them.

It is not a very difficult matter to climb the Great Pyramid, with plenty of time and breath. It is for all the world like going up a steep flight of stairs, only the resting-places are very far apart.

At the end of the first stage I sat down exhausted. Belinda, to my annoyance, followed suit, and gazed rapturously at the prospect. The Duke gazed rapturously too—though not at the prospect. Truly the scene before us was a marvellous one. We looked down at the Delta of the Nile interspersed with countless canals and rivulets winding about like silver threads, and glistening like jewels in the moonshine. In the distance gleamed the domes and palaces of Cairo, a diamond stud set in a silver fan.


THE DUKE OF EASTACRES'

I found some difficulty in recommencing my ascent, and by the time Reggie and I had joined the second stage Belinda and the Duke were half way up the third. At this point we encountered the

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party of tourists of which Crawley had spoken. One of them recognised Reggie, hailed him with glee, and, to my great satisfaction, button-holed him on the spot.

I left him to the tender mercies of his new companion, and scrambled up the last stage by myself. I was anxious to see how matters were progressing with Belinda and the Duke. I did not find them as I expected waiting my arrival, and I concluded they had gone to explore the tomb of Rameses. As a girl, I had been a frequent visitor to Cairo. My father was an ancient Egyptologist, and would spend hours in speechless admiration at the remnants of a temple or a portion of a tomb.

I had often and painfully climbed the Pyramids and explored them through and through. I had small difficulty, therefore, in finding the passage that leads to the Great Gallery and the King's Tomb.

Some members of the party we had met had left their candles stuck in the walls. I took one in my hand and by its dim light I could find my way in safety if not comfort. As I neared the end of the passage a whistle rang out clear and sweet as the trill of a bird.

"Listen to the echoes," cried Belinda, as the whistle returned again and yet again. And the terrible girl whistled once more.

The Duke did not attempt to end this unladylike performance, but clapped his hands in applause. In his enthusiasm he dropped the candle he was carrying; for the moment they were plunged in darkness, and just at that part of the passage, as I remembered with a horrible distinctness, there was a break in the masonry, a sort of pit into which it would be dangerous to fall.

Quick on my thought came a stumble, a cry. I rushed forward, light in hand. Belinda was standing safe, but rather white, on the farther side of the danger trap, leaning against the Duke. He was supporting her with tender yet eager solicitude.

"A narrow escape, Lady Peggy," he said, as I came up. "Another moment and Miss North would have had a nasty fall."

"You were very quick and very clever," said Belinda gratefully, "and most brave."

The Duke smiled and disclaimed any special courage. Personally, I don't think he had displayed any. On close inspection the pit proved to be little more than a foot deep, being nearly filled up with rubbish. But Eastacres took all possible credit for his performance, however, and fell in with the suggestion that Belinda should rest awhile in the great King's Tomb.

The tomb is a small room built of stone, and once upon a time contained the mummies of several Rameses. The burying-place of kings now served to give rest to Belinda. How those ancient persons would have opened their eyes could they have seen her, a fair-haired divinity in blue serge!

She was still a little frightened, and clung appealingly to Eastacres, as she would have clung to anybody at that moment. The pale face of the Duke flushed as he felt the pressure of her warm, bare hand. His breath came quickly, and his eyes narrowed as they wandered from point to point of her beauty. Her head thrown back, showed the curve of her round, white throat, with a glimpse of a small, pink ear. He tightened his clasp about the lissom figure and drew her closer to him.

Something of cruelty and exultance came into his face. He watched her as a boy watches the exquisite motions of a moth, desirous to catch the creature only that he may crush it.

For a moment I wished that Davenant and not the Duke was going to marry Belinda, but only for a moment; the next I remembered that Davenant's was only a courtesy title, he being the younger son of the Duke of St. Ormont, and, therefore, of no use to me or Belinda. It wasn't likely Hardy North would think a younger son worth £20,000.

"Are you better?" Eastacres asked slowly.

"Yes, thank you," said Belinda with a sigh. "It's awfully silly of me to be so foolish and turn faint when nothing's happened, but it's awful to feel the ground slipping from under one's feet."

"Terrible!" said Eastacres sympathetically. As he spoke he led her from the room, skilfully engineered her past the hole, and so into the fresh air once more.

Not more than fifteen minutes had elapsed since they had first entered the great passage. But in that fifteen minutes much had happened. Belinda looked upon the Duke as one who had saved her from a dreadful accident; her feeling towards him was softened. The noose already had begun to tighten.

The next day we went for an expedition in the desert. That is to say, Belinda and the Duke, Crawley and Davenant. Midge and I stayed at home. Randolph, the newly discovered cousin, hung about in disconsolate fashion. He was only petted when Reggie was there. During that individual's absence he was ignored, not to say snubbed.

Midge unburdened herself to me at great length in the privacy of her room.

"Reggie's behaving shamefully, Peggy," she cried with heightened colour. "It's scandalous the way he neglects me to go after this girl. I sent him a message last night to say that I must speak to him. He sent word back he was so awfully tired, would I excuse him? *Tired!* When I was waiting for him. A one time he thought nothing of fatigue or trouble when I was concerned. I can't stand it, Peggy. I shall do something desperate if it goes on. The girl doesn't want him, she doesn't mind if he's with her or not. You must tell her to snub him, Peggy. I mean it, you must give Belinda her orders in respect to Reggie!"

"My dear Midge, you are excited, and——" I glanced at the flushed, eager face, and thence to her open dressing-case. Rumour had it that Mrs. Murchison-Lee's vivacity and wonderful flow of spirits had their root in hypodermic injections of morphia. I thought an injection might be helpful at that moment. She seemed to read my thoughts, and coloured from brow to chin.

"I'm not using morphia," she said sullenly. Then, "Peggy, if you don't speak to Belinda I will. I'll tell her all about the Duke, and how badly he treated that pretty little Armstrong girl."

"Don't be absurd, Midge!"

"I mean it!" She grasped me by the arm, her eyes flashing, her face twitching. For the moment I was alarmed. Midge was utterly irresponsible. Her husband, a Chicago manufacturer, never interfered with her. She obeyed each impulse, every whim that seized her, and was quite capable of upsetting all my plans and hopes in regard to Belinda.

There was but one way of subduing the little woman. Deprive her of morphia, keep her without the drug that stimulated nerves and brain to such abnormal quickness, and she would be limp as a rag and as helpless.

"I shall tell Belinda," she repeated, and then, falling from temper to tears, threw herself into a comfortable chair, and rocking herself to and fro, sobbed piteously. Her head was turned away from me, towards the window, her face buried in a pocket handkerchief. Now was my time and opportunity.

"Poor Midge!" I said commiseratingly. "It's too bad that a girl in her first season should cut you out!" As I spoke I deftly lifted the lid from her dressing-case. There, in the lower compartment, nestling in the corner, was the bottle that I sought, together with the hypodermic syringe, a tiny little affair small enough to go into the pocket. I slipped bottle and syringe into mine softly, almost stealthily, and withdrew.

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Midge was checkmated! She would not come down to dinner that night, I surmised. She would, in fact, be unable to do so. Such slaves are the victims of the morphine habit, that they cannot go without the drug for longer than an hour or two. And their sufferings if kept without are terrible. I meant Midge to suffer. She should only have her morphia back on certain terms, and in the middle of the desert she could not get a fresh supply.

There were two or three fresh arrivals at the Mena in the course of the day. Among them was Stanley Forbes, the famous barrister. A few years previous to the time of which I am writing, Stanley was one of the most prominent and most popular figures in Society. He was the heir to a baronetcy, and had large private means besides his practice, which brought him in some thousands. His prospective title and his personal charm made him a most desirable *parti*. Great, therefore, was the sorrow among ambitious mothers when he suddenly and unexpectedly threw up his work at the Bar and disappeared. Many and wild were the reasons assigned for his conduct. One tale I remember gained credence for a short time, to the effect that he was in love with a charming young cousin—an Irish girl who lived in the wilds of Galway. Rumour had it that one fine morning Sheila Kenwyn left her home, and had not been heard of since.

Stanley, broken-hearted at her loss, had vowed to find her and execute dire vengeance on the man who had taken her from home and from him. That there was a man in the case was a foregone conclusion.

Stanley was a tall, striking-looking man, with keen eyes and clear-cut features, and a particularly charming smile. He was a favourite of mine, and we enjoyed a quiet chat until dinner.

As I expected, Midge did not turn up. Neither did the Duke, or his party. After dinner I received a wild note from Midge, imploring me to come to her room. I put the note in my pocket—it would do her no harm to wait a little longer—and sat down by my window to enjoy the view.

I watched till once more the moon lit up the heavens, watched until I could distinguish the figures of Belinda and the Duke, with Reggie and Crawley close behind. The two first came straight into the hotel, Eastacres and Belinda lingered in the garden.

I leant as far out of my window as was consistent with safety, and resolved to watch them with intense excitement. Given a garden, or a wilderness—either will do—moonlight, a lovely girl, and a man versed in the art of pleasing women, and in most cases the result could be foretold with certainty.

If only the image of that hateful David Carr could be erased from the girl's mind. If only she could forget his tall, strong figure, his dark face and passionate eyes. If only——

The Duke was speaking quickly, eagerly, to Belinda. The girl listened, her face turned towards him. He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

The caress startled the girl, she drew back and glanced apprehensively towards the house. The action irritated Eastacres. I saw him catch his under lip between his teeth. Then, with a sudden, unexpected movement, he bent towards her. Holding her firmly round the waist, he drew her face towards his own. Belinda had found her master early in the game, I thought, and waited for the sequel.

It proved to be an unexpected one.

Suddenly, swiftly, without sign or warning, a figure stepped from the bushes at their back. A strong hand dropped upon Eastacres' shoulder and roughly drew him from Belinda's side.

"I've been looking for you, Duke," remarked the newcomer, "for a long time. Now I've found you I should like a little talk."

He smiled grimly as he spoke, and laid his hand once more upon the other's arm.

Eastacres' face seemed to grow absolutely bloodless. Then, with an effort, he steadied himself.

"I am at your service," he said quietly. "Miss North, you will excuse me?"

Belinda nodded, and hurriedly left them. A sudden foreboding of danger made me fling on a wrap, hurry downstairs, and steal after these two figures walking rapidly, crossing the desert.

My heart thumped painfully. I confess I felt afraid. Truly I had reason.

The man who had interrupted the Duke's conversation with Belinda at so critical a moment was Stanley Forbes!

He had sought the Duke—I knew it, I felt it—on account of Sheila Kenwyn. Stanley was a strong man, on occasions a ruthless one. Eastacres would be as nothing in his hands. I shook at the thought of what might happen. The scandal of an open quarrel between the two men would jeopardise, if not prevent Belinda's marriage; my plans would come to naught.

I could not tranquilly face such a possibility. For my own sake I must at all costs save the Duke from Stanley's wrath.

The two men paused in the moonlight. There was a dangerous look on Stanley's face, a look that frightened me. He meant mischief to Eastacres, and I, a mere woman, how could I hope to stop him?

I went forward and stood trembling between them.

(The result of Lady Peggy's interference will be told next Tuesday.)

HE: "So the engagement is at an end?" She: "Yes." He: "Who broke it?" She: "The minster who married us."

"THEN, Marie, you don't love me any longer?" "No, dear. I can only be a sister to you for the future." "A real true sister?" "Yes." "Ah, then lend me a sovereign."

"WHAT'S the matter, Brush? You look sad." "I am sad. I decorated a set of soup plates for Mrs. Hoodelle, and what do you suppose she did with them?" "Give it up. What?" "Used them for soup."

HE waxed eloquent over his *fiancée's* beauty. Her eyes were lustrous, her nose fine, her lips a theme for the poet. "And her teeth?" interrupted his friend. "Teeth," he murmured rapturously, "like those of a newly-born babe!"

Two soldiers lay under their blankets looking up at the stars. Jack: "What made you go into the army, Tom?" Tom: "Well, I had no wife, and I loved war, Jack, so I went. What made you go?" Jack: "Well, I had a wife, and I loved peace, Tom, so I went."

THE REJECTED ONE (after a painful pause): "I think, on the whole, I will accept your offer to be a sister to me; but on one condition." The Rejecting One: "What is it?" The Rejected One: "That you let me be your little brother. Then I can get even with some of my successors."

TARTAN COVER No. 6
Will Appear Next Week.

THE TARTAN WILL BE THAT OF MACDONALD OF SLEAT.

Don't miss it. **Don't miss it.**

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AN UNSPOKEN ANSWER.

Or, Spoiling His Chances.

"Look here, Digby," observed Guy Maxwell to his chum, with that air of superiority which was peculiar to him, "there's only to-morrow left, and I must arrange to have a few minutes with Miss Lyttleton. She's the sort of girl who would make a fellow a real good wife. I rather think she likes me, and the fact that I am heir to a baronetcy, with a good income attached, will have some weight. I intend to have a try to-morrow."

Digby Grant blew out a cloud of smoke in order to hide the expression that crept over his face.

"That means," said Digby after a pause, "that you intend to propose to her to-morrow?"

"I don't see what other interpretation you can put on my words!" rejoined Guy, rather irritably. "You don't seem very bright to-day; you are tired after your walk. Your voice is a bit shaky. Have something to brace you up."

"No, thanks!" said Digby, forcing a laugh. "But go on."

"Well," continued Guy, "I have fallen in love with that girl. My life will not be a happy one if I do not win her! I have mentioned my intention to you, old fellow, because I wish to ask a favour."

"What is it?" inquired Digby, surprised. "I can't help you to win Grace—I ought to say, Miss Grace Lyttleton!"

"Yes, you can!" was the astonishing rejoinder. "I simply want you to keep out of the way. You see," pursued Guy, a trifle awkwardly, we are always together. Now, I can't propose to her with you by my side, so I want——"

"Oh, I'll clear out for the day!" agreed Digby. "You ought to get a good chance. I'm going to turn in now. You will have to-morrow entirely, and on the following morning we start for town. Good night!"

Digby Grant was not in a pleasant mood when he reached his own bedroom. He, too, was in love with Grace Lyttleton; he had been trying to arrive at a decision as to whether she cared for him or not—whether he would be likely to stand any chance if he proposed. He was not very well off, but nevertheless he could offer her a good home, and he was rising in his profession. Now, at the last moment, Guy had announced his intention of essaying the capture of Grace's hand and heart.

"I can't go behind his back," muttered Digby disconsolately, "so I must stand aside. Is she the sort of girl that would be captivated by the prospect of a title? I hardly think so, yet she may be in love with him, for women like a masterful man."

He pictured Grace Lyttleton as he had seen her that afternoon. A tender, sweet, loving and lovable girl; quiet and womanly; one who would make a perfect helpmeet, encouraging, soothing, and urging in times of trouble and illness, and filled with pride and delight when success crowned her husband's efforts. Guy Maxwell scarcely seemed the kind of husband for her; he was wilful, and his affection was of the passionate kind that does not endure; yet Grace might be in love with him, might be fascinated by him.

"I don't see that I have any right to interfere!" groaned Digby. "I must be off early, and go to—somewhere—for the day!"

He was true to his word, and Guy Maxwell watched for his opportunity. Miss Lyttleton was staying at the same hotel, where her father had taken a suite of rooms to accommodate himself, his daughter, and his young son, a boy of fourteen. Mr. Lyttleton thought it a bore to be compelled to spend two or three weeks away from his business, so he had letters sent on, and spent a fair proportion of his time in writing his instructions, talking to London on the telephone or reflecting over commercial problems in the smoking-room. Grace and Roy were left much to themselves, which was fortunate from Guy's point of view.

"The boy will be off somewhere, and she will be alone, so far as her relations are concerned," mused Guy, with great satisfaction. "I can manage to get her to a quiet spot somewhere inside or out, and the thing will be done."

He had to wait some time for his chance during the morning. Other gentlemen appeared to claim a goodly share of her attention, and she was playing tennis in the spacious grounds of the palatial hotel. Roy, too, seemed to be "dodging about," as Guy inelegantly phrased it, more than usual. However, the much-desired opportunity presented itself at last, and he found himself alone with Grace Lyttleton.

"May I have the pleasure of a walk and a talk with you in the garden, Miss Lyttleton?" he asked gallantly. "You must feel warm after that game, and the flowers are worth seeing. I am going away to-morrow, and I should like this last day of my stay here to be the happiest."

She glanced at him shyly, half frightened, but bowed and said briefly that she would like a walk among the flowers.

"I think she guesses what is coming!" said Guy exultantly to himself. "That makes my task easier!"

They went into the garden, and, after a few steps, he suggested that they should seat themselves on a rustic bench.

In spite of his masterful disposition, Guy felt a little nervous about beginning. He nerved himself, and said—

"Miss Lyttleton, I have asked you to come here because——"

"Oh, here you are!" chimed in a shrill voice. "Nice in here, isn't it? Got room for me?"

And Roy Lyttleton took a seat next to his sister.

"What do you think of Mr. Benson's play, Mr. Maxwell? Not up to much, is it?" asked the boy.

Guy made some kind of reply mechanically. He wished that young gentleman further, but he had to conceal his annoyance and be pleasant.

Guy Maxwell laid himself out to make another opportunity for the afternoon. He suggested to Roy that there was good scenery for an amateur photographer in the neighbourhood of Rookham, about three miles away, and that the day was a perfect one; Roy appeared to catch at the idea, and Guy was hopeful.

Guy felt just a trifle mean at the thought of spying on Miss Lyttleton in order to discover which way she went for a walk, but he did it, and was rewarded by seeing her alone on the cliffs.

"This is a fortunate meeting, Miss Lyttleton!" he declared, raising his hat. "Suppose we go to the base of that cliff? There is a pretty nook, invisible from here, and it would form a pleasant afternoon excursion. Don't you think so?"

Grace Lyttleton murmured that it might be so, but she was afraid to undertake any climbing on account of the fatigue.

"It is really very good of you to take so much trouble to

make my stay agreeable, Mr. Maxwell," she said charmingly, "but I fear that it is a thankless task for you."

She looked at him with a strange expression, which he interpreted favourably. He stretched out his hand to take hers.

"I'm going to Rookham to-morrow or the next day, Mr. Maxwell!" said a well-known voice behind him.

Guy nearly uttered a rude exclamation, but he smothered it, and resigned himself to the loss of another opportunity.

The evening alone remained, and Guy vowed that, by hook or by crook, he would have his answer then. There was a ball that evening, so he would certainly get Grace alone at one portion of the entertainment. Roy would be in bed, that was one thing to be thankful for, and old Lyttleton was nobody.

He secured three or four dances, carefully selected by himself for convenient times, and felt certain of victory.

"She knows what to expect!" he murmured several times. "She's shy and restrained, which is a good sign."

When his first dance with her was over, he tried to lead her away to the conservatory, but her next partner claimed her.

The second dance was before the interval, so he was safe from the intrusion of the next partner. Without asking her, he led her away to a quiet spot; she appeared reluctant, but he paid no heed. If he lost this chance——!

"Miss Lyttleton—Grace! I must tell you!" he began, losing no time in preliminaries. "I cannot——"

"I say, it's late for me to be up, sis, and dad is cross! Do you think that Mr. Maxwell——? Oh, that *is* Mr. Maxwell!"

Roy looked as though he had said too much. Guy was on the point of telling him to clear off when Grace spoke.

"I am afraid father will be cross, Roy, but I must take the blame. I'll go and find him and explain. You will excuse me, won't you, Mr. Maxwell?"

She was gone before he had time to realise the fact. He gazed sternly at Roy; if he could get that young rascal out of the way, there would still be a chance after one of the other dances.

"Roy," said Maxwell impressively. "I want to have a quiet talk with your sister, and you come in every time. See here, I'll give you this half-crown if you'll go to bed—go anywhere and leave us!"

Roy's face lighted up and his arm began to stretch itself in the direction of the piece of silver; then his face grew sombre and he shook his head.

"That would be treachery," he explained. "Grace told me this morning that she expected you would try and say something to her if you were with her alone, and she didn't want you to. So she gave me a shilling to keep near her all day, so as you shouldn't have a chance, and I agreed. I'll stick to the bargain, even if I lose by it!"

Maxwell paled.

"Did she tell you why she didn't wish me to speak to her?" he asked, as an idea crossed his mind.

"Yes," admitted the boy. "She said she didn't want to hurt your feelings by saying something you wouldn't like, so it would be better to prevent you from saying anything to her. Girls are funny, aren't they?"

"Roy," said Maxwell, after a pause, "I understand now. I'll give you this half-crown on condition that you say nothing whatever about this chat we've had."

"Done!" exclaimed the boy, and the money changed hands.

"So that's my answer!" groaned Maxwell, as he made his way to his room. "Yet it was kindly on her part to wish to spare me a refusal. A refusal! H'm! That must be pretty uncomfortable for a man to hear when he expects to be accepted! Yes, it was a strange way of doing it, but a well-meaning way. Now I understand her apparently shy glances. I'm off by the earliest train to-morrow. I wonder if she is in love, and whom she loves?"

His question was answered six weeks later by the announcement in the newspaper of the engagement of Miss Grace Lyttleton and Mr. Digby Grant, the rising young barrister.

George Day.

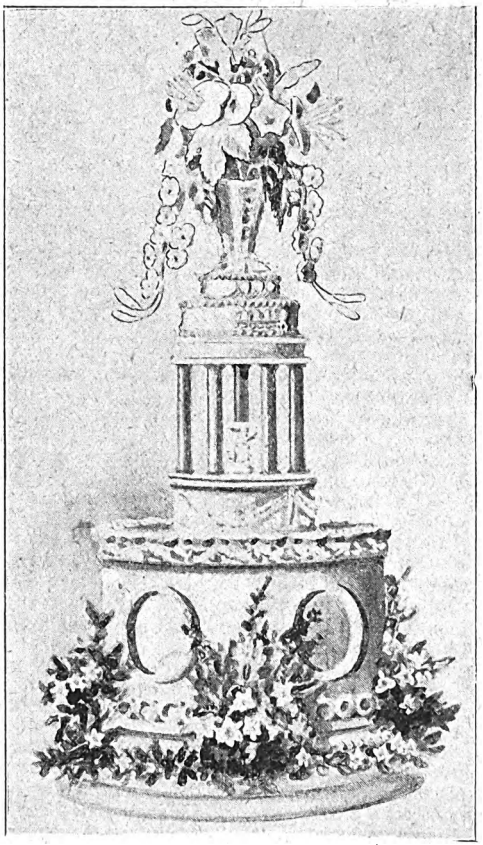
THE BEAUTIFUL BRIDE-CAKE

that we shall divide amongst 101 readers.

The lovely ornament at the top will go to one reader—perhaps you.

Miss Madge Morris will be married on Tuesday, December 2nd.

We shall purchase a big wedding-cake for Miss Morris,



and after the wedding festivities are over it will be cut up, put into boxes, and sent to certain readers of the paper.

Altogether, a hundred delicious pieces of cake will be sent out.

Moreover, the beautiful centre ornament from the top of the cake will also be offered as a prize.

The conditions under which you will be entitled to receive a piece are as follows:

All you have to do is to sit down and write a short congratulatory letter to Miss Morris on the auspicious occasion of her marriage. The reader who sends what Miss Morris considers to be the best letter will receive the beautiful centre ornament from the top, and the senders of each of the next hundred best will receive a piece of the cake.

Send your attempt to Miss Madge Morris, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope "Wedding" in the top left-hand corner, to arrive not later than Monday, December 1st.

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Another Man's Love.

THE ROMANCE OF A SWIMMING GALA.

"Oh, hearts are fond and faith is frail, and the years are over-long,
And the man that loves another man's love, must do or suffer wrong."

PART I.

Tells How "Hearts Were Fond."

"Well, I bet you a new hat Murray wins, and wins easily. Ask Cassie what she thinks, she has any number of gloves wagered on him—haven't you, Cassie?"

The girl addressed blushed and laughed, the laugh had a little echo of embarrassment in it. She was looking out over the strong iron railing near which she stood with her companions. Beyond, the long concrete wall of the hot white pier dropped to the level of the flat ripples that lapped at it sleepily. A tiny breeze fluttered her smart costume of butcher-blue drill and fanned the pink cheeks under the shady blue hat.

"I—I think Mr. Murray has a very good chance, papa," was her demure answer; "he is what I believe they call a popular tip. And I hope he wins, not only on account of my gloves, but because he swims so gracefully, not like our lumbering local champions."

"Trust a woman for being on the side of elegance," said her father; "however, in swimming, elegance is all in favour of speed, and I fancy Murray's chances myself for that reason, Vallance. But some people would prefer him in a hundred or two hundred yards sprint; he is lightly built in comparison with our fisher folk, and strength tells in five hundred yards and upwards."

"Whether yonder pretty jackanapes of an artist wins or not, Dr. Gibson," retorted the third person of the small group, "there's one man who, if he were here, would give him thirty yards and a beating. And that's my boy Ben."

Dr. Gibson glanced shrewdly at the tanned, grey-bearded face of the speaker, and noted the flash in the eyes under the peaked, gold-banded cap.

"Perhaps you're right, harbourmaster," he answered, soothingly. "Ben swims a good racing-stroke, though I don't suppose he's had much practice, at least not since he got command of the *Nova Scotian*."

The harbourmaster leant on the rail before him, biting his grizzled moustache.

"That's as maybe," he rejoined, "but I'd back him to beat this whipper-snapper, any day of the week. He's a man, is my boy, and let Cassie here remember it."

Cassie Gibson shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly—her father was adjusting a pair of binoculars and did not notice it. But Eli Vallance did, and the scowl grew on his weather-beaten visage as he bent his gaze upon a distant barge, moored at the head of the still, land-locked harbour, whose waters shimmered under the westering sun. Around it, on wharf and pier and foreshore, on masts and spars and standing rigging, was gathered a crowd of eager spectators.

"They're ready for the start," said Dr. Gibson, peering through his glasses and fumbling meanwhile to unhook from his guard a fine stop-watch; "take this Cassie, and time them when I cry 'off!'"

His daughter secured the watch, put a finger-tip on the stop-lever, and waited.

"Off!" exclaimed the doctor. At the starter's signal four figures had dived from the deck of the barge, and four heads, one brown, three fair, with the fairness of the southern shiresmen, were visible upon the sapphire surface of the harbour. Cassie had touched the stop-lever and the long seconds-hand of her father's chronometer was flitting upon its way as four arms showed themselves intermittently in the powerful swing of the overhand racing-stroke.

The on-lookers regarded the contest silently, and then a sudden shout went up. Two of the fair heads had drawn clear of the other—the brown head imitated them.

"Aha!" said Dr. Gibson approvingly. "Murray's no fool, he's letting his rivals make the pace. Do you see, Cassie, he's swimming on his right side to watch them—it's lucky for him he's equally good on both. By Jove, child, you're correct—he is a pretty swimmer. No splashing or blowing, and his strokes carry him half as far again as those of his competitors—he cuts the water like a fish."

"I'll take your bet about the hat, doctor," observed the harbourmaster slowly; "he'll give out at three hundred yards."

"Done," assented the doctor, gazing critically through his binoculars. "Here they come past us, Cassie. Bravo, Murray, bravo!"

His big voice rang out cheerfully as the swimmers went down the harbour, two of the fair-haired south countrymen out of it, the brown head keeping abreast of the remaining competitor coolly enough. Yet there was something desperately exciting about the fierce energy with which the strokes were made by the powerful arms, one white as a woman's, one leather-hued with tan.

Cassie Gibson could hear her heart beat loudly as she stared at the ruffled water and saw the dark, clean-shaven face of Joscelyn Murray, a quiet smile upon it and a determined gleam in the wet hazel eyes. Swift and true his left arm swung in the mighty racing-stroke, and his slight, yet muscular figure hurtled under its impetus towards its goal.

Fifty yards from the judges' boat his opponent spurted—the fair head distanced the brown one. The shouting broke out again—and hushed, the artist had spurted, too. The leading swimmers drew level and, for an instant, hung side by side. Then an interval began to open between them—the spectators cheered them wildly, madly, vociferously. But the fight was already ended, the brown head had reached the judge's boat, the white arms were flung over the edge, the dripping, dark features were shaking themselves free of the sea water.

"Won by half a dozen lengths," said Dr. Gibson, pocketing his glasses, and consulting the watch in Cassie's fingers, "time, eleven minutes, twenty-five seconds. Harbourmaster, I take six and three-eighths; Cassie, my dear, you will have sufficient gloves for months."

He put his watch back on to its chain and chuckled. "I win several little cash bets," he added, "with your per-

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mission, Cassie, I'll go and collect them. Good day, harbourmaster."

"Good day, doctor, good day," growled Eli Vallance, and Dr. Gibson shouldered his way out of the crowd, a sturdy, middle-aged figure in a linen jacket and a Panama. But the harbourmaster stayed to put a heavy hand on Cassie Gibson's wrist.

"Cassie, my lass," he said. "I'm loth to do you a wrong, and it may be that you don't mean aught. Yet the whole port is talking about you and this artist fellow. You've been walking and talking and riding and boating together, for a matter of a month. If it wasn't for Ben it'd be none of my business, but you're promised to be my boy's wedded wife. The *Nova Scotian* is due any day. Supposing I was to let Ben know, when he gets back, how you've been philandering with Mr. Joscelyn Murray."

"I don't care, I'm sure," responded Cassie proudly. But her head drooped, nevertheless.

Eli Vallance pulled his peaked cap hard over his brows. "Maybe not," he replied hoarsely, "but it'd break Ben's heart, and he might break yonder young fool's neck into the bargain."

"Mr. Murray," declared Cassie, haughtily, "is quite able to protect himself. And if everybody is talking about—about Mr. Murray and me, as you say they are, Ben will hear whether you tell him or not."

The harbourmaster gripped her wrist tightly. "Cassie," he murmured, "don't, for heaven's sake—don't spoil my boy's life. Ben was fond of you as a little lad, you were like brother and sister together. Now he's got his ship and can marry and settle down. Don't break his heart, Cassie, don't do it! I'm sorry if I spoke clumsily—I'm only a clumsy old man, but I love my boy. Say you've only been fooling with Murray, and I'll tell Ben that I watched it and laughed at it, whatever folks tell him."

Cassie released herself and looked down into the azure waters below.

"I—I—perhaps I have been fooling," she said, in a strange, quiet voice. "There, Ben shan't have anything to complain of, Mr. Vallance, I promise you."

Eli Vallance coughed awkwardly. "Don't remember it against me, lass," he pleaded. "My—my speaking about it. I expect there was no need, but Ben's my only child, Cassie, and—and he loves you better than he does me. Well, I'll be off, Cassie, you've taken a load from my mind, you have indeed."

Cassie Gibson sighed heavily as the harbourmaster stepped over the railing and went along the edge of the breakwater.

She herself did not move from the spot, but stood, trifling with her parasol, and biting at her delicate underlip. At length she was roused from her reverie.

There stood Cassie Gibson, a tall, distressful shape, gazing on at the wreck.

"Well, Miss Gibson," said a pleasant, masculine voice, "I managed to win you your gloves, you see."

The doctor's daughter turned. Joscelyn Murray had come unperceived along the pier—now relieved of its crowd, for the five hundred yards scratch race had been the last event of the swimming gala—and paused by her, a modest, personable young Englishman in grey flannels and a straw "boater." He was rather more like a lawyer than an artist, save for the soft, somewhat dreamy expression of his dark eyes. His curly brown locks were still damp with the sea water.

Cassie did not meet his glance. "Yes," she answered, "it was quite exciting—papa waxed positively enthusiastic."

The artist laughed and leant on the rail near her. The sun was westering fast and the small sea-port of Meols—pronounced by the natives as Mells—was all aglow with the last of a glorious afternoon. In its compact, picturesque bay a white-winged pleasure-yacht or two, under a press of canvas, tacked hither and thither, and wandering rowboats crept about it like water-beetles. Meols was a lovely corner of the south-west coast, and Joscelyn Murray might have been forgiven, on purely professional grounds, his prolonged stay within its straggling borders.

The painter was putting a thumb and finger into a vest-pocket. He drew out a short strip of narrow pink ribbon, rather damp and woebegone.

"I did as I said I would," he remarked with a smile in which a certain grave tenderness was mingled, "carried my lady's favour to victory. I'm afraid it was a trifle conspicuous, tied on my wrist, but probably no one noticed it. By-the-bye, you never told me you forgave me for stealing it.

"I'm not so sure that I do," rejoined Cassie. "I may have some difficulty in matching the shade, and, besides, you tore the chiffon of my ruffle in pulling that streamer off it."

"I'm sorry," said the artist penitently, "especially as I wanted to ask your advice about something. That confounded prize I've won—it's a silver tea-service, presented by a local tradesman. I've no use for a silver tea-service, and I thought perhaps that you would—that you might——" Cassie Gibson cut swiftly into his sentence.

"I couldn't think of it, Mr. Murray," she assured him, a fraction of severity in her tone, "such a present would be too valuable for me to receive—except as a wedding-present, and as you are merely an acquaintance of my father's and do not in the least know Captain Vallance, I—I fear——"

Joscelyn Murray was staring at her amazedly. "Cassie—Miss Gibson," he gasped, "what in Heaven's name——"

Cassie turned away, yet he heard the sob that rose in her throat. "It's quite true," she said, "forgive me my unceremonious fashion of breaking the news. But I am really to be married one of these days—a woman's usual fate, after all—to Captain Vallance. He is our harbourmaster's son, and commands a Meols vessel, the *Nova Scotian*."

The artist twisted the bit of ribbon round his finger. "I—I congratulate Captain Vallance," he responded, and there was a bitter note in his voice. "I shall hope—notwith-

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HAVE YOU ENTERED OUR WEDDING COMPETITION? SEE PAGE 647.

standing my lack of acquaintance with your future husband — to be allowed to — to dance at your wedding. Luckily one doesn't have to dance with one's heart, only with one's feet."

A second sob came to his ears. He held out the bit of ribbon. "I ask your pardon for this piece of folly," he said; "our friendship has been very pleasant to me."

Cassie made no motion to take the damp little strip. "Thank you," she faltered, averting her head, "I—I do not deserve such a friend." She raised her hand to her long lashes, as if to wipe away a tear. "Here is dad coming for me," she added. "I—I think I will go and meet him."

Joscelyn Murray assented mechanically, but his fingers sought hers. Two hands encountered and clasped lingeringly. The next moment Joscelyn Murray had slipped out of sight down a flight of landing-steps, to escape an interview with the genial, sharp-eyed doctor, and to stand for some time, twisting the scrap of moist ribbon and biting his lip. The victory to which he had borne the little favour had suddenly become as dust and ashes in his mouth.

PART II.

Shows That "Faith Was Frail."

"MR. MURRAY! MR. MURRAY!—just a moment, sir!"

A door swung slowly inwards and the artist appeared. He was dressed in pyjamas, a big meerschaum pipe was balanced between his fingers, those of the other hand held a book, and his brown hair was ruffled picturesquely.

"Dear, dear, sir!" said his disturber, a red-cheeked, red-nosed man in a collarless shirt, unbraced pantaloons, and down-at-heel slippers; "what a time of night, or rather morning, to be sitting up. I made no doubt you'd be asleep."

Joscelyn Murray coloured and looked down ostentatiously at his book as he stepped out on to the landing of the little seaside hotel.

"I was trying to read," he answered, "I had an attack of sleeplessness. Is anything wrong?"

"There's a barque ashore in the bay, sir," he was told, "I fancied perhaps you'd like to see them launch the lifeboat."

The artist threw his book back into the room and began to unbutton his sleeping-jacket.

"By Jove I should, landlord," he said, "they might want someone to pull an oar."

The landlord of the Regatta Hotel shook his head and snuffed thoughtfully a candle he carried. "They've a full crew," he responded, "and reserves—there's no call for such as you to risk their lives, sir."

"My life," exclaimed the artist, "is a very useless, purposeless thing, Bateson, and well worth risking on any decent excuse. But I must see the launch, whatever happens."

He went in to fling some clothes on, leaving Mr. Bateson to carry off himself and his candle in a species of bewilderment, so unexpectedly bitter had been his guest's retort.

Joscelyn Murray donned a thick sweater and a pair of rough trousers. "Perhaps they'll let me go in the lifeboat if I insist," he muttered, as he put a mackintosh loosely over his garments, "it would be a good end if—if there were any accidents. I'm only in the way now—in Cassie's way."

The artist picked up something from his toilet table. It was the bit of pink ribbon and he tied it upon his wrist once more. "My lady's favour," he murmured, and the words sounded like a sneer.

Catching up a cap, he ran down the creaking stairs and out of the hotel. The landlord followed him and they went along the sea-front together. A storm had burst over Meols with the first flush of the dawn, and in the wan daylight the great waves from the bay were thundering across the little esplanade. Out to sea, just where an ugly reef formed, at low water, a flat black island, were the three masts, two of them square-rigged, of a smart modern barque. A fluttering rag or so of canvas on her foremast showed that what sail she had dared to leave set in her attempt to beat off-shore against the sudden storm, had been blown from the bolt ropes.

"She's thought to be a Meols ship, sir," shouted the landlord in the artist's ear; "the *Nova Scotian*—old Eli Vallance's son is skipper of her, she was reported past the Lizard this morning, it seems."

An exclamation burst from Joscelyn Murray's lips. "Captain Vallance!—the *Nova Scotian!*" he cried, "why——"

He stopped, recollecting Mr. Bateson's presence. But an uncontrollable thrill ran over him as he realised that upon that wave-lashed hull, out there in the wild green seas, was the man who stood between him and Cassia Gibson.

His companion pressed on and the artist kept abreast of him. The lifeboat house fronted the bay from the inner edge of the esplanade. They reached it to find a team already harnessed to the ponderous carriage and straining it down the concrete slope. At the top of the beach her crew got into her—Meols fashion—big and bearded men in cork jackets, oilskins and sou-westers. A crowd of fisher-folk ranged themselves to push at the laden carriage—Joscelyn Murray noticed that Dr. Gibson was aiding them unassumingly—the whip of the teamster cracked, and the bulky vessel was thrust towards the furious sea. The artist caught his breath as he wondered what would be the result of the battle between that handful of men and the elements—an awful hope had sprung up in his heart. He banished it with a shudder.

Suddenly a cry rose from the margin of the thundering waves. A huge roller, washing far in-shore, had caught the laden boat, lifted her from her carriage, filled her, and dropped her upon it again—transversely, so that she rolled into the surf. Joscelyn Murray started from his absorption and hastened down the beach.

The crew of the lifeboat were struggling back to the shore, borne up by their cork jackets, the boat herself wallowed like a wounded creature in the waves. A hundred willing hands seized and dragged her up. Another shout arose—a shout of alarm and dismay that made itself heard high above the howling of the storm. A horrified murmur went round among the helpers on the beach.

"She's broken her back, sir," said a voice by the artist. He looked and saw the landlord of the Regatta Hotel—whitefaced and dripping, Mr. Bateson had already thrown himself into the contest with the storm.

"Wouldn't have believed it possible if anyone had told me," added the landlord, gaspingly. "Well, they'll have to try a rocket and the breeches buoy. But the nearest rocket-brigade is at Frisby, five miles off, where they've no life-boat, and no telegraph or telephone either, worse luck. We'll have the brigade here as quickly as my best horses and a brake can fetch them, and that'll not be much under an hour, everything else serving."

He panted away in pursuit of the harbourmaster. Eli Vallance had just passed them, his cap gone, his white hair fluttering in the wind.

"Rockets be—— !" he swore, at the landlord's first words; "the barque will begin to go to pieces in no time if this sea lasts. But we're not beaten yet."

The harbourmaster turned to the crowd of fisher-folk and threw up his hands appealingly.

"Lads," he cried, "I want volunteers—we'll try for her in a gig. You know who are yonder—your own sons and brothers and one of the finest skippers that ever sailed, my boy Ben."

"It is useless, my poor friend," said a pitiful voice—Dr Gibson had come up the beach and stood beside the white

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locked, desperate figure, "if the lifeboat can't cope with a sea like that, what will happen to a cockle-shell?"

Eli Vallance laughed wildly. "You're a coward, Gibson," he exclaimed, "a rotten coward. But the men of Meols are no cowards—look lively, lads, there's no time to be lost."

A bronzed form or two stepped forward dauntlessly, but the rest faltered. "It's throwing life away," said one, "I'd chance mine with any man, but I've a wife and young children. It's suicide, Mr. Vallance."

A wail burst from the harbourmaster. "Cowards! cowards!" he cried, "and here's my boy's betrothed and many another lass to call you so."

Joscelyn Murray touched the excited old man upon the arm. The artist had seen Cassie Gibson suddenly, a tall, distressful shape, wrapped in a long cloak and gazing out at the wreck, a group of rough women near her. A lump rose in his throat and a pang of jealousy cut him to the heart. It was lost in a nobler impulse and he found himself interrupting the bitter denunciation of the harbourmaster.

"Mr. Vallance," he said, "there is another way, let me try it."

Eli Vallance lifted his head, the tears were running down his withered cheeks. "You!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," answered Joscelyn Murray, "I'll swim out with a line. I—I can do it, by diving through the rollers."

A murmur of admiration and dissent ran round the throng on the beach. "The rocks, sir, the rocks!" said an old fisher-wife; "you'd be battered to death, dive or not."

The artist threw aside his mackintosh and pushed off his shoes. "The middle of the bay is all sand," he rejoined, "she's struck just over the bar and that's sand, too, of course. There's a chance. Give me a line—the best and lightest you have."

With anxious faces and almost reluctant haste they brought the long, fine cord and arranged it skilfully that he might pay it out as he went instead of dragging it from the shore. The harbourmaster wrung his hand, but Dr. Gibson frowned.

"Madness! madness!" he said. There was a little cry, the echo of his own melancholy tone, and Cassia, standing by him, reeled and fainted in her father's arms. Joscelyn Murray had mounted the disabled lifeboat as she lay lifting to the surf, ran along the sloping gunwale, and leapt far out into the rollers

The captain led her forward. "My wife," he explained. "Your what?" cried Joscelyn in astonishment.

The pathetic feminine cry and swoon passed unnoticed by the majority of the helpers on the beach. With breathless tension, straining their vision through the grey morning, they waited for a glimpse of the daring swimmer. A moment, another, and yet another slipped away and then a sigh burst from every bosom. The artist's head had emerged, visible for an instant to those upon the higher ground of the beach. Then it was lost again in the swirling green seas.

"He'll not do it," said the landlord of the Regatta Inn; "a pity, a great pity, he is a brave fellow." And Mr. Bateson gazed wistfully at the turbulent surface of the bay. Many an eager glance was focussed on the angry billows, but nobody contradicted the pessimistic Mr. Bateson.

Meanwhile, Joscelyn Murray, progressing by a series of long dives and aided by the now changed run of the tide, was nearing the sandy bar of the small bay. Soon he had to forge athwart the set of the current and it tried him to the utmost. Beaten, buffeted, smothered in a whirl of glassy, foam-flecked billows, he struggled on, husbanding his strength as far as he might for the contest with the breakers that hammered upon the good ship *Nova Scotian*. He dared not dive any more, but allowed the rollers to carry him forward, treading water to peer over their tops.

At length a giant wave hurled him forward and he felt a shock that numbed him in every limb. He had been dashed against the reef on which the barque had struck. Above him he could see the hull and quivering masts of the vessel, enveloped to her main-top in clouds of driven foam. But the shock to the daring swimmer had been critical, it had enfeebled, if not injured him—a sense of lethargy crept over the artist, a retreating roller dragged him back, to fling him again upon the reef.

Unexpectedly he was seized in a pair of strong arms. A big and powerful swimmer had dived far out over him from the deck of the vessel and risen behind him, to grasp the artist dexterously. A rope was bound about the waist of the rescuer, it tightened and they were drawn up into the barque.

Finding his feet on the listing deck of the vessel, Joscelyn Murray shook out the last few coils of the line he had brought

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from the shore, and lashed it to the mainmast. Then he looked about him with a certain curiosity.

His rescuer clapped him on the back. "You are a brave fellow and no mistake," the artist was told, "we'd almost lost hope when we saw the lifeboat go wrong.

Joscelyn Murray dashed a trickle of water out of his eyes and surveyed the speaker—there was something about him that recalled the tanned and wrinkled features of the harbour-master.

"This is the *Nova Scotian?*" he asked. The other nodded; he was a bluff, fair-haired Englishman.

"Hamburg to Meols," he pursued, "and I'm her skipper, worse luck, Captain Vallance—my dad is harbourmaster here."

"Quite so," said the artist, coldly; "well, suppose we get this line in and rig up a substitute for the breeches buoy. The sooner we're all ashore the better."

His curt advice was promptly acted upon and ten minutes later a stout rope had been stretched between the shore and the ship, with a basket and hauling-tackle upon it. The means of escape were complete.

"Ladies first," observed the captain of the *Nova Scotian*, and he motioned invitingly to a closely-wrapped, yet obviously girlish figure that had been watching interestedly the procedure of rigging the impromptu device. "My wife," he added explanatorily, and with a sailor-like courtesy, for a brief inspection of the artist had convinced him that the latter was no common long-shoreman or Meols fisher.

Joscelyn Murray leapt an inch into the air. "Your what?" he cried.

"My wife," repeated the captain, as he glanced affectionately into a blonde, pleasant face, blue-eyed and blushing. "Sweet ending to a runaway honeymoon trip, isn't it. Luckily Gretchen is a sailor's child herself and doesn't know what fear means. But won't the old man give me a keelhauling for marrying a Dutch lass." And he sighed as he helped his pretty partner into the basket that swung from the suspended cable.

* * * * *

Captain Benjamin Vallance was right. The "keelhauling"—which is maritime slang for a warm quarter of an hour—was duly performed by the indignant, if relieved harbour-master, who was, however, persuaded ultimately to welcome the little Dutch girl as his daughter-in-law, much to the gallant captain's gratification.

"Sorry to give you all such a surprise, dad," said that person the next day, after a long talk with Joscelyn Murray and another with Cassie Gibson, "but I loved Gretchen and she loved me, and I knew Cassie didn't and never would. So I exploded all that boy-and-girl nonsense by getting married in Hamburg. And a nice ending my honeymoon trip would have had if it hadn't been for Mr. Murray. But bless you, Gretchen and I have got it out of Cassie that she's not particularly sorry to be rid of me. So here's their healths." And he lifted the glass that stood at his elbow.

"Whose healths?" demanded his father irritably.

"Cassie's and Mr. Murray's," said the skipper of the *Nova Scotian*, "and may he come as safely through the stormy seas of matrimony as he did through those of Meols Bay."

And Captain Benjamin Vallance drank his own toast with enthusiasm.

R. Norman Silver.

PHILANTHROPIST: "Look here, my man, didn't I give you sixpence last night to get a bath?" Tramp: "You did, yer honour, but I tried it before, an' you get just as dirty again!"

A FRENCH lady, of very elegant figure, was recently asked why she always had such enormously stout servants. Her answer was characteristic: "To prevent them wearing my clothes when I am away from home."

"JANETTE, I'm afraid you're a vain little wife. You gaze into your mirror so much." "You oughtn't to blame me for that. I haven't your advantage." "What's that?" "You can see my face without looking into a mirror."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

November 18.—An unfavourable year for those whose birthdays fall here. Much competition and annoyance in business and over home affairs.

Girls will have many minor troubles in love matters.

The day is evil for marriage, pleasure, signing papers, and dealing with superiors.

A child born here will be careless, romantic, and moody; will not have a fortunate life.

November 19.—A mixed year is promised; Health will need extra care. More than usual activity and some pleasant events in home circle.

Young girls will find love affairs very interesting; if engaged they marry.

The day is good for dealing with opposite sex. Evil for doing business with landlords and farmers.

A child born to-day will be active, affectionate, and clever.

November 20.—Rather a fortunate birthday; those in employ are promoted. Insure against fire and mishap.

Love affairs go favourably, and girls become engaged or marry.

The day is good for asking favours, marriage, and doing business with governmental bodies.

A child born here will be ambitious, fond of change and adventure.

November 21.—An unfortunate year for business, and finances. Beware of law, and have a care in signing papers.

Girls born near 4 p.m need caution and prudence in dealing with the opposite sex.

The day is unfavourable for most things. Don't speculate, sign agreements, nor lend to friends.

A child born this day will be unsettled, improvident, and unfortunate in most matters.

November 22.—A trying year; sickness in domestic circle; health will need care; those in employ are in danger of losing it.

Girls will meet with deceit from opposite sex.

The day is evil for marriage, visiting, engaging servants and asking favours.

A child born to-day will be idle, careless and often without employment. If a girl the health will be poor.

November 23.—The year will be full of change; much travelling and movement.

Girls born near 5 or 6 p.m. receive attentions from married men and should beware of deceit.

A child born here will be stubborn, moody, and malicious. Will be fond of travel, and subject to accident.

November 24.—Good and evil come into the following year. Be cautious in buying and selling. Some pleasant events in domestic circle.

Girls will receive attentions and become engaged or marry: a good year to visit and seek introductions.

The day is good for asking favours, and dealing with those in authority.

A child born here will be ambitious, affectionate, and will rise in life.

Asturel.

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A Juggler's Daughter.

The Story of a Dark Cloud and a Silver Lining.

1882.

"Doctor Beckett?"

"Yes, what do you want?"

"I want you to come with me to a dying man!"

"Who is it?"

"No one you know, doctor. No one living in the place, I mean."

"But I don't know *you!* Ah! I have it now. You belong to one of the travelling shows, just come in for the fair."

"You've hit it, guv'nor! That's me."

"Well, is the sick man also a van-dweller?"

"Yes. It's old Joey Baretta, the juggler! He's struck for death, and wants to see you."

"To see me? It must be a mistake. I have never heard of him."

"It's no mistake; for the old 'un had got your name as pat as mine, and I've knowed him more nor a year or two."

"Well, I'll go with you. Just wait a minute while I put up a few things. Baretta—never heard the name in my life."

The flashily-dressed, shabby-looking individual, who had knocked up Dr. Miles Beckett just before dawn, on a raw, dark morning in October, was not a person likely to inspire confidence in a staid country practitioner, not too well versed in the ways of the world.

The doctor had a prejudice—a deep-rooted prejudice—against folks of this kidney, and even in broad daylight gave them a wide berth.

But the man's assertion of Baretta's knowledge of, at least his name, puzzled him, and roused in him a strange feeling of curiosity.

"It's a good step," said the doctor's guide, by way of apology. "That Parson-Squire of yours keeps us well outside. Won't let us come within touchin' distance, if he can help it. Hates show folk, he does."

"Yes, he's not a bad judge," replied the other, with a dry cough. "But this man, Baretta, is he married—has he any family?"

"Well, it's like this 'ere—his wife's dead—a toff she was, he run away with her, and he's got one young 'un, a girl, four years old."

"Ah, this is the place, I suppose?" said the doctor, as they stumbled into a tangle of vans, tents, tethered horses, and all the scattered, ragged and dirty paraphernalia of a stroller's encampment.

"Nat!" said a voice out of the darkness, and apparently proceeding from a large van, the windows of which showed a dim light, through the grimy blinds, "Got the doctor? The old man's nearly gone. He's bin callin' for you this arf 'our or more."

"All right, doctor's here. You keep outside till I tells you."

On the lowermost bunk in the hot, stifling van lay a man, evidently prematurely old. His hair was grey, his features drawn and ashen white.

Doctor Beckett lost no time, but went down to look at him.

"Here, the light—you!" said the doctor sharply to his guide. "I thought so."

Filling a small pocket-glass with brandy, he put his arm under the sick man's head, lifted him slightly, and made him drink the spirit.

It was at this moment that the doctor was conscious of another presence.

Half hidden by the curtain at the bed-head, he could just make out in the gloom a little figure, a girl-child, whose large round eyes were fixed in terrified intensity upon the face of the dying man.

"You sent for me!" he said to the latter. "Have I seen you before? Do you know me?"

"Yes, I know you, but you have never seen me," was the whispered reply.

"I don't understand."

"Your sister—doctor—Ivy——"

"What do *you* know of *her*, man?" cried Dr. Beckett, startled out of himself. "My sister disappeared years ago! What of her?"

"She—she died—when this little one was born."

"You are dying!" the doctor responded, with almost brutal frankness. "You would not, you could not deceive yourself or me with such a statement, if it were not true."

"It *is* true!" came with laboured articulation. "In those days I was just from Milan, young, famous, rich! I saw your sister at Liverpool. I loved her—she loved me, and, Heaven forgive me if I did wrong! I persuaded her to marry me and to cast in her lot with me."

"Yes, yes, and then?"

"Then," went on the dying man with ever-increasing gasps for breath—"then was the happiest time of all my life. One, two, three children were born and died; and now, come closer—I cannot see you—now—my—my little Ivy—my baby. I go from her."

The child heard and understood. Throwing herself across her father's breast, in an abandonment of grief, she kissed his thin, pale cheeks, beseeching him—crying bitterly the while—not to leave her.

Tenderly the doctor detached her arms from around Guiseppe Baretta's neck and lifted her away.

Sitting her on his knee, with her head against his shoulder, he spoke again.

"You are distressed for the child's future?" he said. "But why did you not send her to me when my—when your wife died?"

"Send her away!" was the almost fierce reply; the last flicker of the lamp of life. "My Ivy—the one thing in all the world I had to love me and to love!"

"Well—no—perhaps you could not. But listen. I will take her now. She is my own flesh and blood. We—my wife and I—have no children. She shall be to us as a daughter. Will that comfort, and content you?"

Guiseppe Baretta was beyond speech. His eyes rested for a second only upon the fair-haired child he was leaving, and with a satisfied smile upon his lips, he fell back dead.

* * * * *

1902.

The following extract is from the *Morning Post* of September 18th.

"Sir Randall and Lady Ivy Sandys have returned from the Austrian Tyrol, whither they went for their honeymoon.

"Lady Sandys, who it may be remembered, is the niece of Sir Miles Beckett, Physician-in-Ordinary to His Majesty, is one of the loveliest women in Society, and as popular as she is beautiful. The match was quite a romantic one. Sir Randall, with all the honours of the late campaign thick upon him, and being one of the most distinguished heroes of the hour; having won his wife, Othello-wise, as it were,

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and for the sake of 'the dangers he had passed.' General Sir Randall Sandys, who has received a baronetcy, is quite twenty-five years the senior of Lady Ivy."

"Isn't it too bad?" said the lady, passing the paper to her husband across the table. "There is absolutely nothing sacred with editors nowadays!"

"It is one of the penalties of over-civilisation, I suppose," said the bronzed soldier opposite. "There is one thing, it breaks no bones, and we can afford to laugh at it."

They were at breakfast at Claridge's the morning after their arrival.

"As soon," continued Lady Ivy, "as I have safely packed you off, sir, to the War Office, I am going to see Uncle Miles."

"That's right, dear, and directly I have finished my business I will follow you."

Within the half hour the dainty little figure—not to be recognised as one with the grief-stricken child of twenty years before, watching the dying juggler, her father, in a stroller's van—tripped down the great staircase and into her brougham.

"Dear old uncle," she kept repeating to herself—her aunt had been dead for many years—"home would not be home without him!"

The drive was a short one across Oxford Street to Seamore Place, Park Lane.

The once obscure country doctor was now the famous and honoured specialist. A member of the reigning house had been practically saved by his skill, and the reward was a knighthood and a Court appointment.

From the night when he had taken his sister's child to his own home, he had loved her as a father; while she regarded him with, if possible, even greater affection.

As she grew up, she developed personal gifts that attracted round her half the fortune-hunters of London.

Not that Sir Miles Beckett was a millionaire or even an exceptionally wealthy man, but he was sufficiently rich for his niece and adopted daughter to be an object of consideration to impecunious matrimonial speculators.

Her early life with her father, all the squalor and the misery of an ever-deteriorating nomadic existence, gradually became but a dim memory; so that by the time she met with her life's hero, the past was practically forgotten. Ivy Beckett the famous physician's adopted child, and Ivy Baretta, the daughter of Guiseppe, or Joey Baretta, the Italian juggler, had, in the eyes of the world, nothing whatever in common.

With wedding presents from Royalty itself and from a large section of the upper ten thousand, Ivy Beckett's transformation into a successful general's wife, and a future Society leader, was but one more notable instance of Nature's delight in the exceptional and the rare.

As Ivy descended from the carriage at her uncle's door, she saw what she had failed in her excitement to notice before, that the coachman (the brougham was one of Sir Miles', sent by him for her use till she was settled) was grinning a recognition.

"Why, Plunkett!" she exclaimed, with a smile, "is that you? You don't look a bit altered!"

"Nor more do you, miss—my lady—I beg your ladyship's pardon!"

"That's all right, Plunkett! You and I have known each other for a few years. And has my uncle lent you to me?"

"Yes, my lady! He said he thought I'd take more care of you than the second coachman."

"Just like him, isn't it, Plunkett? You needn't wait. I'm going to stay all day with Sir Miles."

The meeting between uncle and niece was something neither would be likely to forget. He had missed her so, this lonely, prosperous man, and she, though her heart was now given to a husband, had looked forward to seeing him again with all the great love of a child for her father.

Later on, when the General joined the little family circle, it was a question whether a happier one existed in all England.

While the two were alone, however, Sir Miles was suddenly reminded by a chance remark of Ivy's of the death-bed scene of twenty years before.

"Uncle," she said, "have you not a picture, a trinket, or some little thing once owned by my mother which you could give me?"

"Why, of course I have, child! Your father the night he died gave me a packet, which, somehow, I have refrained from opening until now."

"Oh, fetch it dear, do! I think that I should be still happier than I am, if I could only see and touch something which belonged to—my mother."

He went and got it, and together they opened it.

There was a miniature of the first Ivy; a pathetic letter, written to her father, but never sent; her marriage certificate, and a ring. With these, was a letter addressed to Sir Miles, and which, reproaching himself for having so long neglected to read, he passed to the writer's daughter.

After a repetition of that which, when dying, he had told the doctor, he went on to say that "he had always desired, for the child's sake, to entrust her to her uncle's care, but that the temptation to have her near him was too great to be resisted. Finding himself in the neighbourhood where his wife's brother lived, and realising that his own end was near, he determined that he would lose no time in carrying out that which he knew to have been his wife's earnest desire.

"For two or three years now," he concluded, "things have gone from bad to worse with me, so that I can leave nothing to my little Ivy, save my prayers for her future happiness. Don't let her quite forget me, bless her!"

The letter ended abruptly here, but underneath, as an evident afterthought, were the words: "I have arranged with my two partners, Nat Ross and Charlie Townsend, that after my death the whole show—tent, vans, and horses—be sold; see that there is taken out of the proceeds enough to bury me decently. I want to lie with Ivy, my wife. Nat knows where."

Uncle and niece looked at one another, the thoughts of both going out to the grave of the strangely-assorted pair, who after the struggle and the storm lay calmly and peacefully side by side, at rest for evermore.

* * * * * * *

Once more it was fair time on the outskirts of the little county town, where we first met most of the people who figure in this little story.

The parlour of the "Bear" was fairly full about six in the evening.

There appeared to be something under discussion which was the cause of more than ordinary interest.

"Read that agen, Mister Plunkett!" said a grey-headed father of the hamlet.

"My son, ye see," repeated Mr. Plunkett, "as is up in Lunnon as coachman to Sir Miles Beckett—him as lived about 'ere nigh twenty year ago—'as sent me this paaper, the *Marnin' Poast*, which 'as a bit in it about the owd doctor and 'is niece."

Mr. Plunkett then proceeded to read the extract with which we are already familiar.

While he was reading it a poorly-dressed man, who was quietly sitting in a corner with some bread and cheese and a pint of beer, ceased from his eating and drinking, and listened intently.

"Beg pardin', mate," he said, when the other had finished, "did I understand you to say as Dr. Beckett, as used to live hereabouts is in London now?"

Mr. Plunkett looked the speaker up and down, and then apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, replied that it was the same.

"Do you know where he lives in London?"

"Well, seein' as my son 'as bin his coachman for nigh twenty-five year, I ought to."

"THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY." Our New Serial will commence shortly.

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"Perhaps you wouldn't mind tellin' me. I've something I wants bad to see him about."

"I dunno as I oughter; but I don't think as you can do 'e much 'aarm."

With the address in his pocket Nat Ross, old Joey Baretta's one time partner, prepared to tramp the sixty miles and odd to London.

"It ain't no 'arm to remind 'im or 'er of old days; an' me clean broke to the world. She's married, that's certain, but I don't think as she'll be fur away from the old doctor. Anyway I'll try my luck, for I've carried her in my arms 'undreds of times when she wer' fractious, an' old Joey didn't no more know what to do with her than a babby unborn."

* * * * * * *

It was a fashionable concert at St. James' Hall.

Scores of carriages were waiting in line to take up after it was over.

Hanging round the entrance in Regent Street, and closely scanning every lady's face that came out, was Nat Ross.

Earlier in the day he had just missed Ivy as she drove from Seamore Place, but managed to hear the butler's order for St. James' Hall.

For two hours or more he had patiently waited, unconscious that he was being watched by a pair of keen official eyes.

He would never have recognised her, of course, but for knowing which was her carriage.

"Lady Sandys' carriage!" shouted the commissionaire.

Up it dashed, and as its fair occupant put her foot upon the step, a voice spoke in her ear.

Frightened in spite of herself, for she was a brave little soul, Ivy gave a suppressed shriek.

At the same moment a heavy hand was laid upon the man's shoulder.

"What do you want with the lady?"

"Nothing."

"That's very likely."

"Let him go, policeman!" said Ivy, pleadingly. "He hasn't done me any harm."

"Very sorry, my lady, but this kind of thing's been going on for a good bit lately, and we've got orders to run the next man in."

It was all very unpleasant, for Ivy would have to appear at the police-court the following day and prosecute.

Before the case was called on, however, she was informed that the prisoner desired to see her. He was brought into a room, and the statement he then made was sufficiently impressive that upon Ivy's earnest appeal the magistrate allowed him to be discharged.

"I didn't mean no 'arm," he said, "I was starvin', and didn't know which way to look for a farthing. I thought as maybe you'd 'elp me, fur the sake o' old days. You an' me was friends. I was always staunch and true to yer father an' never wronged 'im of a penny."

Ivy was not one to conceal from her husband the fact of her mother's *mésalliance;* indeed, Sir Randall had no cause for complaint, seeing that his wife's mother was really Sir Miles Beckett's sister.

Fortunately, the circumstance did not get into the papers, so that no tongues were set a-wagging.

"Look here, my man!" said the General to Nat, the morning after his release from custody, "we want to do something for you. What would you like? You can either go down to my place in the country, and I'll find you a job there, or we'll set you up in something."

"That's it, sir," said Nat, "would it run to a little shootin' gallery to go round with? I could see my way to a good livin' that way."

"Very well, come up here to-morrow, and we'll see about it; meanwhile, go and get a lodging and something to eat."

"Randall," said Ivy, when the vagabond had gone, "I love you more than I did before, for you have helped an unfortunate to help himself, and, more than that, do not love me any the less because a poor juggler was my mother's husband and my father."

Ralph Enderby.

Your Editor Chats.

OLD readers of our little paper will remember a remarkably powerful serial story which ran some time ago, entitled "The Lost Lady Delia." It was from the pen of Louis Tracy, the great author who was responsible for the ever-to-be-remembered romance, "The Final War." Well, since that time I have been endeavouring to arrange for a new story by the same author, and have now succeeded in obtaining one entitled

"The Albert Gate Mystery."

The new story needs no further recommendation from me. Lovers of Mr. Tracy's works will know what they are going to get so far as interest is concerned, and those to whom he is yet unknown will have a very pleasant surprise in store. Next week I will tell you more about the new story.

MEANWHILE I would like to say a few words about

Miss Madge Morris' Marriage.

In a fortnight Miss Morris will be off on her honeymoon, and the big bride cake, about which so much has been heard, will have melted into a hundred pieces and scattered all over the country. Will *you* get a piece—for luck? I hope so; but, of course, you certainly won't unless you enter for the little competition announced elsewhere. If you can write a nice letter of congratulation, you stand a good chance of getting a piece of cake in return.

Several correspondents have written to say that they wish to send Miss Morris a little token of their respect on the occasion of her wedding, and wish to know if they shall address it to this office. While thanking such readers for their kind thoughtfulness, I regret to have to ask them not to forward any presents of any sort for Miss Morris. This is not said from any unkind motive; but circumstances into which we need not enter here prohibit anything of the kind. At the same time, Miss Morris asks me to thank most cordially all those who have expressed a wish to make her a little wedding gift, and she assures them that the receipt of a sincere letter will be appreciated by her as much as the most expensive present money can buy!

Those Gramophones!

BY the way, the first batch of Gramophones, now in the hands of the lucky owners, have brought me a shoal of congratulatory letters. The machines have given great satisfaction to everyone. They are well worth trying for—especially as the competitions in which they are offered are so very simple. Turn to page 659 and see how easily a brand new Gramophone may be yours.

Your Editor.

Result of the Second "Serial" Competition.

A GRAMOPHONE has been awarded to each of the following competitors:

LONDON.—A. Strike, 10 Jelf Road, Brixton, S.W.; A. Barnes, 24 S. Peabody Buildings, Stamford Street, S.E.

UNDER 100 MILES FROM LONDON.—W. Smith, 138 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone; E. Quaile, 83 Swallowfield Rd., Charlton.

OVER 100 MILES FROM LONDON.—Mrs. Bradbury, 547 Attercliffe Road, Sheffield; George Craine, 126 Buck's Road, Douglas, Isle of Man.

SCOTLAND.—James Scott, 111 North High Street, Musselburgh; J. Gillespie, 1216 Springburn Road, Glasgow.

IRELAND.—D. S. Jones, 69 Beechfield Street, Mountpottinger, Belfast; James May, H.M. Training Ship *Black Prince*, Cork Harbour.

The correct sentence ran as follows:

"*He had questioned the railway porter, and the man had jerked his thumb in the direction of her employer.*" **Page 486**, col. 2, line 64.

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THE STORY OF THE WEEK: See our Coloured Cover.

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS.

How a Pack of Cards Decided a Destiny.

I THINK very few girls in the world could have felt so lonely as I did when I left school to live with my father.

My mother had died long years before—mercifully for her, poor dear. I believe that even during the short time of her married life my father had contrived to break her heart; but my own recollections of her are very shadowy and dim, and I can only recall one picture of her with absolute certainty.

It is the picture of a fair, girlish face, worn with sorrow, white and weary with illness and misery; of a crown of golden hair, amongst which my childish fingers touched the silver threads, and of a voice broken with weeping.

But though the picture of her is faint, the words she spoke have remained firmly rooted in my mind for all time. She bent over my bed as she said them, and kissed my face with tender, lingering kisses.

"God guard you, my darling. Be a pure and noble woman, and never stoop to do anything your conscience tells you is wrong, even if the wrong seems expedient." Those were her words and sometimes I have wondered since whether, being so near to death, she foresaw something of what my future would be!

What a strange childhood mine was, after my mother's death. I wonder whether any other girl has ever known so varied and yet so lonely an existence.

As in a kaleidoscope I seem to see the shifting scenes of my child days fly past me.

Now we were rich, living in a big house with lots of servants, and a luxury that, as I look back upon it, strikes me as appalling in its lavishness.

Next we were in dismal lodgings in a London back street, waited upon by a grimy slavey, hard put to it to find the ordinary necessaries of life.

And finally would come a flying abroad, and a residence in one cheap Continental town after another, as varied in scenery as in language, and alike only in one thing, that they allowed unlimited gambling within their precincts.

For my father was a gambler, and in this lay the whole secret of my mother's broken heart, of my strange childhood, of our odd kaleidoscopic existence.

And then, when I was twelve, came a few brief years of happiness for me!

My father, being, I suppose, a little extra flush of money, and perhaps finding it a bother to take a child with him everywhere, sent me to school. For the first time in my life I enjoyed the society of other children; for the first time since my mother died I revelled in being cared for, watched over, and helped in tender, motherly fashion, and I was happy, oh! so happy, until the day came when my father arrived unexpectedly at the school, and——

It all happened so suddenly.

I was singing upstairs in the great schoolroom, when Miss Belmont, our headmistress, hurried in.

"Come downstairs at once, Di," she said breathlessly, "your father is here."

"My father?" I do not know why my heart sank at her words, excepting that the thought of my father brought with it a remembrance of those weary days of my childhood, and of my mother's lovely, heartbroken face.

Very slowly and reluctantly I went down to the drawing-room, where my father awaited me, and though I tried to feel glad, as a dutiful daughter should, I could not help shrinking a little when he kissed me.

Then he put me away from him, and a smile crossed his handsome, dissipated face.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "I never expected *this!* She'll do, she'll do, down to the ground."

I had no idea what he meant, though his words gave me again that odd sensation of fear and shrinking; but their meaning was to be made only too plain to me in the course of time.

My father talked to me for a few minutes in a rather scrappy, irrelevant fashion, looking very hard at me all the time, as though he were appraising my value, in the way a connoisseur appraises the value of a work of art.

Finally he said, with such suddenness that I nearly jumped out of my skin, "I have come to fetch you away, my dear. You must come home and keep house now for your poor old dad."

Did the dismay I felt show itself in my face?

I think it must have done, for he shrugged his shoulders, laughed a little acidly, and said—

"You don't seem overjoyed, but I can't help that. You will be a great help to me, and I want your help."

"My help? What can I do?" I asked, more puzzled than ever.

He laughed again; his laugh sent a cold feeling up and down my spine.

"Look in the glass, my dear," he answered with cynicism; "being a woman, you will perhaps find out there how you may be useful in entertaining your father's friends."

I was very young and very innocent in those days, and when I went to my bedroom to pack my box, I looked in the glass as my father had told me to do.

A slip of a girl looked back at me from the mirrored surface, a girl with wide, startled eyes, brown as a fawn's; with hair the colour of a ripe chestnut, falling in soft curling masses about a white forehead, and with a face on which the colour went and came in tints like the dainty flush upon a sea shell.

"I do believe I am pretty," I said aloud in an awestruck voice, and the laughing voice of one of my school-fellows exclaimed over my shoulder—

"Oh, Diana Meredith, you dreadful humbug! Don't you really know you are perfectly lovely?"

But I really had not known it until that day—truly and really I had not, and it gave me a sort of shock, half of surprise, half of fear. Well, I went home.

I found that home, at that moment, meant a fair-sized house, well, even luxuriously furnished, a staff of good servants, and all the surroundings of a gentleman of means and position. Who, indeed, would ever have guessed, on casually meeting my father, that the suave, courteous Mr. Meredith, who seemed merely a moneyed man of leisure, was really an adventurer, a gambler, a man living by his wits?

Even I did not take in the position at once. I fancied that my father had turned over a new leaf since my childhood days, that he no longer gambled, that he had made enough to pass the remainder of his days in affluence. Then the truth dawned upon me, and I felt more utterly lonely than I had ever felt in my life.

I gradually observed that no ladies ever came to the house; that our only guests were gentlemen, and those not of a kind with whom I cared to associate.

I knew absolutely no women; when I asked my father to take me to see his friends, to let me have some girl companions, he merely laughed, and said he had dropped all his lady acquaintances long ago, and that my business was to make myself pleasant to the people he brought in with him, and to make his house charming to them.

"Your face is my fortune as well as yours," he told me, with that dry cynicism which I had grown to dread.

He was kind to me in his own way, but I think now

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that it was chiefly because of what he wanted me to do for him.

He lavished lovely gowns upon me, bought me jewellery, insisted upon my making the drawing-room a perfect palace of delight, and yet—I was lonely and uneasy. I felt that something besides fatherly affection underlay all this demonstration. I disliked intensely the men who were brought in to dinner by my father evening after evening, and who seemed so glad to linger in the drawing-room and talk to me, instead of beginning their card play at once in the little room downstairs, and I had an intuitive feeling that I was being drawn into a net from which I could not escape.

One man I feared and disliked above all the others, and he, as ill luck would have it, was my father's chief friend. Michael Standish was his name, and in appearance he was a dark, saturnine man of perhaps forty years old. Handsome enough in a repellant fashion, his face nevertheless produced on me a most unpleasant impression; yet he was invariably polite—and more than polite to me.

Every evening saw him by my side; often in the daytime he would appear as well, and he and my father would take me out, either into the Park or to some entertainment. But the more I saw of Michael Standish the more I feared him.

The admiration in his dark eyes sickened me; the way in which he seemed to take possession of me when others were present, as though I were his special property, gave me a feeling of revolt and horror.

Night after night the same round of events took place. The excellent dinner, at which I was the only woman present; the adjournment to the drawing-room, when I had to listen to compliments I detested, or talk to men whom I loathed, and then the departure of my father and his guests to the card-room, where they spent the remainder of the night, and from which I heard my father come up to bed in the dawn of morning.

The monotony of my life, its loneliness, its hatefulness, were beginning to tell on me, when a gleam of light shone through the clouds.

One evening there came amongst the other guests a man I had never seen before—a man as different from the rest as an archangel differs from a fiend! Shall I ever forget how the blood rushed to my heart, and left my face white, when I saw Denis Strahan enter the drawing-room, when I saw the surprise that flashed over his face at sight of me, and the little look of admiration that crept into his grey eyes when they met mine.

He was tall and very fair—fair as a girl, but there was no girlishness in his face, only strength and purity; and I wondered, oh! how I wondered, what had brought him to the den of thieves I knew by this time my father's house to be.

Long, long afterwards I discovered that he had first been drawn to my father by certain similarities of artistic taste, and that, being also a keen whist player, he had been misled into supposing that innocent whist playing was the *raison d'être* of the gathering to which he had been invited.

But though I wondered that first night why he came, I rejoiced at his coming, for he seemed to bring a sane and healthy atmosphere with him. I felt a sudden safety in the very fact of his presence.

He stayed only a short time in the card-room; just as I was crossing the landing to go up to bed I heard a step on the stairs, and turned to find him beside me. His eyes were shining and angry, his face was very white.

"Why do you stay here?" he said eagerly, all conventionalities forgotten. "It is not fit that—or are you one of them?" he added abruptly.

"I hate it," I cried vehemently. "I hate it all, but I am my father's daughter. I must stay with him if he tells me!"

A great pity replaced the suspicion in his eyes.

"Poor little girl," he whispered, and I felt a lump in my throat. "I am sorry. I have come to say good-bye. I shall never——"

I put out my hand and touched his sleeve

"Oh! don't say it, don't say it," I exclaimed, "don't say you will not come again. You make me feel safe." A curious look swept over his face, half of doubt, half of pleasure, but as he looked at me the doubt died away, and he took my hand, saying:

"I believe you are as pure and good as you look. I will come again."

And then I knew that Denis Strahan had, for a moment, thought that I was willingly aiding and abetting my father as a decoy duck, but that the momentary doubt of me had given way to belief in my innocence.

And oh! indeed he was right. I was a very innocent girl, and only longed to make those words of my dear, dead mother, the guiding motto of my life:

"Be a pure and noble woman, and never stoop to do anything your conscience tells you is wrong, even if the wrong seems expedient."

Soon, terribly soon, I was to understand the full force of her words! One morning my father entered the drawing-room, his face blanched and lined, his hands trembling.

"I'm done for, Di," he said, "it's all up with me."

"What do you mean, father?" I answered, going quickly to his side, and seizing his shaking hand.

"That fiend Standish has me in his power, utterly in his power," he said, pacing the room feverishly. "I owe him more than I care to remember, and he won't give me time to recover the losses and pay him. He vows he will have payment to-morrow or ruin me utterly."

"How?" I whispered.

"*How?* The man is clever," my father laughed bitterly. "He will not only make me bankrupt and ruin me financially, he threatens to expose me all round, and show up this house for—for what it is," he eyed me uneasily.

"A gambling den," I answered quietly. "Oh, father, give it all up, dear; give it all up, and let us go away together and live quietly and happily. Let him do his worst, and——"

"Thank you, no, my dear," my father's usual coolness was returning, "his worst might be very bad indeed; one or two queerish things have happened here, things I should prefer not having dragged under the eyes of the law; things that would land me in one of His Majesty's convict establishments."

His coolness staggered me. I shuddered.

"Yes, Di, I am only speaking the truth," he went on, his face growing suddenly haggard. "God knows I've been a poor sort of father to you, but I don't suppose you want to see your poor old dad in prison, and only you can save me."

"*I?* Oh, father, what can I do? Tell me quickly; let me do what I can."

He came close to me, and put his hands on my shoulders, looking earnestly into my face. "Michael Standish will forego the debt, will keep silence about this house, will give me back every I.O.U. of mine he holds, if you will marry him?"

The words fell on my heart like molten lead.

"*Father!*" I cried, "it is impossible—*impossible!*"

My father's grasp on my shoulder tightened. "Di, for my sake," he said, and there was more tenderness in his voice than I had ever heard there, and it shook in a way that went to my heart.

After all, he was my father, and I could not bear to see him in trouble, it hurt me to look at his worn and haggard face

"Standish loves you, Di," my father went on, still in that pitifully shaking voice, "he loves you, he is a very rich man, he will do his best to make you happy, he——"

"I can't do it," I exclaimed. "I can't do it," and, beside Standish's dark, evil face, another rose in my mind, a fair face, and pure and strong as that of an angel. "Can nothing else be done, father? Will he not give you time to get the money to pay him?"

DON'T MISS
THE COMPETITIONS
ON PAGES 647 & 659.

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"He will agree to *nothing*. He will have no compromise. I begged him for a week's respite, he will not hear of it. In a week I could borrow the money—in a week much might happen. He will expose everything if I do not pay him to-morrow, unless you will marry him. That is his final word."

I wrenched myself from my father's hand, and went to look out of the window, to where the sunset light played over the trees in the square, and a yellow sky lay behind the dark house opposite.

Marry Michael Standish? Marry the man I loathed and feared and despised, to save my father? Impossible—impossible! Sell myself to such a man even for a reason that might appear a good one? No, I could not do it, and yet—ought I to think of myself at all, when my father was in such dire distress? Was it perhaps sometimes right to do evil that good might come? Was——

My mother's words flashed into my mind. "Never stoop to do anything your conscience tells you is wrong," and I turned back to my father.

"I cannot marry Mr. Standish," I said firmly, "it would be a deadly wrong to him and to myself. I cannot marry him."

"Then I am ruined, utterly and for ever," my father replied; "ruined, and by my own daughter!"

* * * * *

The evening had come at last!

Ever since my final words to my father I had been in a fearful state of mind, wondering whether I had been right or wrong in my decision, half inclined to recall my words, yet sick with dismay at the bare thought of doing so; torn with a thousand doubts as I saw my father's haggard face, yet filled with unspeakable loathing at the very idea of marrying Michael Standish.

And now the evening had come, and Mr. Standish would have to be told my decision.

He and Denis Strahan dined with us, and the conversation was general, but during the whole meal I never lost the consciousness of those dark burning eyes upon me, never for a moment got rid of a nightmare of dread that hung over me.

I knew that Denis Strahan's eyes were often upon me too; I read the sympathy in his face, even though he did not know what was troubling me.

No word of love had ever passed between us, but I was sure that he loved me—because, oh! why is a woman sure of such a thing as this?

Not for one moment were he and I alone that evening; in some subtle way my father kept us apart, and presently the three men went to the card-room, leaving me alone upstairs. I could settle to nothing! My ears were strained to catch any sounds from below, and though I could not have told anyone what I expected to hear, I was not surprised when footsteps sounded on the stairs, and my father's voice became audible through the half-open door.

"She will not consent," he said, in low tones.

"I think she will." These words were in Mr. Standish's voice.

"You will never work it." My father's voice spoke again, but it was so low I could that not hear how his sentence ended.

Mr. Standish took up his parable. "Trust me, Meredith," he said, "you shall be free, and I will get what I want."

The grim significance to me of the last words made me cold with fear, and at that instant the two men entered the room, and I do not think either of them had the least idea that some of their conversation had been overheard.

My father looked nervous and shaken, but Standish looked triumphant, his eyes glowed.

"Miss Meredith," he said, "your father has told me of your decision; I need not worry you by telling you my feelings. I come to ask whether you can reconsider it."

I was on my feet facing him; his eyes, blazing with passionate admiration, looked full into mine.

"No," I said firmly. "I cannot alter my mind."

"You will not marry me, though I love you, God knows how dearly."

"I cannot marry you," I replied, "it would be a sin."

A curious smile crossed his saturnine face.

"A *sin*—to save your father?" My father glanced at me with a look I could not interpret. Was it desperation? Was it—could it be—amusement? I dismissed the thought, and turned to reply to Mr. Standish, when he continued:

"Miss Meredith, I have offered you and your father a—what I may call, a last chance. Mr. Strahan has heard of your father's predicament; he offers to pay the debt to me" (I started forward with flushed face, and clasped hands), "and I—refuse—excepting on one condition."

"Refuse?" How my heart sank.

"Yes, I refuse—excepting on one condition."

"And the condition?"

"I am a born gambler, Miss Meredith," he answered, his eyes gleaming strangely; "and I do not only want your father's money; I want you"—his voice dropped to a passionate whisper. "Now, I have a suggestion to make which will leave everything to the Goddess of Chance!"

I looked at him blankly.

"This is my proposal," he said. "Strahan and I will have a pack of cards dealt out to us, and whichever of us first turns up the Queen of Hearts shall win you!"

I started and nearly screamed, but he silenced me by a gesture, whilst he continued:

"If I turn up the Queen I free your father of all obligations to me and you agree to be my wife. If Strahan has the Queen you become his and he pays me the money your father owes me."

"I will never agree to anything so utterly humiliating," I cried, my cheeks flaming with anger; "how could you, how could Mr. Strahan dare to propose such a thing."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, Miss Meredith! Then—I give you fair warning—I leave the house now, this instant. I shall insist upon receiving every penny from your father, and I shall report the nightly transactions carried on here to the police without delay."

A feeling of despair swept over me, to be replaced suddenly by one of hope.

Was it because I was a gambler's daughter that something in the idea of appealing to Chance appealed to me? Was it that far down in my heart I felt certain that Denis Strahan would never have agreed to anything that could truly humiliate me?

I do not know; all I know is that I turned sharply to Mr. Standish, saying:

"Come, we will see," and, sweeping out of the drawing-room, I preceded the two men to the cardroom downstairs.

Denis Strahan sat by the table, his head buried in his hands. He lifted it when he heard the rustling of my gown, and I saw that his face was deathly. He pushed back his chair and came towards me.

"It was the only way," he whispered; "God grant it may turn out right—my darling—my darling."

How my heart leapt at the tenderness in his words, and in his eyes, though I tried not to show what I was feeling, as my father and his hateful friend came in.

"Miss Meredith agrees," Mr. Standish said to Denis, looking at him with an evil triumphant leer; "whoever first turns up the Queen of Hearts wins her, and sets her father free."

Mr. Strahan nodded—he could not speak, and he sat down heavily at the table without a word.

Then I spoke, and I have no notion, to this day, what prompted my utterance:

"I agree," I said, "but if either of the two who are playing this

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game cheat by the fraction of an inch, the question is settled for ever! My father is to be freed from his debts, and I shall be free to marry whom I will. Do you agree to that, gentlemen?"

"Of course," Denis exclaimed quickly.

"By all means," Mr. Standish said smoothly; "cheating on either side disqualifies the one who cheats from further action. I quite agree."

"So be it," I said, my spirits suddenly and unaccountably rising; "then give me the cards and I will deal. If I am to be the stakes, I will deal! Give me the cards!"

I stood beside the table and the men sat, one on either side of me, their faces set and strained.

But I? I laughed as I caught sight of myself in the long glass opposite, and saw how beautiful I was; yes, I laughed, and then I looked through the pack to make sure that only one Queen of Hearts was there, and after that I dealt the cards, and Mr. Standish never took his evil gaze from my face, and Denis' clear eyes met mine each time I laid a card upon the pile before him.

"I conclude that I begin," Mr. Standish said when I had finished; "I sit on the dealer's left."

"Begin, for Heaven's sake," Denis answered roughly; "let us get it done."

And I saw that his face was working with emotion as he looked at the cards that lay face downwards on the table.

"Begin at once," I repeated, and I looked at Mr. Standish and the smile died from my face.

His hands fingered his cards, and my eyes turned from his face and watched his hands. All in the flash of a second, he whipped up a card and flung it on the table between himself and Denis, crying:

"The Queen of Hearts!" But I laid my hand over his, and over the card, and said, in a voice that shook with righteous anger:

"You have cheated! That card was never dealt by me!" In a second both men were on their feet, and Mr. Standish put out his hand to sweep all the cards together, but I prevented him, and he swore under his breath.

"Wait!" I said, some strange new strength seeming to have come to me. The two men and my father all watched me silently; and under their eyes, I set aside the Queen of Hearts Mr. Standish had thrown down, and then I looked through all the pack I had dealt to the two.

And the Queen of Hearts lay at the bottom—the very bottom of the cards that had been dealt to Denis!

"We agreed," I said very coldly, "that the one who cheated would no longer have part nor lot in the matter, and that in such a case as this my father should go free—and I should marry whom I chose. Is not that so?"

I looked into Mr. Standish's evil sullen face.

"There was no cheating," he said; "I turned up the card."

"And how comes it there are two Queens of Hearts now, when there was only one in the pack before I dealt?" I asked.

"Very strange!" Mr. Standish sneered, looking hard at Denis, who stood motionless and silent; "either you or Strahan——"

"Neither I nor Mr. Strahan did anything unfair," I said quietly, breaking into his sentence, "*and you know it.* I saw you draw the second Queen of Hearts from the sleeve of your coat. I saw you take it and fling it on the table. My father is free of his debt, and I am free to marry whom I will; but it will not be you, Mr. Standish."

With another angry oath he strode towards the door, but my father caught and held him.

"Before we part to-night," he said, "I will see my I.O.U's. burnt in here."

And, to make a long story short, the wretched Standish disgorged from his pockets the various odd slips of paper which my father had at different times given him, and they were burnt before his eyes.

Then he vanished from our sight, and, I am thankful to say, he has never crossed my path again.

I married Denis Strahan, and I am the happiest woman in the world.

L. G. Moberly.

YET ANOTHER TEN GRAMOPHONES TO BE GIVEN AWAY!

We are again offering this week ten of our now famous Gramophones for competition among *Short Stories* readers. All you have to do is to go in and win, and when the prize is delivered at your door, call in your friends and, having placed in position one of the two records with which every instrument is provided, explain to them that you gained the wonderful talking, singing, and playing instrument they are listening to by the fact of your being a reader of *Short Stories*, adding that they might go and do likewise.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

As you will see by page 647, Miss Madge Morris is to be married on December 2nd. I want you to construct a sentence the initial letters of the words of which must form that young lady's name, M. A. D. G. E. M. O. R. R. I. S., in correct order, and the sentence must be in the form of a message of thanks for the services she has rendered to *Short Stories* readers.

The ten competitors who send in sentences which in the Editor's opinion are the best, will each be rewarded with a handsome Gramophone.

Attempts must be made on the backs of postcards only, marked "Wedding," and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Postcards must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday, November 25th.

Result of the "Short Stories" Leaflet Competition.

A GRAMOPHONE has been sent to each of the following competitors who disposed of the fifty leaflets sent to them in the most advantageous manner:

Miss I. Graham, 12 Houston Place, Glasgow, S.S.

F. Locke, 16 Drayton Road, Sipson, Yiewsley R.S.O., Middlesex.

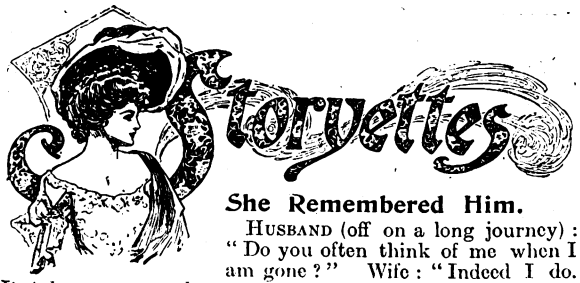
Miss L. Stevenson, 12 Armadale Street, Glasgow.

H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, S.E.

D. Moscardini, 17 Herbertson Street, Glasgow, S.S.

PENCIL-CASES have been sent to the fifty competitors whose names appear below:

Miss M. Hamilton, 45 Regent Street, Blackburn; R. Pescod, Springfield Terrace, Low Fell, Gateshead-on-Tyne; G. H. Bloomfield, 55 Norman Road, Greenwich, S.E.; Miss L. Mays, 100 Beresford Street, Moss Side, Manchester; H. Kitching, 22, Grove Street, Mansfield; M. Gwynn, 21 Harrow Road, Newport, Mon.; J. Platt, 66 Prussia Street, Manchester; Miss A. Wonnacott, 156, Cathays Terrace, Cardiff; J. Price, Lower Wallop, Stockbridge; T. Molony, Church Street, Rathdowney, Ballybrophy; R. Jones, 32 Newark Street, Walton, Liverpool; F. Hobbs, 12 Elizabeth Terrace, Eltham; T. Forbes, Ballanton, Aberfoyle; Master O. Deacon, 4 Robin Hood Street, Newport, I. of W.; Miss B. Livock, Marion Terrace, Hill Street, Lurgan, Co. Armagh; W. Forsyth, 304 Morningside Road, Edinburgh; H. Bellerby, 2 Little Reed Street, Hull; N. Blomberg, 42 New Road, Commercial Road, E.; W. Romaine, 19 Richmond Hill, Brighton; J. Sheridan, 6 Austin Street, Northampton; E. Morley, Plumpton Green, near Lewes; L. Bruce, 4 Clarence Road, Handsworth, Birmingham; J. Rathbone, Leon Villas, Bight Pill, Stroud; Miss Wayschal, "Chesterfield," Warwick Road, Cliftonville, Margate; W. Ferry, 137 Olivia Street, Bootle, Liverpool; W. Shaw, 3 Bristo Port, Edinburgh; F. H. Taylor, 44 Francis Terrace, Carmarthen; E. Barrow, 4 Glebe Cottages, Whiteley's Estate, Hanworth; Miss H. Moir, 53 Dens Road, Dundee; M. Gilvary, Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim; J. Henderson, 3 Leddington Road, The Portway, West Ham; Mrs Decrievell, 8 York Road, W. Hendon; P. J. Carroll, Barrack Street, Granard, Co. Longford; F. Murray, 102 North Hill, Highgate, N.; H. Chamberlain, Portland House, Southtown, Great Yarmouth; A. Berry, 6 Malins Road, Buckland, Portsmouth; H. M. Alexander, 17 Eglinton Street, Belfast; C. H. Knight, 158 Killearn Road, St. Germains Estate, Hither Green, Catford; Miss H. Harding, 14 Whitmore Street, Hockley, Birmingham; S. Fenton, 6 Tib Place, Cast Street, Varley Street, Oldham Road, Manchester; C. Swan, 40 Felden Street, Munster Road, Fulham; W. Howchin, 116 Military Road, Colchester; H. Endeacott, 11 Cheap Street, Hunslet Road, Leeds; Miss K. Hughes, 50 Cathcart Road, South Kensington; J. McDevitt, 57 Barrack Street, Strabane, Co. Tyrone; N. May, 4 Park Terrace, Stoke-on-Trent; W. J. Davies, Evan Terrace, Dukestown, near Tredegar; J. Binyon, 21 Chevet Street, Sidney Road, Homerton, N.E.; T. McEniry, Morlestown, Caher, Co. Tipperary, Ireland; C. Beasley, 148 Cross Lane, Radcliffe, near Manchester.



She Remembered Him.

HUSBAND (off on a long journey): "Do you often think of me when I am gone?" Wife: "Indeed I do. It takes me a week to get the smell of smoke out of the house."

Pity to Waste the Light.

JACK: "You are the light of my life, May—and, taking that into consideration, I think I may turn down the gas."

Mamma's Opinion.

YOUNG HOBBS: "Mamma, what animal is the king of beasts?" Mrs. Hobbs (with a significant look at her husband): "Man!"

Obeying Orders.

MOTHER: "Clara, I can't tell you how shocked I was to see you kiss that scamp, Jack Manlay." Daughter: "Why, mamma, you told me to set my face against him."

What the Audience Thought.

CONTRALTO: "Only think of it! I was encored three times in my last song." Soprano (spitefully): "Yes, the audience recognised that you needed practice."

Quite a Different Bird.

MRS. FLASH: "Isn't it a duck of a bonnet?" Mr. Flash: "It's more like a pelican of a bonnet." Mrs. Flash: "What do you mean, dear?" Mr. Flash: "The bill is too long for a duck."

Why He Played.

SHE: "I shouldn't think such a Society man as you would care about football." He: "I have to keep in training as a matter of necessity. When I go to receptions it helps me to get down to supper first."

He Had Reason to Know.

YOUNG WIFE: "Yes, father always gives away expensive things when he makes presents." Husband: "So I discovered when he gave you away." (And then he went to the library to draw a cheque for the monthly millinery bill.)

Very Close.

MAUDIE: "Why should you think I'm engaged to him? If you had seen us together you would at once have seen there was nothing between us." Frank: "I did see you together, and, not seeing anything between you, at once concluded that you were engaged."

She Didn't Mind.

JACK: "My darling, I want to tell you something. I have deceived you. I am not rich, but utterly penniless. Will it make any difference to you, dear?" Ethel: "Not the slightest, Jack." Jack: "I am glad of that, dearest. Are you quite sure it will make no difference to you?" Ethel: "Quite sure. I can marry old Moneybags."

An Important Question.

"I WANTED to ask you something," he said, with a look of much anxiety on his face. "Yes," she replied, as a sudden smile illuminated her countenance. "I know what I am going to say may sound a little silly——" "I don't think it will, George." "Well, your father——" "He likes you very much, George." "Does he? Well, when he came home to-day, did he happen to say what was the winner? I came down in such a hurry that I didn't have time to look at the paper."

John Had His Doubts.

"I KNOW I'm a little irritable, John, but if I had to live my life over again, I'd marry you just the same." John: "H'm, I have my doubts about it!"

Girls, Beware!

"BE MINE!" he cried, in a voice surcharged with anguish. "If you refuse me I shall die!" That was forty years ago, and the heartless girl refused him. Yesterday he died. Girls, beware!

A Fatal Mistake.

"I HEAR that Jenks' rich lady-love has broken off their engagement." "Is that so? Why was it?" "You know he was always a bad speller, well, he headed a letter to her like this: 'My bony angle.'"

Testing his Imagination.

YOUNG HUSBAND: "I'm just about dead beat putting down this carpet." Wife: "The carpet is not heavy." "No; but I have to work in such a cramped position." "Nonsense. Just imagine you are on your bicycle."

Still Some Doubt.

MOTHER: "He is a very desirable match, Mary, and I think he loves you." Daughter: "I'm not so sure of that." Mother: "Why not?" Daughter: "He leaves me in less than an hour after bidding me good-night."

Sergeant Knew Her.

A PRIVATE soldier, walking arm-in-arm with his sweetheart, met his sergeant when about to enter a restaurant. He respectfully introduced her to him: "Sergeant, my sister!" "Yes, yes," was the reply, "I knew her long ago; she was mine once."

Brave and Brainy.

SWEET GIRL: "The man I marry must be both brave and brainy." Adoring Youth: "When we were out sailing, and upset, I saved you from a watery grave." "That was brave, I admit, but it was not brainy." "Yes, it was; I upset the boat on purpose."

Sleight of Hand.

FITZ-JONES: "Did you go to the pantomime last evening, Percy?" De Brown: "No; I attended a sleight-of-hand performance." Fitz-Jones: "Where?" De Brown: "I went to call on Miss Le Smythe, and offered her my hand, but she slighted it."

No Cause for Worry.

ELDERLY FIANCÉ: "I hope you are not impressed by the silly sentimentalists who hold that because you've married once you ought not to marry again?" Pretty Widow: "Don't let that worry you, dear; I've no such prejudice. My own dear mother was married three times, and I only hope that in all things I may follow her example." And she wondered why he looked sad.

Brutal Candour.

JONES is frankness itself. Being at an evening party, he took occasion to compliment a lady, not otherwise remarkable for her beauty, on her small feet. "You can't mean what you say, Mr. Jones," said the lady, greatly flattered, as she still further, by a deft movement of the hand, exposed the members in question. "You are quite right, madam," said Jones, looking down; "I only saw half of them."

She Had Considered.

"I HOPE, Jennie, that you have given the matter serious consideration," said a lady to a servant who had "given notice," because she was to be married that "day two weeks." "Oh, I have, ma'am," was the earnest reply. "I've been to two fortune tellers, and a clairvoyant, and looked in a sign book and dreamt on a lock of his hair, and been to one of those asterrologers, and to a meejum, and to a palmist, and they all tell me to go ahead, ma'am. I ain't one to marry reckless-like, ma'am."

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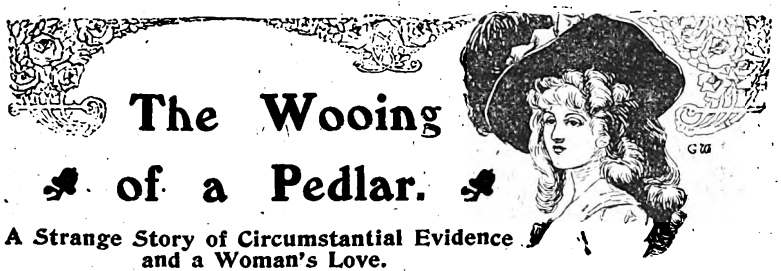

The Wooing of a Pedlar.

A Strange Story of Circumstantial Evidence and a Woman's Love.

"WANTS a job, does you?"

"Yes, if you have one to give me."

"Well, I *am* in want of a man, but I don't think as you'll know much about the work."

"I could soon learn."

"That's all very well; but when it comes to teachin' folk their business, an' payin' on 'em at the same time for doin' of it, it seems a bit rough on such as me, don't it?"

The seeker for employment was a tall, well set-up young fellow of twenty-six or so. Somehow he did not appear to be one of the sort who would be used to such work as he was applying for; there being a superior air about him, which he succeeded badly in disguising, while his clothes, shabby and travel-stained, were, it was obvious, of originally good cut and material. In addition he wore an evident wig, black and ill-fitting, his complexion, too, being unmistakably stained a darkish brown.

All this had not escaped the old cheap-jack's eye, and in his own mind he came to a conclusion, which after events proved to be tolerably correct.

He was a strangely eccentric creature, old Peter Hennig, and made still more so by the very nature of his occupation. Yet he was a just and kindly man, one indeed who, though he was keen upon the profits of his business, never, by any chance, took a mean advantage of any human being.

"Look a here, mister," he said at length, coming down from his perch on the top of the van steps. "I don't want to pry into no man's affairs, if I thinks as that man is straight and honest. So I ain't a-goin' to ax you no questions, but I likes the looks of you, an' if you cares to help me get rid o' the goods when I pitches, pickin' up from me what you can at odd times, why, th re's my hand on it, an' ten bob a we k an' your board an' lodgin'—in the van."

"That will suit me," was the reply. "And I'll do my best to suit *yo*."

"What's your name?"

"My name? Oh—er—Smith—Tom mith."

"Well, then, Tom Smith, you n' me's pals now, ti l one or both of us thinks different. Arter supper to-night, we're a-goin' to put the horses to, an' get along the road for Sevenoaks, where I'm due to-morrow."

"I just want to go back to the inn in the village and fetch a few traps I left there, and then I'm with you," said Tom Smith.

"Right you are, an' by the time you come back I'll have something ready to eat an' drink."

"You see, it is like this," said the new hand on his return, in answer to a hint of old Peter's. "I have not done anything wrong, but, all the same, I do not wish to run the risk of recognition in those places through which we shall be likely to pass; and as I am well known throughout the sout anyway, I have altered my personal appearance a bit."

"Which you have, an' no mistake, though I've never set eyes on you before in my natural," was the other's only comment upon the explanation.

The new man was a bit green at first, as was only natural, but it was wonderful how soon he picked up "cheap-jack" ways.

He had a fund of humour, too, far ahead of the master of the concern, so that before long old Peter began to take longer and longer spells of "time off," leaving the selling to his new partner.

Things went very well therefore, till one day Hennig announced his intention of going into Surrey, to the neighbourhood of Guildford, the county town.

Business had been very slack in the Kentish villages, and small towns, while Surrey was always to be relied on for brisk trade at that time of the year.

Hennig could not but notice that Tom Smith visibly started when Surrey was named.

"Near Guildford, did you say?"

"Yes, I've a big market round about there."

"You won't touch Leafield, I suppose, will you?"

"I generally puts up about two mile from there," replied old Peter, trying to get to the bottom of the other's evident disinclination to fall in with the proposed new route arrangement.

"Look here, mate," he said presently, "I don't want to force you to go into Surrey agen your will; so just say the word, an' we'll keep our present pitch till it's time to sample the Norfolk dumplin's."

"I shouldn't think of it," said Smith. "I'll only ask you not to talk about me anywhere near Leafield, and—but there, I'll tell you more later on."

"Right you are!" replied the old man. "I believe in a still tongue makin' for a wise head, and when I says 'mum' I means 'mum'; so don't you fear nothin', mate."

A week later Leafield was reached, and the van was pitched in a field belonging to a farmer, who had known old Hennig for years.

Tom Smith had stuck so close to business up to this, that it was the more noticeable now when he began regularly to absent himself of an evening. One night in particular this happened, and as there was not much business doing, Peter shut up the show, and took a stroll himself.

It was not a spying expedition that he was on by any means; but certain it was, that walking along the main road for about a mile, he came face to face with his partner—and a young lady.

Old Peter knew her, for he had seen her many a time in former visits to the neighbourhood—it was Miss Compton, of Plessis Park. The pair seemed on very good terms with each other, a fact which fairly flustered Hennig, who had suspected nothing approaching to anything of this sort.

"Ethel!" said Tom Smith, whom Peter saw was now for the first time minus his wig and complexion, "this is a dear old friend of mine—my master, in fact. Hennig, let me make you known to Miss Compton, who, when I set up by and by in business for myself, is going into partnership with me."

Ethel Compton was one of those women who always do the right thing and speak the right word at the right moment. So now she held out her pretty little hand and smilingly said. "I've heard all sorts of nice things about you, Mr. Hennig, and I am very pleased to know you."

"As I am to know you, miss," replied the old cheap-jack, with a low bow.

"Mr. Dorrington says you——"

"Not Dorrington now or yet, Ethel, just plain Tom Smith, please."

She laughed, said "Good-night" to Peter, and turned off with her companion towards Plessis Park.

Before they went to bed that night, Tom Smith told Hennig his story; or, at any rate, as much of it as made clear his position.

His real name, he said, was Dorrington. Basil Dorrington, and until just before he had joined Peter Hennig's travelling establishment, he had acted as private secretary to Mr. Compton, Ethel's father, at Plessis Park and Grosvenor Square.

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It was not unnatural that, seeing much of the only daughter of the house, he should fall in love with her, and that she should reciprocate in kind. Unfortunately, there was another gentleman in the field, a cousin, whose suit was exclusively encouraged by Mr. Compton.

This cousin, one Bernard Peyton, would inherit property, that marched with the Plessis Park estate, a fact which, in Mr. Compton's eyes, made the match more than desirable.

True, the Peyton property was, through the anticipative extravagance of the heir in the matter of horse-racing and gambling, heavily encumbered, a fact, however, which, in the father's opinion, was no bar to the proposed union.

It can be easily imagined, therefore, that Basil Dorrington's chances of winning Ethel were very remote. Still, as the latter had a strong will, and the gift of exercising it, there was just a bare possibility that everything might have ended well and happily but for an altogether unexpected sensational development.

A cheque for a large amount, and purporting to be drawn and signed by Mr. Compton, was presented at the Leafield branch of the Capital and Counties Bank, and pronounced to be a forgery. Basil Dorrington was at once accused of the crime, the circumstantial evidence being so overwhelmingly strong against him, that if, to save a scandal, the matter had not been hushed up, he would undoubtedly have had to suffer a long term of imprisonment. Of course he had to give up his post, and to seek some other means of getting a living, as unlike his former occupation as possible.

"Do you think me guilty?" he asked Peter Hennig.

"No, I don't, lad! And I take it anything but kindly of you that you should ask me such a question."

"Well, I thought you would believe in me, for I tell you, Hennig, on my honour as a gentleman, that I did not forge that cheque, and more, that I have my own suspicions as to who did."

"Mr. Bernard Peyton?"

"The same."

"An' what be you a-goin' to do with him?"

"I don't know yet. I'll tell you perhaps to-morrow. Good-night!"

* * * * *

"Here's a letter for you," said old Peter to his partner the next morning. "'Name o' Smith?'" postman says. 'Yes,' says I. 'Letter for him,' he says. 'Right you are,' says I, 'I'll give it him.' Hullo, mate, what's up? Bad news?"

"Not exactly. Miss Compton tells me that Bernard Peyton has an idea that I am in the neighbourhood, and knows of our meeting place; she suggests, therefore, that the spot should be changed this evening."

"You're a fortunate man, Mr. Dor—; beg pardin'—Tom Smith. If I'd a had a gal like yours—no offence meant—I'd be a happier man to-day."

In the evening, about nine o'clock, Tom Smith went off as usual. He was never, as a rule, very late returning; but this night it was past eleven and no sign of him.

Old Peter sat smoking his short black clay, on the top of the van steps, for he was too uneasy to turn in until the other came back.

"Good evenin', boss!"

Hennig had not heard the soft footsteps upon the grass, the sudden salutation startling him so that his pipe dropped out of his mouth.

When he saw that it was a stranger, with a fairly-large pack upon his shoulder, he took him for a wandering member of his own tribe.

"Evenin'," replied Peter, when he had recovered himself. "Come fur?"

"A matter of ten mile or so—from Redhill."

He was a low-browed, round-shouldered individual, and Peter did not like the look of him.

"Um! Going fur?"

"I'm lookin' for a lodgin' in the village. But this pack o' mine's so precious heavy that I don't feel I can carry it another inch."

"Put it down a bit, an' give yourself a rest," said Peter.

"You look a good sort!" quickly responded the other; "will you take care of my bag for the night, so as I can get on quicker to the village, and I'll call for it in the morning?"

However much old Peter might dislike anyone, he would never refuse to do them a kindness.

"Right you are!" he said, "sling it up here, and I'll put it inside till you comes for it to-morrow mornin'."

He thought it a bit strange afterwards that the fellow never even so much as thanked him, making off in the direction of Leafield village as soon as he had got rid of his burden.

"Tired, I suppose," he said to himself. "Well, mebbe I should be the same."

Then Tom Smith came hurriedly up, looking annoyed and out of spirits, and Peter forgot all about the man and his bag.

"What's wrong, mate?" he asked.

"You're almost as wise as I am," returned the other moodily. "That letter—I don't know what to make of it. Ethel wasn't at the newly-appointed place, where I waited more than a hour, or at the old spot, where I subsequently went—though I'm not surprised at that, it being so late."

"Here!" said Peter, "are you sure as it's her writin'?"

"Oh, there's no doubt about that; the only thing I can think of is that either she is not well, or that she could not elude Peyton, who, as you know, lives in the house."

* * * * * *

"Is your name Peter Hennig?"

"Yes, it is; and I ain't ashamed of it."

"Well, I am a sergeant of police, and you are my prisoner."

"Prisoner! What for?"

"Burglary."

"Burglary! An' whose house as I bin a-burglin', pray?"

"Mr. Compton's, of Plessis Park."

Tom Smith, who was at breakfast with old Peter, started up, and demanded an explanation of the sergeant, vehemently protesting that the whole thing was a mistake and a blunder.

The officer, who was accompanied by two other constables, took no notice of the young man's protest.

"Your name, I take it," he said, "is Basil Keith Dorrington, alias Thomas Smith; and you are also charged as an accomplice of this man."

The sergeant, with one of the constables, then proceeded to thoroughly search the van.

"What's this?" said the former presently, as he dragged from under Peter's "bunk" the bag, left the night before by the stranger from Redhill.

"That!" replied the old cheap-jack, "that's somethin' I'm a-takin' care on for a friend o' mine."

"Oh, is it?" answered the officer. "Well, if you and your friend have no objection, I'll open it, and see what's in it."

Without any ceremony they forced the bag, and turned out upon the floor of the van a heap of plate and valuable jewellery of all kinds.

"Hennig!" said Tom Smith, half angry, half mystified, "what does this mean?"

"Mate," replied Peter, "I'm as much in the dark as you are."

Then while the police were bundling the stolen property up into the bag again, he related to his partner how it was the goods came there.

"Of course I believe you," said Smith; "but it is clear that the plot to ruin me has taken a fresh turn, and how to circumvent the scoundrel who is at the bottom of it all I am at my wits' end to think."

"Well, I've got an idea," whispered the old man, "that there letter 'll not only be the means o' clearin' *this* up, but 'll also put that other matter we know of straight an' true."

* * * * *

The result of the preliminary examination before a magistrate of Peter Hennig and his partner was a foregone conclusion; inasmuch as

WOULD YOU LIKE A PIECE OF MADGE MORRIS' WEDDING CAKE? THEN TURN TO PAGE 647.

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a set of skeleton keys were found in the grass under the van; while a knife, known to be Peter's, and with his name scratched upon it, was picked up outside the window of the butler's pantry at Plessis Park.

The accused were, therefore, committed to the next Guildford Assizes; the bail, however, of the solicitor, employed by Ethel to defend them, being accepted for their appearance.

During the interval between the examination and the trial Basil Dorrington, to call him now by his proper name, did not once see Ethel Compton. He heard from her frequently through the solicitor for the defence.

The day before the trial he received a letter from her, which would have told him, even if he had not known it only too well before, that her love and trust were his more than ever.

"My dear," she wrote, "I cannot, for many reasons, exactly explain how, but all will come right. Do more than hope—be sure."

With unblushing effrontery Bernard Peyton sat in court at the solicitor's table to see and to enjoy his rival's degradation.

There were, however, two unpleasant surprises in store for him that day.

The first was when, at the bidding of the counsel for the defence, the usher of the court called "Ethel Compton" as a witness.

Without a trace of nervousness or false modesty, she admitted having written to Basil Dorrington, appointing a meeting at *the usual place* on the night of the robbery. This letter she gave to her maid to post. Mr. Dorrington did not keep the appointment.

Then the maid was called.

She said that on her way through the hall to post the letter Mr. Compton called her into the library. Throwing the letter on to the hall table, she found, on returning in less than five minutes, that it was gone.

She heard Mr. Peyton speaking to the butler, and pass out while she was engaged with Mr. Compton in the library. The time was eleven in the morning.

More than one person in Court now noticed that Bernard Peyton's face was white to ghastliness.

"Call Richard Drake!"

The witness, a low-browed individual, with a stoop, had evidence to give, which was certainly, though brief, to the point. He declared that he had been employed by Bernard Peyton to "crack the crib," and so dispose of the "swag" that the cheap-jack and his partner should have the credit of it. The knife he had picked up when Peter Hennig dropped it, during the heat of auction time, three evenings before, and had placed it where the police had afterwards found it. The set of "skeletons" were his, and he supposed he must have mislaid them on his night visit to Peter. They were not a "plant." Peyton was to have given him a hundred pounds for the job, but all he got was a "fiver" on account."

A couple of policemen had by this time placed themselves one on each side of the wretched schemer Bernard Peyton, who was in a state of complete collapse.

In the case of the two men at the bar, a formal verdict of acquittal was immediately entered.

Richard Drake, though arrested with his employer, was ultimately allowed to turn King's evidence.

Bernard Peyton, before his conviction and sentence to a long term of penal servitude, confessed that he had not only written the misleading letter, in imitation of Ethel Compton's handwriting, but had also forged the cheque which had been the beginning of all the trouble.

He hated Basil Dorrington, and was determined to stick at nothing to ruin him, and to lose him his sweetheart.

* * * * * * *

"And you did it all for my sake! What can I give you in return?" said Basil, still in Tom Smith's garments.

"Nothing," she answered him, "for I know I had your love long ago; and you have nothing better than that to give me."

* * * * * * *

Old Peter Hennig was an honoured guest at his late partner's wedding, which took place in the spring of the following year.

E. Ralph.

SOME THINGS TO . . . . REMEMBER.

REMEMBER

Pearson's

Xmas 'Xtra.

REMEMBER NOT TO FORGET

TO BUY IT.

REMEMBER TO REMIND

YOUR FRIENDS TO BUY IT.

ALSO REMEMBER.

That PEARSON'S XMAS 'XTRA costs One Shilling only. . .

That it is now on sale. . . .

That it contains sixty-four pages, thirty-two printed in colours. .

That its stories are bright and interesting. . . . . .

That its pictures are as charming as numerous. . . . . .

That its jokes are original. . .

If you remember these facts you will . . . not forget to buy it

To-day.

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A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

(Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Plot to be Frustrated.

GEORGE ILDEN, Baron, of Ilden Castle, while staying with his uncle Jasper, at Pennybrook Hall, suddenly discovers that several suspicious events which have taken place during his stay at the Hall, point to the existence of a plot against his life. He has been shot at, poison has been placed in his pocket-flask, and other attempts, fortunately futile, have been made on his life. He confides in Cathie Hay, his cousin, and they agree that as many members of his own family would materially benefit by his death, the attempts must have their origin in that direction. They suspect Percival, Ilden's cousin. Ilden asks Cathie to marry him, as a means of circumventing his enemies' designs, but she has to refuse.

At about this time he meets Florence Courthorpe, the sister of an old college chum who was drowned while boating. She is very poor, and has taken a situation as governess at Witterby, a village not far from Pennybrook. In seeking to escape his foe, Ilden inadvertently settles down just opposite Florence's temporary home.

Late one night Florence sees a man attempt to enter Ilden's bedroom window with evident criminal designs. She leaves the house clad only in dressing-gown and warns Ilden of his danger. For this exploit her employer dismisses her.

She now has no home, so next day leaves Witterby to stay with some friends at Lallerton. Ilden accompanies her. Arrived at Lallerton, however, they discover that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left suddenly, and no trace of them can be found. Florence, of course, is greatly distressed.

Ilden, however, feeling that he is responsible for her position, and desiring to baulk his enemy, proposes to her, is accepted, and marries her secretly. An announcement in the papers informs his family of the wedding.

Shortly after their marriage Ilden receives a message urging him to return to Pennybrook, his uncle Rupert being dangerously ill. Leaving his wife at the apartments he has taken in London, Ilden leaves for Pennybrook. He is met at the Hall by Cathie, who informs him that his uncle is dead, and that he is again exposing his life to danger.

Cathie informs him of her belief that Guy Despard is in the plot, and insinuates that his own wife, being a friend of the Despards, is possibly implicated.

That night her fears for his safety are shown to be well founded. For in the middle of the night the alarm bell is violently rung, and as Ilden opens his door to ascertain the cause, an attempt is made to stab him. Ilden immediately gives chase to his would-be murderer, and, catching him, throws him down, and is half-strangling him when Grant appears with a light, the rays of which show Ilden's captive to be none other than his cousin Percival. Percival, however, declares that he saw Despard entering Ilden's room and thought he was stabbing at him. A search is made and Despard is discovered. He is locked in a cellar till he can be handed to the police in the morning, but someone lets him out during the night. Next day Ilden leaves the Hall to make inquiries regarding Despard at Lallerton, and finds that Despard has been there before him and knows of Lady Ilden's assumed name of Mrs. George and her hiding place at Sydenham.

(The above is a short synopsis of the opening chapters.)

Mystery Upon Mystery.

"How do you know my name?" he asked, his voice betraying none of the excitement which its mention had given him.

"Mr. Despard told me. I mentioned that you had come here expecting to find his sister at the cottage still, and I said how disappointed the lady had been at finding her friend gone. He knew at once who you were, and of course that is how I was able to write, sir. Before, I did not even know your name."

"You wrote to *me*?" he said, feeling not a little bewildered.

"Yes, sir, or rather to your lady, to return the little gold brooch she dropped here. We found it almost as soon as you were gone, and put it by in hopes that we should hear from you. I sent it off registered just a little while before you came, sir. If I had only known, I might have saved myself the trouble."

He remembered that Florence had spoken of the loss of the trinket on their journey to London, but she had imagined that it was left behind at Witterby. It had belonged to her mother, so she would be pleased to get it back, but it did not occur to Ilden even to thank the woman who had restored it.

"And to what address have you sent it?" he asked, and the disturbed wonder in his mind became greater when she answered promptly with the address at Sydenham, where on the previous day he had left his wife.

But his voice was still matter-of-fact.

"And how did you discover where I lived?"

"Mr. Despard told me, sir, as I have been saying, this morning. He said that he would be going to Sydenham himself to-day and would see Mrs. George, and he offered to take the brooch himself. But he seemed so strange in his manner, if you will excuse me saying so, sir, of a friend of yours, that I thought it would be wiser to send it by post."

"You were quite right," he said mechanically, and as mechanically felt in his pocket to produce the expected reward. His face had grown perfectly pale. In some way the assassin had discovered the secret of his wife's whereabouts which he thought so secure. No doubt he had been watching them all through the fortnight when they thought themselves so free from observation, and had only waited for

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them to separate to make an attempt on the life of each. That on himself had failed. But Florence, alone and defenceless!

How could he hope that she would escape from an enemy so irrationally implacable. The idea increasing in his mind that Despard was mad only increased his panic.

An agony of self-reproach mingled with his uneasiness. He ought never to have left her. If harm happened to her—he could not bear the thought, and he set his mind against it resolutely, afraid of the physical faintness which threatened to unman him. He needed all his strength and clearness of thought to get back and save her. He could not allow himself to think that it might be too late. The good fortune which had directed his steps to the inn could not surely desert him now.

He was inquiring whether he could have a vehicle of any sort to take him back to Shipton Gate, and there seemed to him a cruel irony in the situation when he found that the only one available was that which Despard himself had engaged.

It drove up, however, as he was speaking, but Ilden's relief at the fact was not unmixed. For the landlord who brought back the trap reported that he had used it according to the landlady's surmise to drive Despard back from Castledale to the station. He had caught a train which would take him to Rickerby in time to catch the London express there, if he were lucky.

Ilden cut short his story.

"When is there another train to the junction?"

"Not for a couple of hours, sir."

"And how far is it to the junction from here by road?"

According to the landlord it was barely ten miles, and Ilden's hopes rose. If Despard lost the express he might still overtake him.

He turned to the inn-keeper.

"I will give you ten pounds if you can get me to Rickerby within the hour."

Florence Vanishes.

THE tedious journey to Sydenham was, for George Ilden, one of those experiences which are calculated to turn a man's hair grey before its time.

He had reached Rickerby to find no trace of the man he was pursuing there, and could only conclude that Despard had managed to catch the express which was timed to reach King's Cross three hours before he himself could get there.

In three hours what might not happen. He could only hope that the would-be murderer, unconscious of his pursuit, would delay his actual journey to Sydenham.

And in any case he could at least send Florence a warning. It was not the time now for excess of caution, and he puzzled the telegraph clerk at the station by the message he dispatched.

But the fact that he had warned her did little to relieve his mind when he knew Despard's cunning. The man who had tracked them to Sydenham in spite of all their precautions could manage to follow her if she left the house.

From his conversation with the innkeeper on the way, he had become more than ever impressed with the idea that Despard was insane, but if so there was no doubting that his mania was united with the proverbial cunning of the maniac, and the thought only added to his nervousness. For the madman is restrained through no thought of selfish prudence.

It appeared that Despard had spent more than an hour at Castledale, visiting various people there, but to what purpose the innkeeper had been unable to make out, although it was apparent he had been curious enough.

With himself Despard had scarcely exchanged a word, but he had muttered to himself a great deal.

"It did not seem to me safe for him to be about by himself," the man had said to Ilden, and Ilden had smiled grimly as he answered that he was following the man to see him properly taken care of.

It was a grim smile, and it was the only one which crossed his face during the whole of his anxious journey from Lallerton to Sydenham. The delays seemed endless to him, making the journey one long-drawn torment of suspense.

In his telegram to his wife he had urged her to leave the house and await his arrival at the Crystal Palace Hotel, and his heart beat quickly with mingled hope and fear as he approached the rendezvous at last.

"No, there was no lady waiting for him there," and his heart sank like lead. If Florence had received his message, he did not doubt for a moment that she would have obeyed his wish, unless she had been prevented.

But he still buoyed himself up with hope, telling himself that the message must have miscarried, and that he would find her at home, unconscious that she had ever been in danger. Despard might come when he liked then, so long as he was at her side to protect her.

He jumped into a hansom and drove to their rooms; but, as he opened the door impatiently, his delusive hope sank; for the first thing he saw was his own telegram waiting on the hall table. Where was Florence, that she had not opened it?

He rang the bell furiously, and spread instant alarm into the mind of his landlady by his impatient inquiry for his wife.

"Oh! has she not been with you, sir?" she gasped. "I was hoping that she must have joined you when she did not come back. I should have communicated with you, but none of us knew where you had gone."

He leant back against the wall, overcome by a feeling of physical faintness. There was a singing, surging sound in his ears of which he had not been conscious since his delicate boyhood.

But he mastered the weakness which threatened him by an effort of self-command. He could not afford time to show weakness now."

"Tell me exactly what has happened," he said, speaking only a little more quietly than usual, and the landlady checked an inclination to become hysterical. But it was some time before he could get a connected story from her.

It seemed that almost immediately after he had left home on the previous day, a "young person" whom Mrs. FitzMorris Smith, the landlady, classed as a servant girl, had called at the house and asked to see Lord Ilden. On being assured that no person of the name resided there, she asserted that she had seen him several times entering the house with a lady and insisted on seeing the gentleman who was living there, whatever he might be calling himself. When she was told that Mr. George had left the house on a journey, she had demanded an interview with his wife.

"My heart misgave me from the first about her," said Mrs. Smith, beginning to sob. "But I thought it was only right to let Mrs. George know that she was here."

Ilden nodded.

"Of course. And what then?"

"Mrs. George had the woman shown in, and talked to her."

"Alone?"

"Yes. She asked me to remain, but the girl refused to say anything while I was there, and so I was asked to wait outside."

"And what did you hear there?"

Mrs. Smith was inclined to show indignation.

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She had heard nothing, except once or twice the repetition of the name "Lord Ilden."

"And after that?" he asked.

"They came out of the room together, and Mrs. George dressed and went out with her. She did not tell me a word of what the girl had said, or where she was going with her, but when I asked her whether she would be back for dinner, she said 'most probably.' That, sir, was the last word I heard her speak, and the last time I set eyes on her. She never came back, and I had cooked a dinner special for her because I thought she might be a little down-hearted with you away."

"And she left no message for me?"

"No, sir, not a word. I am sure that she expected, when she left the house, to be back long before you were."

This was the whole of the story, and after trying in vain to extract any further detail of importance, Ilden left her to stride through his rooms, seeking the written message which she must surely have left for him somewhere. The artifice which had successfully decoyed her away must have been a marvellously cunning one to deceive her, when she was so completely on her guard and expectant; but however plausible the story told her had been, it was not like Florence, with her foresight and her thoughtfulness for him, to leave the house—with people who confessed themselves cognisant of her identity—without making some provision against a possible intrigue. He ransacked the rooms feverishly, seeking a scrap of paper from her, but in vain.

It was Mrs. Smith who interrupted him; she wanted to know whether he wished the cab to stay. Perhaps he had forgotten it.

As a matter of fact Ilden *had* forgotten its existence; but the reminder roused him to the fact that he must do something, and he went back to the hansom to be driven to the office of a private detective in town.

The time for secrecy had now gone. The publicity which he had hated to think of, the honour of the family which he had been so anxious to preserve, all these seemed insignificant now and not worth a thought. The only thing that concerned him was that his wife was gone, and that he must find her.

"The Albert Gate Mystery,"
Our Splendid New Serial, will Commence Shortly.

The only thought that frightened him was that he might find her too late. His heart sickened at the possibility. He had told himself confidently that Despard had attempted his own life first and would return to attempt that of his wife.

It seemed to him only too possible now that he had taken her life first.

If only he had known that when they stood face to face at Pennybrook.

From the office of the celebrated detective he was brought back in feverish haste by the delusive hope that Florence might have returned in his absence.

When he found the hope unsatisfied a sense of great desolation came upon him.

As he wandered through the deserted rooms, everything reminded him vividly of the girl-wife he seemed to have lost, and brought back the happy week they had spent there together to compare with his utter loneliness.

She had been embroidering a tobacco-pouch for him, and the work still lay on the table where she had last laid it down.

With a passionate rush of tenderness he raised it to his lips and kissed the work of her fingers.

"Little wife, little wife, come back to me. I want nothing in the world but you," he cried with a sob in his throat.

And he had wondered—how strange it seemed to him now—whether he loved her

A Carefully Planned Decoy.

MEANWHILE Florence had passed through emotions as poignant as those which tore the heart of her husband.

The visit of a stranger who knew Lord Ilden's name had filled her with an instant apprehension which was a little modified by the young woman's appearance.

It was difficult to associate danger or intrigue with the rosy-faced country-girl who stood before her excited with her mission. And she agreed with little reluctance to see her alone, as the girl wished.

"I want to see Lord Ilden," said her visitor abruptly, as soon as the landlady had left them, and Florence flushed uncomfortably. She had never practised subterfuge in her life, and it seemed necessary now.

"And who is Lord Ilden?" she asked, and the girl looked at her in surprise and something that looked like pity.

"What, hasn't he even told you his right name? Well! I do call *that* a shame."

There was something in her voice that made Lady Ilden proud and thankful to think that her ignorance of the man was only pretended.

She scarcely made an effort to keep up the pretence.

"And suppose I knew this Lord Ilden, may I ask why you want to see him, and what you have to say to him?"

The girl hesitated for a moment, and despairing of her ability to soften the blow, delivered it bluntly.

"I want to tell him that his wife is dying and ask him to come to her, poor thing."

She was surprised that the blow did not appear to hurt. The beautiful lady for whom she had been feeling some compunctions of pity only looked at her in bewilderment.

"Then I am sure that you are making a mistake," said Florence quietly. "I have reason to know that Lord Ilden's wife is quite well, and that she saw him quite recently."

"Meaning yourself?" said the girl, and went on without waiting for an answer. "I was afraid that you must be thinking yourself his wife when I saw you coming in and out here together, not to speak of your being with the gentleman at Lallerton. But if there is any worth in a marriage at the registrar's his wife is my poor mistress, who lies dying to-day because he has broken her heart."

"I am sure that you are making a mistake," said Florence again, her voice quite confident. "But you speak of Lallerton. Would you mind telling me who you are?"

She seated herself as she spoke, for the maid's assertion had tried her nerves, although she knew that it must be false, and she felt her limbs trembling beneath her.

"My name is Clara Wimple," said the girl, "and I followed you to Shipton Gate that day when you went there with his lordship, and him pretending that he did not know where his wife had gone to, although he had her letter telling him all the time. That is how I was so certain that it was you and Lord Ilden when I saw you coming in here. And if he has been deceiving you like he has deceived my poor mistress, I shall never forgive myself for warning him that day. He deserves all he gets if the master does meet him, and I am sure it was more for the poor master's sake than his that I tried to keep him away, knowing what I know, and having seen the master wandering round by his old home only that morning."

She was evidently debating with herself the morality of a past action, but on Florence the words were wasted. The tumult of thought bewildered her.

She was calming herself to ask a question.

"You say that Lord Ilden married your mistress. What is her name?"

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"Lady Ilden, ma'am, although she and I are the only people that know it, and he won't admit it, and for his sake she keeps it a secret and keeps her maiden name."

"But her maiden name?" asked Florence impatiently.

"Was Miss Despard, ma'am. I was her maid at home and when she came here she sent for me and engaged me again."

Florence had known it before she spoke, and she drew her hand over her brows in a pathetic effort to think clearly.

It was false, of course, to say that George had been married when he met her—that she was not really his wife. She had laughed at the assertion in her heart, feeling that it was a trick intended to make her distrust him. But Daisy Despard could not have joined in a trick. She was the one person whom she believed in as completely as her husband. It was very strange. If Daisy said that George had married her——but it was impossible. He did not even know her. Of course when she spoke to her friend she would discover how the strange mistake had arisen.

"Miss Despard is a great friend of mine," she said. "I was very sorry when I found that she had left Lallerton without letting me know her new address. If you can tell me it, I should like to see her."

"I can take you to her at once," said the girl. "She is living quite close."

"Then I will come now and see her," said Florence.

The thought that this might be a trick did not suggest itself, and she put on her things impatiently.

It was not until they were out in the street that something the girl had said recurred to her mind.

"You spoke as though your mistress were ill. I hope that you were exaggerating."

"Oh! no, ma'am. I wish I were. But the doctor himself says that she has not strength enough to pull through. He doubts whether she will live through the night, and that is why I made up my mind to come and beg her husband to see her. You see, ma'am, something she saw in the papers last week gave her a shock when she ought to have been careful with her health, and now that it is over the doctor says she has not strength to pull round again. I don't know whether I am doing right in taking you to her."

"She is my greatest friend," said Florence. "I am sure that she will be glad to see me. Have you not told her that you have seen me."

"And his lordship? No, ma'am, I daren't; but it came over me this morning when I saw her asleep, that if her husband were to hear that she was dying, he might come to see her, and perhaps let her die happy by saying something kind. And to think that you and the mistress were friends!"

Something of the dramatic tragedy of the coincidence seemed to touch even her rustic imagination, and she lapsed into silence.

Florence did not break it. That she had found her friend, only to hear that she was dying, was in itself sufficient to occupy all her mind, apart from this strange, incredible story which connected her with George. The latter was, of course, some strange misunderstanding. She would not let her mind dwell on it, or even admit to herself that she wished to question her friend about it.

The rooms which the Despard's had taken on their flight from "Chez-nous" were, as Clara Wimple had said, quite close by, and the journey took only a few minutes.

Florence, walking as in a dream, realised that they were stopping before one of the tall houses in the next avenue, which she and George had passed all unconsciously on the previous day. She was conscious of no emotion beyond expectation. Something was going to happen. She waited for it breathlessly.

Her guide was opening the door without a key, and started back with a little cry of surprise and fear.

"The master is back again," she whispered to the silent figure following her.

(*Continued on next page.*)

BILE BEANS CURE A LONDON CHEF.

TESTIMONY FROM CHELSEA.

LIVER COMPLAINT, RHEUMATISM, AND DIZZINESS ENDED.

Mons. Etienne Sewry, of Shirley House, Gertrude Road, Chelsea, chef at one of London's most fashionable West-end hotels, tells an interesting story of how Charles Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness cured him of liver complaint, rheumatism, and dizziness. It was told to a representative of the "Weekly Budget." Said M. Sewry:—

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BILE BEANS.

Short Stories, Nov. 22nd, 1902.

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Florence had taken it for granted, in so far as she had thought of Guy Despard at all, that in seeing Daisy she would also meet her brother. In her knowledge of them they had always been together, and she wondered at the girl's surprise.

Despard was standing in the hall, and she was conscious that a great change had taken place in him even in the short time since she had travelled with him from Pennybrook to Rickerby. He had looked haggard and wild-eyed then. But now his face was ghastly in its hollowness and pallor. He was unshaven too, and his hair which he had always worn unconventionally long was unkempt and disordered.

He seemed to have been watching for the maid's arrival and addressed her sharply before he noticed that she was not alone.

"What right have you to leave the house, when your mistress may wake and want you? Go to her at once."

He caught sight of Florence as he spoke, and his face, which had been dark with anger, changed suddenly. It seemed to her that he was pleased as well as surprised that she had come.

"I have just heard that Daisy is ill and that you are living quite close to us," she said, holding out her hand. He appeared too agitated, however, to think of any conventional greeting, and her hand remained unnoticed. "It seems strange," she ran on, "that you should be so near me all the time that I have been trying to find you. I was so anxious to see Daisy and know what had become of her."

Clara Wimple stood hesitating near, as if anxious to speak and yet afraid to. Despard turned to her angrily.

"Go to your mistress."

Then, as the girl obeyed with evident reluctance, he turned to his unexpected visitor, his strange face fiercely eager.

"I am glad that you have come. But where is your husband? You say that you are living near here?"

The question seemed to her to lift a sudden weight from her mind. The girl must have made some ridiculous mistake. Mr. Despard had heard of her marriage, and accepted it. It was well that she had given no attention to the maid's words.

"Yes, we are in Woodborough Avenue," she said, "at Selwood House."

"And Lord Ilden is there now?"

"No, he has just gone back to Pennybrook. He received word this morning that his uncle, Rupert, is seriously ill—possibly dying—and wishes to see him. It is our first parting."

Despard smiled curiously.

"And will be your last, I hope. But you are anxious to see Daisy. You will find her very much changed. She was unconscious when I left her just now. If she should recognise you, there is no need for you to tell her that I have been here. I have just returned from a journey, and have to start again at once."

She looked at him in some surprise.

"You are leaving your sister when she is so ill! I understood that her case was critical."

His face was working convulsively, and made her feel vaguely alarmed.

"I am going for her sake. I shall have good news for her when I return. She will live to hear it."

She was too disturbed herself to notice fully the strangeness of his words and manner. But insensibly it prevented her asking any of the questions which were ready on her lip, questions about the strange assertion that Clara Wimpole had made.

Despard was taking her up to his sister's room, and left her at the door. He seemed restless and impatient.

"You are starting at once?" she asked, and he nodded with the strange eagerness in his wild eyes again.

"At once. I have lost too much time already."

Inside the room she found a professional nurse as well as the maid seated beside the bed on which her old schoolfriend lay unconscious.

She lay so still and her face was so thin and worn that it seemed to Florence as if it must be the unconsciousness of death. Her heart filled with a great pity, which drove from her mind every thought except that this was the friend she loved, the one woman who had been kind to her in her days of adversity. She sank on her knees by the side of the bed and touched the worn face with her lips.

"Daisy, dearest, it is I, Florrie. Don't you know me?" she cried, but no response came from the unconscious figure on the bed, and Florence's eyes filled with tears.

"She has been like that for hours now," said the nurse, her matter-of fact voice sounding to her strangely out of keeping with the solemnity of the room. "The doctor says that she may pass away like that, or she may be conscious for a little while before the end. It may come at any time now. Won't you sit down, ma'am. You don't look strong."

She sat down crying silently.

"You will be the friend that she has been asking for so much," said the nurse. "She was always calling for 'Florrie' when she was delirious, or for her husband."

"Her husband?" Florence repeated the words questioningly, and the nurse lowered her voice.

"Or the gentleman who ought to be. I suppose that it is him she calls 'George.'"

Florence started. For the moment she had forgotten, and the name brought it all back. Daisy's maid had told her an impossible story connecting the two.

It must be a mistake, because her husband had never met Daisy. She knew it from his own lips. And yet—it seemed as though some mocking spirit outside herself, whispered the words in her ear—he had gone to Lallerton to see her. The conversation in which her friend's name was first mentioned between them came back vividly. "Has Miss Despard ever spoken about me?" George had asked her, and had seemed very eager for her answer. It was only when she showed her surprise at his knowing her friend that he told her they had never met.

She tried to silence the voice. It was disloyal to her love to listen. Daisy would come back to consciousness and tell her that the maid had made a mistake, and she directed her attention to the figure on the bed again. Would her friend ever wake again to silence the mocking voice that derided her, reminding her that after all she had known her husband only for one short fortnight.

"THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY,"
Our Splendid New Serial, will Commence Shortly.

"Lord Ilden is My Husband!"

"Don't you think that her husband ought to see her before she dies?"

The words roused Florence from a reverie. She could not tell how long she had been sitting there, lost to all that passed around her in the concentration of her mind on the dialogue that seemed to carry itself on there without her will.

Her heart cried out again and again that nothing could make her doubt her husband's goodness and love. He had proved them so fully in the little while that they had been together. And still the mocking voice gave its answer, and all her mind went to the silencing of it. And now she seemed roused as from a dream by Clara Wimple's hushed voice. The nurse had left the room. She had not noticed her departure, nor the fact that the maid had returned to take her place.

"Her husband?" she repeated, starting.

(Continued on page 671.)

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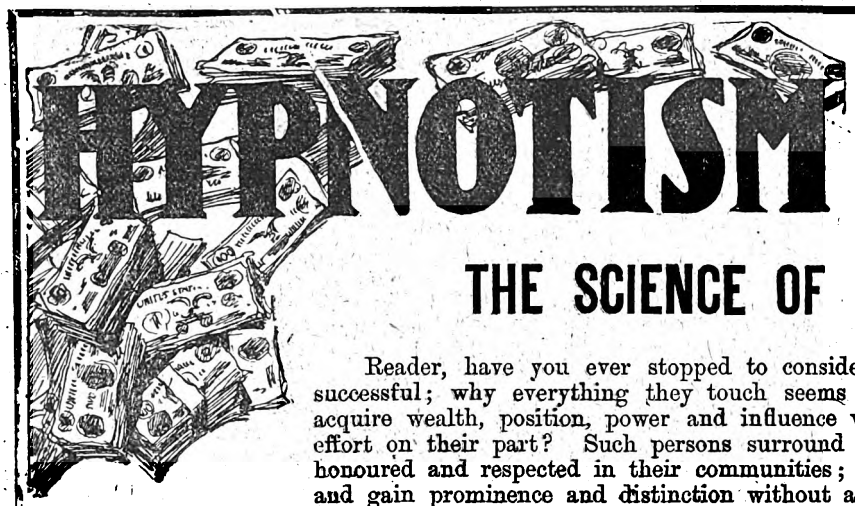

HYPNOTISM

THE SCIENCE OF SUCCESS

Reader, have you ever stopped to consider why some persons are so successful; why everything they touch seems to turn to gold; why they acquire wealth, position, power and influence without any seemingly great effort on their part? Such persons surround themselves with friends, are honoured and respected in their communities; are sought after in society, and gain prominence and distinction without apparently trying. Have you ever considered these things? Do you know why?

WHAT BRINGS SUCCESS

Not hard work, for the poor work harder than the rich. Not birth, because many of our successful men are of lowly parentage. Not luck, for many a lucky man dies friendless and poor. We will tell you why. The secret of success in life is personal influence—the ability to make others think as you do; to win their confidence and friendship and get them to help you. There is a secret power by which you can wield an irresistible personal influence; by which you may overcome all obstacles, charm and fascinate whom you will; by which you may cure every known disease and bad habit without the aid of drugs, medicines or the surgeon's knife. It is called personal Magnetism or Hypnotism. It is the basis of success in every business and calling.

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"Lord Ilden. It does not seem right that she should die without seeing him. I thought that, if you knew where he was, you would send for him, now that you see for yourself how ill the poor mistress is. I did not dare to ask you before, because of the master being here; but I have just been asking, and they say that he has gone away again by train; so that there could be no harm in his lordship coming for an hour or so. You will send for him, won't you? I think the poor mistress would die happy if she could only see him once, in spite of the way in which he has treated her. She would never believe that he really meant to desert her. Perhaps I ought not to be talking like this to you, ma'am, being as you think that he is your husband too; but you can't love him like the poor mistress does."

Florence kept her voice steady and dignified.

"I am sure that you are making a mistake. Lord Ilden has never met Miss Despard. He told me so himself."

"As I suppose he would, ma'am. Men seem all alike to me. There's no believing them. Whether they are lords, or just plain, ordinary men, they are just the same to women."

Florence interrupted her.

"But what makes you think it was Lord Ilden who married your mistress?"

"She told me so herself, ma'am; and besides, I was with her the first time that she ever met him. It was in the Castledale woods early in the summer, and Miss Daisy was making a picture of the old ruins. I had gone with her to carry the luncheon basket. Lord Ilden had been fishing and lost his way, and he asked us to direct him how to get out of the woods. He said he was staying at the inn at Castledale. I thought then that he must know his way well enough, and had only made an excuse for stopping because Miss Daisy was so pretty. But she did not seem to think of that, and she took him herself as far as the path, and they talked a good deal, and I knew that she liked him. And when we went home she asked me not to speak about the meeting to anybody for fear of Mr. Guy hearing of it. He was always so queer if she made a new friend.

"And the next day his lordship was at the ruins again, and the next, and I suppose a good many days after. But Miss Daisy said that there was no need for me to carry the basket, and I only knew from her face when she came home that she had met him. Indeed, those first three days were the only time that I ever saw his lordship till he came to Lallerton with you. He took good care to keep out of the master's way. Miss Daisy had told him, I suppose, that her brother didn't like her having friends.

"Mr. Guy himself was working hard at a picture, and thought she only went to Castledale for the sketching; and then he went to London to see the galleries, and while he was away Miss Daisy went away too, for a week, and when she came back she told me that she was married to Lord Ilden, but that I was not to tell a soul, because his lordship had important reasons for wishing the marriage to be kept secret for the present, and she did not dare yet to tell her brother. Not that she told me at once, till I had begun to suspect it. His lordship had gone away then, and she wrote begging for permission to tell her brother. But he said that it would spoil everything. She showed me his letter—a cruel letter it seemed to me—so that I should see how important it was to keep silence. He said that it might never be possible for him to acknowledge her unless she kept their secret a little longer.

"And then her brother found out. But she kept her promise, and would not say that she was married. I told him myself, but she denied it for her husband's sake, and she sent me away because I had told him Lord Ilden's name.

"I think that it turned Mr. Guy mad. He had always thought so much of his sister. He went about after that trying to find his lordship. By that time I believe the mistress had ceased to get any letter from him. She used to write to some address he had given her. He would never have the letters sent to his own home, Ilden Castle.

"Miss Daisy—or rather Lady Ilden, as I ought to call her—was afraid that her letters must have miscarried; but she would not disobey him even then, till she found what Mr. Guy was doing, and then she wrote to him where he was staying with some friends in Yorkshire. She saw it in the papers that he was there. I believe he told her then that they weren't really married.

"She has talked about it when she was ill. But I am sure it was a real marriage—Miss Daisy wouldn't have been deceived. And if he knew that his wife was dying and that you knew about her, I should think he would come, if he has any heart at all. You will send for him, ma'am?"

Florence shook her head.

"I would send for him if I thought that it were true. But I cannot believe it. Your mistress will tell us that you have made a mistake, that it was not Lord Ilden she married. Lord Ilden is my husband!"

(The result of this strange interview will be told next Tuesday.)

"DEAREST KITTY," wrote a young lady recently, "I've turned over a new leaf, and broken all engagements but two."

"MISS SYBILLE JONES is going to travel under an assumed name." "Whatever for?" "Well, you see, she gets married next week, and she's going on her honeymoon."

UNSOPHISTICATED PARENT: "Hallo there, nurse, what's that baby yelling like that for? I can't read at all." Nurse: "He's cutting his teeth, sir." U. P.: "Well, see that he doesn't do it any more, or you lose your place."

FLOSSY: "Come, Johnny, let's play we's married." Johnny: "Very well, Flossy." "Come in, den, come in to dinner. How do you like de dinner to-day, my dear?" "It is a good dinner. A very good dinner, indeed." "Oh, you mustn't say dat, you must say dat it ain't wuf a dash. If I couldn't cook a dinner better than dat I would bury myself in the back garden. That's the way papa talks."

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

How to Congratulate.

SURELY, "ADA," it is not necessary for you to ask me how you should congratulate a very dear friend on her engagement? You certainly do know how to write a letter, if the one you have written to me is a specimen. Write to her just as one girl should to another—a letter expressing your pleasure at her engagement, your hopes for her happiness, and any little confidential advice or comments you may be in a position to offer her. Above all, don't be formal or stiff in such correspondence. A genuine letter of congratulation between friends should be natural and not based on any mere form.

The Usual Parent.

"LENA'S" father absolutely refuses to allow her to marry "EDWIN." "EDWIN," however, presses her continuously to continue to be his sweetheart. Should "LENA" oppose her parent's wishes, and agree?

* * * *

Perhaps you had better accept your parent's decision for the time. By remaining true to "EDWIN"—if you love him—in course of time your father must see that it is futile to stand in your way further. Many fathers have been brought to consent to their daughters' engagement if they have seen that their interference is of no avail.

The Unready Lover.

"CAMALLA" has been receiving attentions from a man, but as yet he has made her no definite proposal, but only hinted at marriage. He has professed his love for her, but has lately grown less effusive. He is going to America next year. How is "CAMALLA" to let him know that she loves him very deeply?

* * * *

I cannot understand your difficulty, "CAMALLA." He professes that he loves you, and has suggested marriage. Perhaps he cannot make a definite proposal yet, owing to his prospects. As he is going to America, perhaps it is not possible to make you an offer until he returns. Wait until he does so, in the meantime making him as sure of your love and constancy as you can.

Must He Marry?

MUST a man get married, even if he has not yet met the woman of his heart? "TWENTY-EIGHT" has had one or two love affairs, but none of them have made him the happy possessor of a wife. Now he is no longer in the first flush of youth he is beginning to speculate on the future. As a bachelor, he tells me, he is perfectly happy. His father and mother are living, and he has a comfortable home. He has no present fancy for any particular girl. What he wishes to know is, "should he look for a wife?"

* * * *

If you are perfectly happy, "TWENTY-EIGHT," that is a state which cannot be improved upon. You have, it seems, a good home, a father and mother. You are not in love with any girl. Why then bother your head about matrimony? If your nature is one which pines for the solace of a wife, those one or two love affairs you speak of will in all probability be repeated as time goes on, and you will meet some other woman. Wait till she comes your way, which she must, sooner or later, if you are an ordinary man, of susceptible disposition, and not of the family of woman-haters.

Trapped!

WHAT can a man do when he has been entrapped into a proposal? "LESLIE" feels he has made a fool of himself. Having been thrown very much into "ADA'S" society, he overstepped the bounds of flirtation by saying in a half joking manner that he would like to marry her. He does not know why he said it, but the girl took it quite literally, accepted the proposal, and announced it to her friends. Everybody now looks upon them as engaged, yet "LESLIE" really had no such intention. How can he get out of it?

* * * *

Explain to the girl that your remark was not intended seriously. Ask her to act in an honourable way and release you from any engagement. If you think she really believed you when you proposed, and acted in good faith, you can scarcely break off the engagement without laying yourself open to social censure, or even a breach of promise action. This being the case, I should advise you to accept the situation, but refrain from any further visits to her. If a man has been the victim of a trap—such as, apparently, you have—while he is outwardly pledged to marriage, it is his own affair when to consummate it, and the law cannot compel a man to marry any woman. Absent yourself, after explaining to the girl the facts of the case, and leave it to time to put things in order.

A Dilatory Admirer.

"DAISY" two years ago met a man of whom she became very enamoured. For a long time he wrote to her in very friendly terms, but never breathed a word of any idea of serious intentions towards her. Now "DAISY" has met another man, by whom she is not so much attracted, but who appears to be very fond indeed of her. Should she listen to the attentions of the latter, or wait until the former makes some definite proposal.

* * * *

The first man, "DAISY," has had ample time in which to make any proposal. As he has not done so, it would be better for you to assume that he has no serious intentions towards you, but values you only as a friend. You should not be bound by the shadowy idea that he may suddenly alter his attitude. Meanwhile, you are yourself the best judge as to whether the new admirer is a desirable suitor for you. Certainly do not take up a stiff attitude towards him. Try his companionship for a while, and see how your feelings develop. You may in time get to regard him with affection. Possibly you are not one of the "first sight" lovers, and require time to know where your affections lie.

Accepting a Compliment.

"E. S. S."—Thank you so much for your sweet letter. The little affair has now, I hope, been forgotten, as I am sure few readers would wish to accuse me of sowing discord between husband and wife. When you are introduced to anyone, and they venture to say they would "like to meet you again," it is more usual to bow and accept the compliment in smiling silence. If, as you say, you really do wish to meet the individual in question again, why not say, in reply to his wish, "I daresay we shall," adding that you have been "much interested" in his conversation, or pleased with the way he dances, sings, or plays. Some such nice little return compliment should be passed. If, however, you are unable to pass any such compliment, it would be better to accept his remark with a simple bow.

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CHRISTMAS

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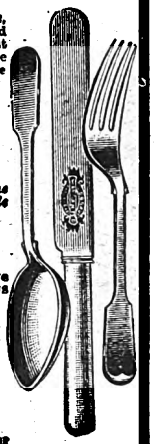

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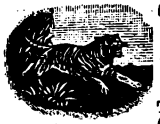

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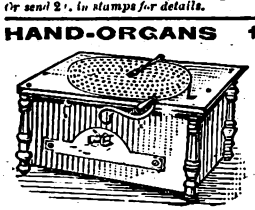

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Short Stories.

No. 726. For the Week Ending November 29th, 1902. One Penny.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

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LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who is staying at Cairo.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Her enthusiasm is misinterpreted. Instantly all is confusion. The guide, however, snatches Belinda from danger, and hurries them away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, then suddenly with a cry of: "It is you, you! Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all. He's David Carr," throws herself into his arms.

The dragoman is dismissed, and back at the hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes Lady Peggy to task for the occurrence. Lady Peggy retorts that not long ago she saw the Duchess' own daughter Honoria in the arms of a real Egyptian. The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and after storming at her, is slapping her face when Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room. Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, we discover that Belinda has just prevented Honoria from poisoning herself.

Another suitor now appears—Lord Reginald Davenant, at one time in love with Mrs. Murchison Lee, who is also at Cairo. The slighted Mrs. Lee, or "Midge," as she is called is furious, and threatens violence to Belinda. Lady Peggy checkmates her, however, by robbing her of her morphia (to which she is a slave) and her hypodermic syringe.

That same evening, Lady Peggy suddenly discovers the Duke of Eastacres and a new comer, Stanley Forbes, about to fight a duel. Realising the possible disastrous consequences to her matrimonial plans for Belinda, Lady Peggy rushes forward and places herself between the two men.

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Belinda Receives Her First Proposal.

"My dear Duke," I cried, paying no heed to Stanley's evident annoyance, "wherever is Belinda? I've been looking for her this hour or more!"

"You must have *overlooked* her in your haste, Lady Peggy," interrupted Stanley; "the young lady was in the courtyard of the hotel five minutes since."

"Oh, no," I said, shaking my head, "*that* was not Belinda. She and the Duke went off this morning to explore the desert. I expected them back some hours ago. Indeed, I've been quite anxious at their non-appearance."

Then turning to Eastacres. "Where is she, Duke? You ought not to have left her."

"Indeed, Lady Peggy, I parted from Miss North only a short distance from the Mena, she can't have come to any harm."

"*Harm*," I repeated; "you little know Belinda. As likely as not she's started off on an expedition to the Bedouins, or gone for a ramble up the Pyramids. She's so impetuous."

"I don't think you need worry yourself. Still, if it will relieve your anxiety, I'll go and look for her."

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"A good idea," said Stanley, "I'll join you in the search. We shall shortly return with the lost sheep, Lady Peggy; until then——" He paused and moved towards the Duke.

"Oh, no," I cried, "that won't do at all. It's foolish for both to look in the same direction. You go towards the hotel, Eastacres. Mr. Forbes and I will search about here."

Thus appealed to, Stanley could not very well refuse.

"I'll see you later on at the Mena, Duke," he called after the other's retreating figure. Eastacres gave a gesture of compliance and walked rapidly towards the hotel.

Stanley, with an air of great politeness, offered me his arm and suggested that if we were going to search we'd better begin.

"I'm at your disposition for an hour," he said, "after which time I'm afraid that I must leave you." He smiled as he spoke, and I knew he had seen through my manœuvre—Stanley and I had had more than one passage of arms in the days gone by—I knew also that unless I took decisive action he would yet meet the Duke that night. I had only delayed, not prevented, the scene.

"Do you know why I interrupted you and Eastacres?" I asked him abruptly.

"My dear Lady Peggy, you are a woman of such infinite resource that it would be the merest vanity on my part to attempt to fathom any of your reasons."

"I'll tell you," I said, gazing at him steadily. "I did it for your sake. I know why you wish to speak in private to the Duke. I guess all that you wish to say to him. But"—I laid my hand upon his arm—"but you must not speak to him until I have told you what I have to tell."

"It's very nice of you to interest yourself on my behalf, Lady Peggy."

"You think I'm playing with you, Stanley? Talking to gain time. Well, I'll prove you are mistaken. Listen! You wished to ask the Duke to-night for news of Sheila Kenwyn?"

The shot went home. His face grew tense, his eyes flashed, he gripped me tightly by the arm.

"Where is she?" he asked hoarsely. "Where is Sheila?"

"I cannot tell you now," I answered steadily.

He fell back, suddenly, swiftly, self-controlled once more.

"Supposing I did intend to question Eastacres on this particular matter. Why should you try to stop me?"

"Because," I came quite close, looking up at him with earnest, pleading eyes, "I feel for you, as a woman of my age can feel for a man of yours. Because I'm sorry for you, and regret the brilliant future you have let slip by. Is it so difficult to believe in my sincerity?"

"You are more than good," he said courteously.

I threw out my hands with a gesture of appeal. "You make it very hard for me, Stanley. Surely it is not more difficult for a woman of fashion to do a kindness than an injury?"

"Come," he said smiling, "let us be more definite. Why am I not to see the Duke to-night?"

"You suspect him of being concerned in Sheila's disappearance," I returned. "Once let him know your suspicion and he will do his best to thwart you. Leave it to me."

He stopped me with a gesture.

"The thing is impossible," he said sternly; "I think we had better drop the discussion." He gazed at me with keen scrutinising eyes and I felt myself turn cold. For the moment I was at a loss what next to do. It was evident unless I played a bolder and stronger game, I should make no impression upon Forbes. He would meet the Duke, a scene, a scandal would result, and then——

Suddenly an inspiration seized me. I took a desperate resolve.

"Stanley," I cried, "you doubt me, doubt my sincerity. I'm going to prove it beyond the shadow of a doubt. You suspect that Eastacres induced your cousin to leave home. I don't suspect—I *know*."

I faced him in the moonlight, watching him with half fearful eyes. He was so strong, so keen, so ruthless an examiner that I had need to fear. I was no match for him in fence of tongue.

"You know it?" he turned upon me fiercely.

"I swear it," I answered trembling, and shrank before the agony upon his face.

He turned aside with a muttered oath. The news had given him quite a blow, and he reeled under its force.

"The hound, the cur," he cried, and his arm instinctively shot out. "God, that a thing like that——" He paused. I think the image of the fair young girl, the Sheila whom he had so fondly loved, stayed the words upon his lips. The truth came home to him with crushing force. The truth that she in whom he had believed, as men believe in God, was after all unworthy. Pity he had for her, the victim of a sensualist's vanity, the dupe of a base man's art, but, for the moment, pity was swept aside. His shrine was empty, his idol fallen to the ground; he was immersed in sorrow for himself.

"You know where she is to be found?" he said at last.

"I do."

"Then tell me." And he flashed a look stern, and compelling, at my face.

"Not now," I answered. "No," as he made a gesture of impatience, "I'm not to be moved in this particular. If I give you her address to-night, what will happen? Indignation will work upon you, until in a sudden rage you fall upon the Duke."

"That," he replied, "will take place in any case. To-night's as good a time as any."

"I beg your pardon, it would be the worst possible time. You must have some consideration for me, Stanley. I cannot give you the source of my information. I must not, I dare not. Were you to insist on seeing Eastacres to-night my name would inevitably crop up. Besides, there's another and a stronger reason. Eastacres could easily put you off the scent. He could cable to your cousin to leave her present address. A few kind words would even now bring her to his side."

"No more," he said fiercely, "you have said enough on that score. Now tell me, if you please, exactly what you know about my cousin?"

His emotion had cooled down; he was once more the cold, stern, legal expert, trained to weigh each word. He had the reputation of being the most invincible cross-examiner at the Bar. Small wonder therefore, that I felt my courage oozing from me. I simply could not stand the ordeal of a rigid cross-examination.

For the moment I felt a hysterical desire to confess that I know nothing, that I had been fooling him all the time; anything was better than this awful strain. The next, however, I had pulled myself together.

"If you don't mind, Stanley," I said softly, "I'd rather not. It goes against me to talk about the poor girl. I am too sorry for her to care to speak about it. After all, the chief thing you want is her address. She will tell you her own story, when she sees you. That address," I caught my breath as I uttered the tarradiddle, "that address I will give you in the morning, on condition that you will not seek an interview with the Duke to-night."

"Very well, I will let him alone until to-morrow. You will not fail me; whatever happens I shall have the address?"

"You shall," I answered strangling an incipient scream. Heavens! what an awful predicament was mine, if, after all, the Duke was innocent of Sheila's disappearance!

If I had been mistaken and he did not know the address—I shuddered at the prospect, and conjured up visions of the K.C.'s wrath should I fail to keep my word.

Still, it was more than likely Eastacres was the man. Intuition told me so, and intuition is a very valuable guide. Even

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if my scheme miscarried I should have made a brave bid for success. As time went on, I grew more and more anxious to arrange a marriage between Belinda and the Duke. The horrors of a penniless old age pressed heavily upon me. My health was not so good as it had been, the loss of my fortune had made inroads on my strength. If only I could succeed in getting the girl off my hands securely tied up to a title I could face the future with equanimity.

I was fighting almost for dear life. I could not be expected to be nice in the choice of weapons.

Stanley and I returned in silence to the hotel. He thanked me gravely for my assistance, and arranged to see me next morning at nine o'clock.

It was now close on half-past ten; only the matter of an hour or two before I went to bed, and in those two hours Sheila Kenwyn's hiding-place must be discovered.

The Duke greeted me in the vestibule of the hotel.

"The truant has returned, Lady Peggy," he said, laughing. "Miss North withstood the temptation of a visit to the Bedouins and is here."

"My dear child," I exclaimed, embracing Belinda with effusion, "you have given me an awful fright. Come upstairs and tell me where you've been." I slipped my hand in hers, hoping to get her out of the way without attracting Stanley's notice.

As I might have guessed, however, he was too quick for me.

"If I'm not much mistaken," he said, advancing to Belinda, "you're Hardy North's daughter? I thought so," as she eagerly affirmed the statement. "I know your father quite well, Miss North. I met him last year in the States. He'd run over to New York on business. Did he not mention my name—Stanley Forbes?"

"Of course," Belinda cried. "He said lots about you. Please come and tell me all about the time you spent together."

Nothing loth, Stanley followed the girl into the billiard-room—Belinda eschewed drawing-rooms and other places where women most do congregate on the ground that they depressed her!

It was an annoying thing to have happened. Stanley was the last person whom I should have chosen to hear Belinda's confidences, but to interfere would serve no end. Stanley would not be ruled by me twice in an evening.

I seized the occasion for a talk with Eastacres. We settled ourselves by the window in the blue drawing-room, overlooking the Pyramids. The room was a large one; sheltered by the curtains—imagine curtains in the desert!—we could have our talk out undisturbed.

I motioned him to a seat beside me on the couch. Then without sign or warning launched a bombshell at his head.

"Duke," I said abruptly, "where is Sheila Kenwyn?"

Not by so much as a quiver of his pale, smooth face did he betray surprise. He answered calmly in his usual level tones, "I really cannot tell you, Lady Peggy."

His assumption of innocence would have delighted me on any other occasion. This evening it merely served to irritate me.

"As to that," I returned, "I know better. Let me tell you, Duke, this is no smiling matter. I must ask you to hear my questions with respect. The issue is a grave one, it affects you deeply. How deeply you will understand when I tell you that on that issue hangs your engagement to Belinda."

He gazed at me somewhat mystified.

"My dear lady," he said quietly, "if you would be just a little more explanatory. What has Miss North to do with—with the young lady you mention?"

"A very great deal," I returned brusquely. "Are you aware, Duke, that you have narrowly escaped a most unpleasant scene to-night? Do you know what Stanley Forbes would have said, and done, had I not come between you?"

"You speak in enigmas," he repeated. "Forbes and I went out for a stroll and a chat. Your arrival interrupted our conversation. That's the history of the whole matter, so far as I'm concerned."

For a moment a wild, an awful fear, clutched at my heart. In the face of the Duke's demeanour it seemed impossible to doubt his innocence. No actor, however accomplished, could maintain such a calm, unruffled front, knowing all that was at stake. Fear, however, nerved me to another effort. I must discover Sheila's whereabouts. Who but the Duke could tell me?

"I have heard your version of the affair," I said, "now hear mine. Stanley Forbes suspects that you are responsible for his cousin's disappearance. I had it from himself. He is prepared to go to any lengths to prove your complicity, will stick at nothing to show your guilt. Only one thing will avert a scene, a scandal between you. And that is"—I paused—"that is Sheila's address."

I watched him closely as I spoke, seeking to read his secret in the calm, unsmiling face. But I was baffled—the narrowest scrutiny gave me no clue. And yet, and yet he must be guilty. In Heaven's name he must be guilty.

"No one dislikes a scene or deprecates a scandal more than I," he said at last; "but if Forbes forces an interview upon me, I cannot decline it."

At that I lost my patience. At this rate I might beat the air for hours and be no nearer what I wanted.

"You can and must," I said emphatically. "The interview will terminate in a scene, the scene will result in a scandal. The scandal"—I laid my hand upon his arm—"will put a stop immediately to any thought of marriage between you and Belinda."

I sat back as I finished, and had the satisfaction of seeing the Duke's face change at my words.

I had stung him at last and to some purpose. He rallied quickly, and returned once more to the charge.

"You set me an impossible task. Consider, how am I persistently to elude this man? If I don't see him here I shall meet him in Cairo. It is only postponing the evil day, how can it be put off for ever?"

I gazed at him steadily.

"By giving me the girl's address," I answered quietly. "Once he has that, all thought of taking vengeance upon you will leave him, provided you are out of sight. Listen," I bent towards him, whispering in his ear. "Forbes knows you are the man, to-morrow he's bent on wresting the truth from you. Your chance, your only chance, is to give me the girl's address to-night. To-morrow early you must start for Cairo. I will see Forbes and send him off to Sheila. Do this and I will help your marriage with Belinda to my uttermost. Refuse——" I stopped significantly.

And then there came a pause—a pause that set me on the rack, midway between hope and fear. I waited in an agony; his next words would clinch the issue one way or the other. At that moment a curious look came into his eyes; he stroked his fair moustache, and seemed to hesitate. It was as though——

"Duke," I said softly, "give me the address. I don't want to know any details of the business. I don't care whether or not you are responsible for Sheila's disappearance—that's beside the point. It doesn't matter what you've done so long as people don't suspect it."

"What do you promise me—in exchange," he said slowly. "Supposing——"

"Have done with that," I cried excitedly. "Answer me 'yes' or 'no.' Have you the address?"

A second he wavered, then low but distinct the answer came.

"I have."

With a sigh of relief I sank back wearily against the cushions. The battle was over, I had won!

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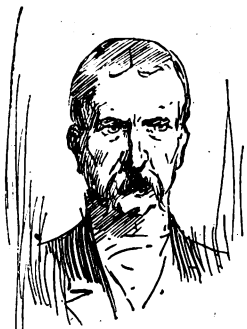
THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

After a pause he took a card from his pocket-book and scribbled an address.

"She was there a month ago," he said carelessly, "and as I haven't heard I suppose she's still there."

I glanced curiously at the card. It contained the name of a villa in a small village in Italy, hidden away among the Alps. The name sent my thoughts into the past. I recalled the fair, sweet Irish girl as I had first seen her. A tall slip of a girl, with big dark eyes and a lovely Irish smile. It was a pity, yes, a cruel pity. I turned my eyes upon the Duke. Serene and undisturbed, no memories of the poor girl grieved him, no thought of the girl whose life he had ruined troubled him. It would, I thought, have been more decent could he assume a little shame. At that moment I felt that I disliked him. But after all it was no affair of mine. The girl had only paid the price of her own foolishness. Still I was sorry.

The Duke broke in upon my musing.

"I understand I am to leave for Cairo about eight to-morrow morning," he said, smiling. "It's an early hour, still I'll contrive to manage it. Forbes you are going to tackle by yourself—awfully good of you. And now"—he glanced hard at me—"what of Belinda?"

"Belinda will go with you," I said. "She will revel at the prospect of an early morning ride. Once you are at the Continental, the Duchess, I am sure, will take my place and chaperon her until I return. I shall be back in the evening. Duke"—I tapped him lightly on the shoulder—"it's time something definite was settled between you and Belinda."

"It's a little early to speak yet, I think," he returned.

I shook my head.

"Under other circumstances, perhaps, but as we are placed delay is dangerous; at any moment some interfering woman with a garrulous tongue may come and tell Belinda fairy tales about your past. And such tales would take effect. You must speak to her to-morrow evening. If you win her consent freely so much the better. If not——" I paused. "Girls are foolish!" I murmured. "Belinda is no wiser than the rest. She is tender-hearted, and if you are distressed she will say something kind—you might put a more favourable construction on the words and——"

Our eyes met. Under his fair moustache his thin lips curled with a smile— a cruel, cold smile, that augured ill for Belinda.

"And now," he said, "one other question. Have you gathered anything as to Mr. North's intentions as to his daughter's dowry?"

I smiled.

"There'd be no difficulty as to that," I answered. "Whatever his prospective son-in-law likes to ask the Australian will be glad to grant. A duke can name his own price."

"A thousand thanks. And now, perhaps, I'd better say good-night?"

I cordially agreed with him; it would have been folly to risk a meeting with Stanley. I was just about to follow the Duke's example and retire myself when a really terrible thing happened.

With dress disordered, face haggard, and eyes fearful to see, so wild were they, Mrs. Murchison-Lee staggered across the threshold of the room.

In a second I realised what had happened. I had been so engrossed in my conversation with the Duke that Midge had slipped from my mind. It was now some hours since I had abstracted the hypodermic syringe, and she was suffering for the lack of it. I saw at a glance that unless she had an injection of morphia immediately the consequences would be serious, if not fatal. She had all but reached the limit of human endurance, her agony was distressing to witness. She seemed unable to breathe, a leaden pallor overcast her face, from which all look of youth had vanished. She was a wreck, mental, moral and physical, such a wreck as morphia maniacs eventually become.

She walked unsteadily to the middle of the room, with feverish glances left and right. Catching sight of me she strove to speak, but only a hoarse murmur came from her lips. Then, with a sudden collapse, she fell, and lay inert and helpless upon the floor.

Immediately there was a hubbub. The women gathered round the unfortunate Midge cackling like a lot of geese, far more concerned to look at than to help her. As for me, I flew upstairs and did not pause for breath until I found the syringe and the morphia. Grasping them tightly in my hand I re-entered the drawing-room. Time was flying, minutes were precious, each second of delay was dangerous. For one heart-sickening moment I thought I was too late. I had delayed too long; she would die for lack of the drug.

The room swam before me, my hand shook, I was within an ace of giving way. The sight of Stanley and Belinda, who had just come upon the scene, gave me courage. He was a strong man used to handle crises with decision.

"Get these women out of the way!" I said hurriedly. "She is suffering from want of morphia. Clear the room, lock the door, and I'll give her an injection."

In a minute the room was silent; empty, save for Stanley, Belinda and Lord Davenant, who, poor boy, was standing terror-stricken at Midge's side. She was looking more than ever ghastly, and at sight of her the sense of apprehension at my heart was like a heavy weight.

Trembling I slipped up her sleeve—the round white arm was already disfigured with innumerable punctures—and just above the elbow inserted the needle; and then, breathless, waited the result.

What if she should die—if the victim of this fashionable form of drug-taking should pay the penalty of her habit? What if it should be discovered that I had abstracted the morphia?

A thousand thoughts and pictures hurried through my brain. And through them all the white face of the girl—she was but little more—rose before me. Here in my hand was the secret of her wonderful vivacity, her flow of spirits, her brightness and her charm; the leaden pallor, the look of age, the torpidity of nerve and will, each was part of the price she had to pay.

The blue eyes suddenly opened and gazed into mine. I gave a sigh of relief and rose quickly to my feet. After that the morphia quickly took effect. Her face grew fair and round once more, the pretty pink flooded her cheeks, she was again the dainty and bewitching Midge.

But though her looks recovered tone, her nerves did not so quickly respond to the action of the drug. Catching sight of Reg she started to her feet, and, with an hysterical cry, clasped him by the arm.

"Reg," she cried piteously, "you have been so unkind to me! I've suffered cruelly, all because of you." Then, as he made no response, she fell to crying, weeping with the ease and unrestraint of a little child. "Say you're fond of me," she insisted. "Tell me you care more for me than anybody else." It was awkward for young Davenant, and under the circumstances he behaved very well. He soothed her as far as she would permit herself to be soothed, and strove to quieten the terrible sobs that choked her utterance. But for all that it was easy to see he was putting constraint upon himself. The scene filled him with disgust; her tears, which once would have plunged him in distress, annoyed and irritated him. In brief, he was no more in love with Midge. Belinda had commenced, and morphia had finished his disillusionment.

With a woman's intuition Midge realised this was so. She turned furiously upon Belinda.

"*You've* done this!" she said. "You've taken him from me, you cruel girl!"

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"Don't be absurd!" replied Belinda promptly. "I don't care *that* for Lord Davenant!" and she snapped her fingers inelegantly but with emphasis in Reggie's face. "You wouldn't either, if you had any sense," she continued. "Come," she put her arm protectingly about the other's waist, "I'm going to take you to bed. You'll feel better in the morning."

Yielding to persuasion, Midge allowed herself to be led away, and the strangely-assorted pair—the young girl and the flighty matron—went off together.

"It's awful!" groaned Reggie, as the door shut behind them. "I shall never forget it. How *can* a woman make such a spectacle of herself?"

I shrugged my shoulders in reply. Most Society women use morphia nowadays, as Reggie knew quite well. Few are such fools as to give themselves away, as Midge had done.

Before I went to bed that night I arranged for Belinda to accompany the Duke to Cairo the following day. As I expected, she was charmed with the idea, and I had the satisfaction of seeing the two start together as arranged just before eight o'clock next morning.

They were still in sight when Stanley Forbes presented himself. I handed him Sheila Kenwyn's address without more ado.

"You will start at once, I suppose?" said I.

"After I have seen the Duke," he returned.

I smiled and drew him to the window.

"You'll need to hurry if you want to overtake him, Stanley. Look!" and I pointed to the specks against the sky-line—Belinda and Eastacres—fast vanishing from the horizon.

"Who's the girl?" he asked laconically.

"Belinda North," I answered. "She went with the Duke this morning. At her own request, not mine," I added, reading the question in his eyes.

"There's no suggestion of marriage between that fellow and Belinda?" he asked incredulously.

"That's for Belinda to decide—no one else will have a voice in the matter," I said earnestly. "Her father gives the girl her own way absolutely."

He seemed to hesitate, then with a shrug turned from the window.

"If that's so," he said, "it's all right. Belinda's not likely to be taken in by a man like Eastacres. If I thought there was the least danger I'd follow her now and warn her. As it is I needn't trouble; she can take care of herself. I shall start at once for Italy; the Duke can wait till I come back."

With a smile I wished him all success. I was most relieved to see the last of him.

I returned to Cairo by myself; the rest of the party were remaining at the Mena for a day or two. I arrived at the Continental about eight, and slipped quietly upstairs to my sitting-room. There was a sound of voices within—the Duke's and Belinda's. With some dexterity I noiselessly turned the handle of the door, opened it, and gazed into the room.

And what I saw therein filled me with great rejoicing!

The Duke who had just finished speaking, was gazing earnestly into Belinda's face. Her head was drooping, her face flushed. To any other girl I should have applied the epithet "shy" in describing the state of her feelings, but Belinda, I believe, was a stranger to the sensation.

Turning towards Eastacres she spoke few words in a low voice—words that I did not catch. Then with a charming gesture—a gesture of encouragement—stretched out her hand and laid it in the Duke's. He pressed it closely, stepped forward—and the next instant clasped Belinda in his arms!

[*This series of articles has already created a great sensation amongst readers of* SHORT STORIES. *The insight which it gives into the manner in which those in the "Smart Set" spend (and often waste) their lives has amazed those who are fortunate enough to belong to the great Middle Class. Although names have for obvious reasons been altered, the facts are absolutely correct, and the statements made are in no way exaggerated.—Ed. S.S.*]

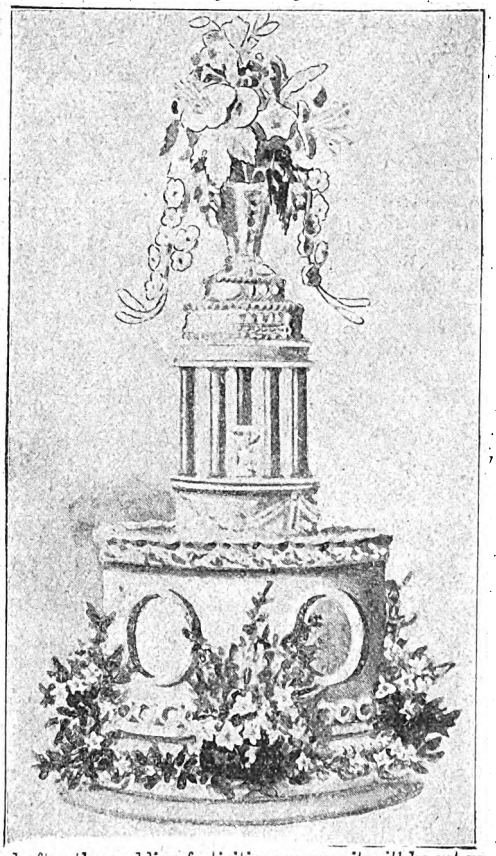
THE BEAUTIFUL BRIDE-CAKE

that we shall divide amongst 101 readers.

The lovely ornament at the top will go to one reader—perhaps you.

Miss Madge Morris will be married on Tuesday, December 2nd.

We shall purchase a big wedding-cake for Miss Morris,



and after the wedding festivities are over it will be cut up, put into boxes, and sent to certain readers of the paper.

Altogether, a hundred delicious pieces of cake will be sent out.

Moreover, the beautiful centre ornament from the top of the cake will also be offered as a prize.

The conditions under which you will be entitled to receive a piece are as follows:

All you have to do is to sit down and write a short congratulatory letter to Miss Morris on the auspicious occasion of her marriage. The reader who sends what Miss Morris considers to be the best letter will receive the beautiful centre ornament from the top, and the senders of each of the next hundred best will receive a piece of the cake.

Send your attempt to Miss Madge Morris, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope "Wedding" in the top left-hand corner, to arrive not later than Monday, December 1st.

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THE CAPITULATION OF CELIA.

A Tale of a Quarrel.

"Did I tell you that I had asked auntie to come here, Len?"

"No, you certainly did not," replied Leonard Vancourt, his forehead lowering into a frown, as he helped himself to a second piece of toast. "Might I inquire which of the two is going to afford us the delirious delight of her presence. Clarissa the saturnine, or Amelia the magpie imitator?"

"Len!" The delicately-traced eyebrows were raised in indignant expostulation. "I think that it is particularly unkind of you to speak in that manner of my relations. You used to say that aunt Amelia was a shrewd business woman."

"I would be the last to deny her that qualification, Celia," remarked Vancourt grimly. "It was positively a stroke of genius the way the old reptile—ahem—lady, palmed off on to me that property in Southwark. Fifteen houses, my dear, with only rudimentary drainage and a hungry County Council waiting on me to render the same effective. Aunt Amelia ought to have been a company promoter. Egad, she would have made her fortune at the game, my respected aunt-in-law has it in her bones. Where is the *Daily Express?*"

Celia's lip commenced to quiver.

"I think that you are horrid, Len," she vouchsafed at length, glancing reproachfully at her husband, who suddenly became immersed in the money market column of the paper, which he had discovered under the table.

"I must say that I think you are particularly unkind to speak of my relations in the way you always do! You should not forget, dear, that aunt Clarissa has been more than a mother to me, and brought me up since I was a tiny tot; the first time you ever met me, Len, was at her house."

"I know," replied Vancourt casually. "But if it hadn't been for Gus Harrington taking me to Rutland Gate I should never have seen either of you. I remember the evening well. I took an instinctive dislike to your respected, more than a mother of an aunt! A feeling incidentally which has intensified ever since."

"You used to say that you were very fond of her—before we were married, Len."

Vancourt coughed, drily.

"I was diplomatic, Celia," he said quietly, as, laying aside his paper, he buttered a piece of toast. "You see, as I could only see you in her house, I was obliged, in a sort of way, to hold the candle to the—your aunt."

"She was very fond of you, Len." Celia Vancourt's eyes were bent reproachfully on his.

"Ahem! That was very kind of her, dear. You see, Celia, I had shekels; in London Society I was considered rather a decent match, at the time I married you." His accent was irritatingly sardonic.

"Do you mean to insinuate that aunt Clarissa liked you because you were well off and had a house in Park Lane?" demanded Celia, her face flushing an angry pink.

"Aunt Amelia did, anyway," smiled Vancourt unfeelingly. "My spare cash made her Southwark property boom in a manner which brought a smile to her face! She had me on toast, Celia."

She rapped her knife impatiently on the immaculate damask. "Leonard," she remarked with dignity. "I would have you remember that you are speaking of my relations."

"I have no desire to rob you of their ownership, dear," remarked Vancourt; then added, as he commenced his breakfast in real earnest, "I wish to goodness that you would manage to see that we get bacon for breakfast that is not salty enough to skin the inside of one's mouth. I don't believe that the tradesmen would dare to sell such abominable meat to anybody else but us."

Celia's face grew tearful looking, as she poured herself out a cup of tea; then, glancing across the table at the sombrely annoyed features of her husband, said irritably:

"I never met such a growling man as you are in my life! The moment anything puts you out, you quarrel with your food. Goodness knows, I am fanciful enough, but I don't find this bacon a bit salty."

"Of course not! It is quite sufficient for me to say that it is for you to declare the contrary," said Vancourt angrily. "I never met such a contradictory woman as you are in the whole course of my existence. I am just about sick of it!"

"And I am tired to death of you and your grumbling," retorted Celia, flushing with anger: "Everything that I do is wrong. I can't make out what on earth made you marry me!"

"Because I was a victim to the throes of drivelling lunacy, that's why," said Vancourt savagely. "I wish now that I had never set eyes on you. Why, ever since my marriage I have never known what it is to have a decent breakfast! If I don't get a high egg, I get salt bacon which a sailor would kick at, and if I get neither of those two things I have a piece of fish which would disgrace an East End cook shop put in front of me!"

He sniffed indignantly, as, turning in his chair, he picked up his discarded paper and, flattening it out angrily, commenced to read its contents.

"Very well, Leonard," said Celia, dignity struggling with tears for mastery in her voice. "Since you are as sorry to have ever met me as I am to have ever come across you I will ask aunt Clarissa when she comes here——"

"I tell you she isn't coming here!" interrupted Vancourt peremptorily. "I won't have the old cat in the house—so there! I'm master here, kindly remember."

"And I am mistress!" retorted Celia. "So aunt Clarissa shall come and——"

"What?"

"And when she does I—I—shall tell her that—how unkind you are—and—and ask her to take me away," continued Celia in a faltering voice, unheeding his interruption. "I—I never—want to see you again—I hate you!"

"Oh, very well, then." Vancourt rose with as much dignity as he could assume. "As such is the case, and since I am not allowed to be master of my own house, we had better separate amicably. I, for one, shall be very pleased to be freed from a nagging woman!"

"And I, from a—brute!"

"That is a question of opinion," remarked Vancourt easily. "I have been asked by Carstairs to go for a cruise, and as his yacht leaves Southampton the day after to-morrow I may as well go with him, until I have decided what I will do. Of course, I shall leave you the house—I will clear out." He crossed the room to the door, adding, as he opened it, "There will be enough money paid into your account to satisfy your requirements." Then, without awaiting a reply, he closed the door behind him, Celia gazing half disconsolately, half defiantly, at the vacant chair on the other side of the table.

Vancourt had not been gone long, before he returned, dressed in faultless style, a Raglan over his arm and a bowler in his hand.

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"Well, I'll say good-bye," he said lightly, extending his hand to his wife. "I've told Job to pack up my duds and to bring them to me at the Carlton. I shall be stopping there till to-morrow morning, when I shall leave for Southampton."

"I see."

"We shall be cruising about the Mediterranean for about two months," he continued, eyeing his wife covertly as he spoke. "After which I may go to South Africa for a few months to do some big game shooting."

"You will enjoy yourself, I hope," said Celia, placing her slim hand in his. "Of course, if we ever meet in Society we need not be dead cuts, need we, Leonard?"

Her deep blue eyes were raised almost wistfully to his.

"Of course not," he said with a strained laugh, as, pressing her cold hand in his, he went towards the door. "*Addio*, little woman, it is a pity that we could not get on better. However, it is best that we should go our several ways, don't you think so?"

"Yes, it is! Good-bye." Her voice faded away into a whisper, adding quaveringly to herself as the door closed behind her husband, "he might have kissed me before he went. I don't think that—he minded leaving me and I—I—oh, I don't care!" she cried angrily, dashing away the tears which had gathered on her lashes. "If he had tried to kiss me, I'd have slapped his face for him! I hate Leonard, and now that I am free I shall be as happy as——"

The harsh clang of the hall door below caused her to stop abruptly. For a moment Celia stood silent, then, sinking on to a sofa, she buried her fluffy head amid a bevy of cushions, and cried as if her heart would break.

"He's gone!" she muttered in a strangled voice, broken by sobs. "And—I made—sure that he would come—back."

Meanwhile, outside in the street, Leonard Vancourt hailed a hansom, and, stepping into it, was soon bowling in the direction of the Carlton. "I am afraid that I have made a fool of myself," he soliloquised. "I made sure that she would have stopped me before I left the house; of course, it's all most unearthly rot to think for a moment that I could live without my little Celia. A day would be bad enough, but two months—I have half a mind to turn back and say that I was only bluffing, only I should look such an ass if I did. I might have kissed her before I left, though! Poor little girlie, she half raised her face to mine when I said good-bye and—oh, I am going to chuck this fool's game and shall toddle back, and she can stodge me with high eggs and salt bacon as much as she jolly well likes if she will only take me on again, Cabby, I——"

His sentence was never finished, for, as he pushed open the trapdoor above his head, the pole of a brewer's dray crashed into the side of the hansom.

* * * * *

When Leonard Vancourt came to his senses it was to find himself swathed in bandages lying in bed in a darkened and familiar room, whilst curled up beside him on the immaculate counterpane, sat Celia, her slim fingers cooling his fevered brow.

"Hullo, girlie," he exclaimed, with a weak attempt at hilarity. "I haven't gone after all, you see."

"Are you sorry, Len, that such is not the case?" she queried gently, nestling her tear-stained cheek against his.

"Would you mind, dearest—I mean—Celia—if I said that I was glad?" he asked slowly.

"Mind! Oh, Len, you are the dearest boy in all the world!" she cried, impulsively. "I thought that you would have come back, and when I found that you did not I just sat down and wrote to the Carlton to ask you to, dear."

"And I hoped that you would call me back, Celia," he said delightedly. "And when I found that you did not, girlie, I thought that I would just come back and say that you might do any mortal thing you jolly well liked, if you would only take me on again, Celia."

She passed her hand caressingly over his cheek.

"Call me girlie," she whispered happily. "You know, dearest, how I hate Celia."

"I don't," Vancourt replied fondly. "I love her better than the whole world! Kiss me, girlie."

H. Morton Baird.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

November 25.—If the birthday falls on this day the next twelve months will be favourable for business and speculation; good for literary people. Girls will find love affairs run smoothly; a good year to marry.

The day is promising for buying and selling, dealing with professional men, writing letters and signing agreements.

A child born to-day will be generous, cheerful, and fortunate. Would do well as a broker, in the church, or any profession.

November 26.—A mixed year; health will need attention; some annoyance in business. Good for young people, but not for the aged.

Girls will have many crosses in love affairs, and need care against deceit.

The day is evil for most matters. Don't ask favours; defer doing business with farmers, landlords and elderly people.

A child born here will be changeable, over cautious, but will possess good mental abilities.

November 27.—Give attention to business through the next year; avoid quarrels and law. Bereavement is likely.

Young girls will have more than usual attentions from opposite sex, and if engaged they marry.

The day is favourable for asking favours; dealing with shipping agents, drapers, and those in authority. Beware of mishaps.

A child born here will be cheerful, active and proud.

November 28.—An active year, but not very promising for business and financial matters. Avoid speculation and too much pleasure. Girls will find love matters slow and dull.

The day is not good for making changes; better to sell than buy; go quietly.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate in most things. Will be active and ingenious, but too free with money.

November 29.—An active and prosperous year is shown to be in store for those whose birthdays fall to-day. Pleasant events in domestic circle.

Girls become engaged or marry.

The day is good for most things; write letters and sign agreements; marry, visit, and make new friends.

A child born to-day will be affectionate, generous, and clever, perhaps too fond of pleasure and society.

November 30.—An active and fortunate year for business and finances; beware of heavy colds, and keep the temper under control.

Pleasant events for girls in courtship; if engaged they will have opportunities of marriage.

A child born here will be fortunate, though the health will need some care in early and latter years. A happy marriage is promised.

December 1.—A year of change and uncertainty; avoid speculation; insure against fire and accident. Be cautious in business.

Girls need care in love affairs; those born near 10 p.m. meet with deceit and anxiety.

The day is one on which to let others make the first move. Beware of mishap in the early morning. Place little faith in promising speculations or news.

A child born here will be rash, unsettled, and will travel much. Will be liable to accidents.

Asturel.

Colonel Jim.

What a Man Did for a Woman's Sake.

It was the smoke-room of the "Cosmopolitan" Club in Piccadilly.

I had strolled in for the want of something better to do, and without any thought or idea of anything or anybody.

There were only about half a dozen members present, to one only of whom—Charlie Maxwell; in his pre-nuptial days an inveterate globe-trotter as I myself still was—I was personally known.

I just nodded to him, as I saw that he was engaged in conversation with an individual whom I never remembered to have seen at the club before.

Though he was sitting back in the depths of a big armchair, I gathered that he was tall and athletically built. His hair and heavy moustache were snowy white, yet his features had that look of perpetual youth about them which some men retain to the close even of patriarchal life.

But it was not so much the wonderful youthfulness of the man (I reckoned him to be at least sixty years of age) as the almost womanly expression of tenderness in his eyes that attracted me. It did not detract one iota from his manliness; it simply supplied the one thing necessary to make that manliness perfect and complete.

I was on the point of leaving when there entered the room a man for whom I, in common with most of the club members, had an unmitigated dislike.

Coarse of speech, ostentatiously vulgar in his manner, and, in fact, an absolute "impossible" from the social point of view, it was a perennial source of wonder with everybody how he could ever have been admitted to "Cosmopolitan" membership.

It was rumoured that he was the millionaire son of a deceased East-end "ready-made" tailor of Semitic descent, and that he owed his admission amongst us to the largely exerted influence of a certain impecunious peer, his great friend, and one of the original promoters of the club.

The truth of this could not be exactly proved, although after events showed that for once rumour did not act up to its reputation for lying.

Almost immediately after this very estimable individual's entrance—his name, by the way, was Marcus Dischman—my friend Maxwell came across to where I stood looking out of the window into Piccadilly, and shook hands, asking me to excuse him for ten minutes, and saying that he would have a chat with me on his return. Complete silence reigned in the room after Maxwell's departure, broken only by the rustle of newspapers or an occasional cough.

Then I was suddenly startled by the voice of Dischman, raised in loud altercation.

I turned sharply round, and saw that he was standing, straddle-legged, in front of the white-haired gentleman's chair, wagging his head and forefinger in time to a stream of angry abuse.

"You've monopolised that paper ever since I've been in the room, and for how long before, goodness only knows! Do you think you've bought the place, just because you've been in the Army!"

The occupant of the armchair rose up out of it to his full height of well over six feet, and calmly laid down the paper he had been reading on the table beside him.

It was then that I noticed for the first time that his right sleeve was empty, indicating the loss of his arm.

"Sir," he said, with quiet irony, "it is evident to me that *you* have not been in the Army, inasmuch as the officer invariably implies the gentleman."

The retort might have been injudicious, but it was certainly richly deserved.

Furious with passion Dischman extended his arm, and violently shook the empty sleeve pinned up to the lapel of the other's coat.

"You dare to taunt me! You!" he shrieked. "How came you by this? Not in battle! No! Do you think I have not heard of a certain gentleman's little affair with a certain young lady? The motor-car ride to Brighton!—too much champagne!—a spill!—and a smashed arm? Do you think I don't know? Bah! you got your deserts, Mr. Officer and gentleman!"

The rest of us thought it high time now to interfere, for the wretched cad was evidently contemplating further violence.

The matter, however, was suddenly taken out of our hands.

Unseen by me, Maxwell had come into the room, and had heard the frantic speech of Dischman's.

As the last word left the bully's mouth Maxwell's hand was on his collar, and his knuckles pressing uncomfortably upon his collar-bone.

Swinging the fellow round, he didn't speak to him, but summoning a waiter, bid him call the club secretary.

Held securely in Maxwell's grip, Dischman looked the picture of vulgar discomfiture.

"Mr. Shaw," said Maxwell to the secretary when he appeared, "I take the responsibility of demanding from you this man's instant expulsion. He has not only grossly insulted Colonel Fergusson, resorting even to personal violence, but by so doing on the club premises has insulted also every member of it. If you do not accede to my request, I, and I think every right-minded, and self-respecting member will immediately send in our resignations."

Maxwell slightly loosened his hold while addressing the secretary, enabling Dischman to shake himself free.

With one glance of scorching hate at his late captor, Dischman, not waiting for the secretary's decision, walked out of the room, and of the club, which latter he has never again entered since that day.

Colonel Fergusson, far from being upset or disturbed by what had occurred, had quietly resumed his seat and his paper.

"Talbot!" said Maxwell, "allow me to introduce you to Colonel James Fergusson, D.S.O., late Dragoon Guards; but known to all who love him as 'Colonel Jim.' Colonel, my old friend Archie Talbot, whom I haven't seen for all the years he has been wandering about the earth."

"Mr. Talbot, pleased to know you; though I warn you to take everything Charlie Maxwell has to say about me with a very large grain of salt."

If the man when silent was attractive, in conversation he was delightful. What I subsequently learnt about him from Maxwell, especially concerning one particular episode of his life, did not in the least surprise me; it simply served to perfect the picture of the noblest man and truest-hearted gentleman that it has ever been my lot to meet.

It was one evening—after a bachelor dinner at Maxwell's house—his wife being in Scotland on a family visit—that my friend told me the true story of the incident, in the course of which "Colonel Jim" had lost his arm, and as a result of which, he had to retire from the Service in the heyday of a most distinguished career.

"Perhaps you don't know," said Maxwell, "that Fergusson and I were in the same regiment. He was full Major when I joined as Second Lieutenant.

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"Though there was a good fifteen years difference of age between us, we became staunch friends. Without being grand-motherly, Fergusson kept me from all sorts of tom-fooleries, such as hot-headed young officers are so apt to indulge in.

"Our Colonel was Harvey Fane, now a Major-General and a K.C.B., with a large family of daughters, and his house was an attractive centre for bachelor officers, eligible and ineligible.

"It was not long before I discovered that Beatrix Fane was more to me than all the other girls of my acquaintance.

"Very soon, too, I was successful in getting her assurance that I, in like manner, was the veritable 'fairy prince.'

"Of course, I confided in Colonel Jim, who, though sympathetic, advised a wise waiting until at anyrate I succeeded to the property, which I inherited six years ago.

"Attached to the regiment was a certain Captain Holroyd, who was said to be connected in some way with a monster firm of East-end clothiers. Anyway, he was very unpopular with all ranks.

"Quite accidentally I heard, the day after the recent affair at the Cosmopolitan, that Holroyd was Dischmann's cousin, hence the fact of the former's knowledge of what I am going to tell you about 'Colonel Jim.'

"This man Holroyd was an inveterate gambler, and nearly always won. It so happened that when I came into the Wharton estate there was a large accumulation of ready money which I immediately proceeded to spend in right royal style. Holroyd, ever on the scent for a pigeon to pluck, suddenly became very friendly with me, and one day invited me to pass a week with him at Brighton. Glad of a change, and having easily obtained leave, I left Aldershot with Holroyd without acquainting 'Colonel Jim' of my intention.

As a matter of fact, I knew perfectly well what would be his advice, and, therefore, I evaded it. I did not even tell Beattie, but wrote her on my arrival at Brighton.

All went well until the third day, except that I lost heavily at bridge to Holroyd, when, after a dinner to which Holroyd had invited two or three other men, we all adjourned for an hour's stroll on the pier.

"Whether it was that, being unused to excessive indulgence in wine, I had taken too much champagne, or whether I was seized with sudden illness, I cannot exactly say. I only know that by some unaccountable means I managed to fall from the pier into the sea, getting a nasty smack through coming into contact with one of the iron cross-girders.

"I remembered nothing more till I found myself alone in my Brighton lodging, wretchedly ill, and very much ashamed of myself.

"The doctor who attended me, a splendid fellow, told me that Holroyd had returned to Aldershot without troubling to find out my real condition.

"That night late, a further surprise was in store for me. Beattie, accompanied by Colonel Jim, the latter with a seriously injured arm, arrived at my diggings in Warrior Square.

"It was soon apparent that Colonel Jim was in a bad way, my doctor, after a brief examination of the injured arm, declaring that immediate amputation was necessary.

"All the time I was in absolute ignorance of how the accident had happened, or how it was that Beattie had come to Brighton in Colonel Jim's company.

"It was not until the operation was over, and Mrs. Fane who was wired for at once, had arrived to look after her wandering daughter, that I learnt the whole story from Beattie's lips.

"As some little explanation of what took place, let me say that both Colonel Fane and Colonel Jim were ardent motorists, each possessing a 12-horse-power Panhard, which they were eternally pitting the one against the other.

"Colonel Jim always drove his car himself, but Colonel Fane, not being so expert, employed a French *chauffeur* at fabulous wages.

"Well, it seems that the day before I recovered consciousness, my landlady, who, up to then, had no clue to the whereabouts of my friends, came across a letter of Beattie's while getting some clean linen for me out of my portmanteau. Without staying to think who the writer might be, she at once wrote to her, and, as it afterwards appeared, gave a very exaggerated account of my condition.

"When my landlady's letter arrived the Colonel's motor was waiting at the door for him on his return from parade.

"Without pause or thought, my foolish, loving little girl imperiously ordered the driver to set off for Brighton there and then, silencing his objections with threats of her father's displeasure if he disobeyed her.

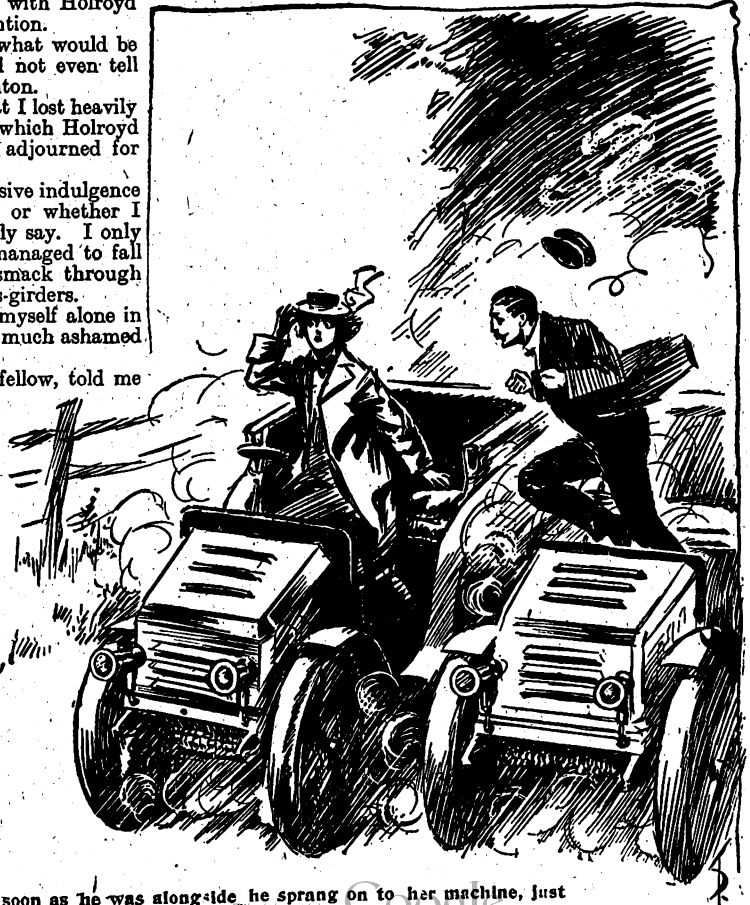
"Was there ever such a mad journey, a journey, too, at which her social world would hold up its hands in holy horror.

"On through Guildford, Tunbridge Wells, Horsham, till the outskirts of Lewes were reached. And there the trouble began.

"The *chauffeur* had insisted more than once on descending at certain inns, and refreshing himself with brandy.

"By the time Lewes was in sight the man was in a state of semi-intoxication, and was quite incapable of controlling the machine.

"Chancing to turn her head at this point, Beattie saw coming up behind them at racing speed half a mile or so



As soon as he was alongside he sprang on to her machine, just in time to avert a catastrophe.

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astern, another motor, which, even at that distance, seemed strangely familiar to her.

"Nearer and nearer it drew, the stupefied Frenchman in charge of the leading car becoming more and more unable to steer it.

"It was at a bend in the road that the catastrophe happened.

"On the right hand was a high bank, and into this the driver made to run Beattie's car.

"By a miracle of mercy he could not turn the steering-wheel, overbalancing himself, and falling out under the wheels in front, which passed over his body.

"Though bewildered and panic-stricken, Beattie caught hold of the gear with both trembling hands, and tried to keep the car straight. What would have been the result of her efforts it is hard to say, though it is almost morally certain that in the streets of Lewes she would inevitably have come to grief.

"Now for Colonel Jim's part in it.

"Putting on the pace for a final spurt, he raced alongside of the runaway, managed to stop his own machine at the same moment leaping on to the other one.

"Seizing the steering-wheel with his left hand—his right arm was broken on the leap—he wrenched it round, and brought the car to a full stop.

"Then appeared the representative of the law, who, running back, discovered that the *chauffeur* was fatally injured.

"The rest you know, though there is one little thing more which I will tell you in confidence, as it renders, from my point of view, all that Colonel Jim did that day the more heroic.

"Beattie told me, more than a year after we were married, that some words that escaped her rescuer's lips as he reached her side in the flying car, convinced her beyond all doubt that he loved her, and that he risked his life for the sake of a woman whom he knew had given her heart to another man.

"How Colonel Jim came to follow after Beattie was owing to a servant at the house, who overheard her orders to the *chauffeur*, telling him, as he drove up in his own machine almost directly afterwards and inquired for her. He knew that her action would compromise her with her friends and society, and, in her interests, decided to persuade her to come back.

"Of course the dear old fellow had to leave the Service, though he has since got his step on the retired list. Now, what do you think of him, Talbot?"

"Think of him?" I said, "Why, that for a man among men, I never expect to meet another like 'Colonel Jim!'"

"As you certainly never will!" said Maxwell, raising his glass. "Here's to Colonel Jim, and God bless him!"

Ralph Enderby.

"I NOTICE that you always sit at your wife's left, Mr. Meggs." "Yes," frankly returned Mr. Megs; "that's the side her glass eye is on."

CLARA: "I suppose you have heard that Charley Bigrolle and I don't speak, haven't you?" Maud: "Why, no. What was the trouble?" Clara: "It was all my dress-maker's fault. She forgot to take the pins out of my waist-band."

ANXIOUS MOTHER: "I wish, Susan, that when you give baby a bath you would use the thermometer so as to ascertain whether the water is at the proper temperature." Susan: "Oh, don't you worrit about that, ma'am; I don't need no 'mometers. If the little one turns red, the water's too hot; if it turns blue, it's too cold; that's all there is about it."

MISS PASTELLE: "It's too bad! I love you, and I've promised to marry you, and yet there isn't a bit of romance about it. You have never even once saved my life." Adorer: "I haven't, eh? Don't you remember the time you first saw me?" Miss Pastelle: "Yes; I was walking down the avenue, and you passed me on your bicycle." Adorer: "Yes, and I rang the bell for you to get out of the way, didn't I?"

SPECIAL OFFER TO SCOTCH READERS.
See below.

Have You Won a Gramophone Yet?

No! Then Why Not Try To-day?

We are extremely anxious that a goodly proportion of our readers shall become possessed of some substantial reminder of the little paper which comes out every Tuesday, and, perhaps, no more amusing and entertaining gift could be made than that of a Gramophone.

The award of a Gramophone is particularly appropriate just now, as the season of Christmas parties is so close upon us, when the instruments would prove a refreshing variation to the usual indoor games.

With each instrument is given two records, and any reader who has been lucky enough to win one will tell you that they are prizes well worth the winning.

What You Have to Do to Win One.

You must construct an anagram from the words, **"The Albert Gate Mystery,"** the title of the splendid new serial story which commences in a fortnight's time in this paper. That is to say, you must construct a sentence of the letters contained in that title, using every letter, but not more often than the letters appear in the title.

All attempts must be made on the backs of post-cards, which should be marked. **Albert Gate,** and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

A Gramophone will be awarded to each of the ten competitors whose sentences are the best in the Editor's opinion.

TO SCOTCH READERS.

FIVE Special Gramophones will be given to the five readers living in Scotland, whose attempts are considered the best of those submitted by Scotch readers. These will be EXTRA prizes.

All attempts must reach us not later than the first post on Tuesday morning, December 2nd.

Result of Third "Serial" Competition.

In the above competition a Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following:

London.—Miss Herrtage, 1 Banbury Road, South Hackney; H. L. Brooks, 55 Foxberry Road, Brockley, S.E.

Under 100 Miles.—B. L. Hammond, 11 North Road, Brighton; F. E. Buckner, 55 London Road, Grays.

Over 100 Miles.—A. Sillito, Amington, Tamworth; W. Pearson, 46 Victor Street, Holderness Road, Hull.

Scotland.—J. Stevenson, 12 Armadale Street, Glasgow; W. Shand, 62 Kirkland Street, Glasgow.

Ireland.—S. Nairn, 51 Denzille Street, Dublin; D. Wallace, 83 Upper Meadow Street, Belfast.

The correct sentence was as follows: "'I have been very uneasy about you,' she said frankly, as he sank into an ample arm chair."—Page 520, column 1, line 3.

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Little Jenny.

A Romance of Love and Music.

"WHAT is it, Jenny?"

A kindly hand was laid on the shoulder of the weeping girl, crouched in a corner of a doorway in a fashionable south coast seaside resort. She looked up, after hastily wiping away the tears that obscured the deep blue eyes, and gazed wistfully, wearily, into the face of him who had spoken.

She was a girl of little more than sixteen; her figure was frail and wretchedly clad, her face was wan and told of privation. So much he could see in the moonlight. And he could also see that the face, now soiled by tears, was full of the promise of loveliness; she would be a beautiful woman, he thought, with an involuntary sigh of admiration.

In her turn she saw a tall, dark, handsome young man of twenty-one. He, too, was but shabbily dressed. He carried a violin under his arm, and he seemed tired.

"What is the matter? Can I do anything for you?" he asked, looking at her with a benevolent and pitying expression. "You seem to be in trouble? Ah, me! I fear that this is a hard world for those upon whom Dame Fortune frowns. My name is Philip Atwood, and I am a violin player; perhaps you have heard of me? I play in the streets *now*, for a living."

"I have not heard," she replied, shaking her head. The touch of bitterness in his voice had escaped her. "I was trying to earn a few pence, to obtain food and a little comfort for my mother, who is old and lives in the country. It was a last resort. Mother says I have a good voice, so I tramped here, where rich people come to spend their money and enjoy life, and I tried to sing. I waited till dark, that they should not see my rags, but I forgot that the hotels have big lights in front. I felt ashamed and I broke down almost at my first note. I tried twice, but I was too nervous and they laughed at me!"

She began to weep again. Somehow, the sight of her grief chased away his own bitterness and he became buoyant in his charitable effort to encourage.

"Oh, that is nothing!" he exclaimed cheerily. "I can tell that you have a sweet voice, and you ought to earn lots of money from these rich people. Never fear! You will be able to take quite a small fortune home to your mother, little one!"

He took her hand and lifted her to her feet.

"Sing something to me!" he said, "and let me be the judge. You are not afraid of me? Come!"

It was a curious scene in the dark street—the girl standing before the youth and, encouraged by his cheeriness, singing a plaintive love-song in a rich, musical voice. Philip stood enraptured as, gaining confidence in the darkness and solitude, she sang with the full sweetness and strength of a voice that was already marvellously developed.

"Ah!" He drew a long breath as she finished. "It is a voice that should bring you a fortune! Go to the hotels and sing! Forget that you are in front of strangers, and think of your mother. Then you will sing with your heart and the money will come! Go! No!" he added immediately, as a thought struck him. "First come with me and have some coffee to refresh you and a piece of cake to give you strength. You will sing better."

"You are very good, Philip!" she replied, calling him by his Christian name in innocent gratitude. "But I cannot take your money; you want it for yourself."

"Nonsense, Jenny!" he responded, calling her by the name he had bestowed upon her when he first saw her. "You can repay me one day, if I want it! You have not told me your name, but I shall call you Jenny. I like it, and we shall meet now and then."

So she went with him to a simple restaurant in a side street, where he made her sit opposite him and partake of the coffee and cake. During the short time the simple repast lasted, he was full of gaiety, making her laugh and befitting her for the task she had before her.

"Now go and sing!" he said, as they parted outside. "I shall see you to-morrow, since you say that you will be here in the evening. Tell me if you notice many rich people there."

He watched her as she went with hesitating steps in the direction of the promenade.

"We might make some money if we could go together, but that would make talk and I cannot play well enough now that my hand has been hurt. No! I'll fiddle away in the daytime and give her the best chance—after dinner, people always feel more generous!"

Jenny took up a position in front of the hotel and, after a moment's hesitation, she began to sing in a rich voice. The air was plaintive and suited her mood, so she rendered it exquisitely. The visitors were attracted; only two or three were listening when she began, but at the end of her song, there was a small crowd.

"Bravo!" shouted some of the men, while the women signified their approval by applauding. If Jenny had been more experienced, she would have walked past and among them with her little cup before singing again, but she was pleased with her reception and treated them to some simple ditties taught to her by her mother.

"Capital!" said one man to another. "She would make a good actress. She was totally different in appearance in the two parts; she looked the embodiment of sadness and pathos during that first song, and now she is quite different—a mischief-loving country girl. Here she comes with her cup. Drop a piece of silver into it for me and we'll square up later."

The result of Jenny's first open air performance was decidedly encouraging, and she trudged back to the hovel with five shillings. It did not occur to her that she might be robbed, and she probably owed her safety to the fact that no one saw exactly which way she went. She was inclined not to sing on the following night, but she reflected that she would not get so much in future, as her voice would not be a novelty, and she had to remember that they were terribly in arrears with the rent, her mother in need of nourishment, and the winter was coming. And—this was important—she expected to meet Philip!

"I must repay him; it will not do to remain in debt!" she said to herself. But in her heart she vaguely felt that it was not only the propriety of repaying a debt quickly that made her wish to see Philip so soon. She half blushed as she experienced that undefined feeling, a kind of delight at her heart, and she turned her thoughts in other directions.

Somewhat weary after the walk of six miles, Jenny's heart gave a bound of pleasure when she espied the figure of Philip at the spot where he had first seen her.

"I thought that I should find you here!" she cried, and she wondered how it was that she had nearly said "I hoped" instead of "I thought!" "I can repay you for the refreshment yesterday, but"—with a look of intense gratitude—"I can never repay you for your words of encouragement!"

"Perhaps you will be able to do so one day!" he rejoined gaily. His face had been sad till he saw her coming. "You did well yesterday, eh? And there are stylish people at the hotel? Well, sing 'Home Sweet Home' this evening. That always appeals to people!"

He raised his violin to his shoulder and she, narrowly watching him, saw that his left hand was partly crippled so that he

had difficulty in manipulating the strings. Yet he played the song with such effect that the tears came to her eyes.

"I have had no home since my dear mother died," he said softly. "If you feel as I do, you can sing that song in a way that will win favour for you from the people at the hotels. They may be in the midst of luxury and may not miss their grand homes while enjoying themselves at this fashionable seaside town, but the song will touch them all the same. You try it!"

"I should break down!" cried Jenny, with a lump in her throat.

"You mustn't!" he cried energetically. "And you won't if you throw yourself into it and forget everything. Come, let me give you a lesson; sing it as I play!"

He began again, and, after an effort, she followed. He stopped her two or three times in order to correct her where he thought she had not caught the true note or where she had not placed sufficient expression on the words. It was a quaint lesson, but when it was over she felt more confident of her powers. Then they parted and she went to sing to the rich people.

Jenny took up her position and sang "Home Sweet Home" with all the pathos of which she was capable, and she startled her hearers.

All declared themselves delighted, and it became the custom to look for Jenny every evening.

Day after day the girl kept up the practice, trudging backwards and forwards to the town from the sick bed, and bringing home the where-withal to make life less irksome and the winter less to be dreaded. She saw Philip every day and she pitied him for his lot in life and loved him for his generous heart and sterling qualities.

He was the son of poor parents, who had been dead for some years; his father had taught him the violin, and he loved music; he was just getting on well, when he injured his hand and thus his hopes were blighted. His mother had died soon after this, and Philip adopted street playing as a method of gaining a living.

As the days wore on, Jenny left home a little earlier, so that she might spend more time with Philip. He met her outside the town and they walked in together, sweetly conversing. So the old story ran its course and they awoke one evening to the knowledge that they loved.

"I have realised it for the first time this evening, Jenny," said Philip, clasping her in his arms, "because I must leave here!"

"Leave!" echoed Jenny, all the joy dying out of her heart.

"Yes, dearest!" he answered, trying to be gay that she might not be sad, as he always did. "I cannot earn much here, because—well, for various reasons," he added hastily. "So I am going away. I shall travel about and I shall earn money, so that I can come and claim you. You can always write to me at old Peter's, and I will write to you."

"But can I not help you?" she inquired wistfully. "You said I might be able to do so."

"Oh, we could not earn sufficient, you know! But we shall be together soon, never doubt it! You can sing your best to-night, for I shall be listening, and it will be the last time for a while!"

She said nothing, and they journeyed towards the town. Suddenly he stopped and took her hands in his, laying his violin on the ground for that purpose.

"Jenny, you are mine, mine alone! Let me give you this in token of our love!"

He took from his pocket a small ornament—a red stone shaped like a heart, with a little ring or eye of gold at the top through which a chain could be passed.

"I have no chain to give you, and the only chain worthy of being used is a chain of gold!" he said lovingly pressing it into her hand. "Keep it for a token of our betrothal and remember that we belong to one another so long as you retain my heart."

HAVE A PIECE OF MADGE MORRIS' WEDDING CAKE? Turn to page 677.

He pressed her to his breast and imprinted a kiss on her lips with all the passion of his ardent nature. Jenny returned his embrace with equal fervour.

"It requires no chain to bind us together, Philip!" she cried. "A silken thread will serve."

He folded her in a final embrace, but he did not tell her that he would not see her after the singing; that might have unnerved her. So he listened, and she sang the old song—sang it for him; and then he slipped away.

Jenny looked eagerly for him as she walked away, but could find no trace of her lover. The red heart was placed securely within the bosom of her dress, near her own heart, and she longed to tell him how she loved him before they said "Good-bye." But Philip was gone, and she had to wend her way homeward without a parting word.

She was walking swiftly along the silent road, deep in thought, when she was startled by a rush of feet and she found herself confronted by three men, who demanded her money.

"It's no use saying that you haven't got any," said one of the ruffians with a leer. "We know that you had a haul this evening!"

They seized her and, in mortal terror, she drew out the money and gave it to them.

"This isn't all!" shouted the foremost rascal. "I want more!"

"Then take it!" shouted a voice, and the three men had to release Jenny in order to defend themselves from the vigorous onslaught of two men who had come to the rescue of the girl.

The newcomers were armed with stout sticks, and they laid about them so lustily that, despite the difference in numbers, the robbers thought it good policy to take to their heels.

"Phew!" panted one of the rescuers, a man of over fifty and tolerably stout. "It's a good thing I asked you to come with me and that I haven't quite got out of form. But I'm nearly done up, what with trying to overtake the voice, and then fighting. Oh, my dear, here you are! Not hurt, I hope? They didn't spoil your voice?"

The question seemed so ludicrous that his companion laughed outright, and Jenny was forced to smile through the tears that had welled to her eyes at the loss of her money.

"No, they have not hurt me, but I don't understand!" said Jenny wonderingly. "But they have taken my money and——"

"Bother the money!" snapped the man. "I can give you more, and put you in the way of earning lots, lots! Lloyd, keep still and don't laugh! I want to hear her sing. My dear, I heard the last portion of your song as I came up, and I tell you that you have the voice I've been trying to find for ages, ages!" The little man, in spite of his inclination to portliness, simply danced about the road in his excitement. "As soon as I could understand where the singer was, I came out to find you, because I must have you. Oh, it's no use saying you can't come!" Jenny had said nothing. "I must have you and that settles it! They told me you had gone this way and we followed; Lloyd came also, because these roads are not safe! Now you know!"

"It was very good of you to help me and drive those thieves away, but they got my money unfortunately," said Jenny, rather illogically. "But I must hurry home——"

"Not if I know it!" cried the little man fiercely, planting himself directly in her path. "What! Let you go! Never! Lloyd, come here and help me to stop her!"

Lloyd burst into another fit of laughter, and the little man smiled.

"Of course, I am much agitated, my dear!" he explained. "But here is the whole secret. You have a voice such as I have been trying to find for a long time; with a little training it will be superb. You must join my party and become *prima donna* in a little while. It will bring you lots of money and

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fame. Let me hear you sing now, to make sure that I was not mistaken!"

Jenny protested, but the little man spoke to her in a kindly manner, soothing her and listening to her story, crowning all his efforts by forcing a gold coin into her hand to more than replace what she had lost. Jenny at last acquiesced, and sang.

The little impresario's face was a study during that song, could it have been seen distinctly. He was enraptured, and could hardly be persuaded to let Jenny go home on the promise to see him to-morrow at the hotel. It was with the greatest reluctance that he allowed her to depart.

Mr. Lucas Harrison, for that was the name of the impresario, waited with impatience—it might almost be said with feverish anxiety—for Jenny to come to him on the following evening. She had positively declined to come during the day on account of her ragged clothing. The girl appeared in due course and Harrison's brow cleared. There was to be no more singing outside the hotel; she was to intrust herself to the wife of his tenor, Lloyd, and to be under the training of the impresario himself; better clothes were to be provided, and a weekly sum sent to the sick mother to keep her in comparative comfort and pay for the necessary help. Jenny saw visions of happiness in the near future which surpassed her wildest dreams, and she consented.

The operatic company conducted by Mr. Lucas Harrison stayed one week in the fashionable resort, and then left for another part of the country. The girl wrote a glowing letter to Philip, and hoped that he might still be there to call and see her, but he came not. Harrison kept her quite secluded, not allowing her to appear on the boards, but working hard to develop the marvellous powers which he detected in the girl.

For nearly four years the company travelled from place to place in England and on the Continent, and during the whole of that time Jenny never heard one word from Philip; she wrote to him many times, but her letters never reached him apparently. Some came back, marked with the legend that the addressee was not to be found at the address mentioned; she wrote to old Peter, only to learn, weeks afterwards, that he was dead. From the badly-written letter penned by a neighbour, she gleaned the fact that some of her letters had been sent on to Philip's address, the last one they had. That was all, and Jenny hoped against hope that she would see him unexpectedly in the theatre one evening. During the short return visit to England, she sang the old song which she had sung to him, and earned frantic applause. But she knew only that he was not there and that "home" was a thing to be yearned for but impossible of realisation without him. She sang the song from her heart.

"When are we to spend a week in the old place?" she would ask Harrison. He would make a droll grimace and shake his head; there was not enough money to be made in that town—that is, not nearly so much as elsewhere, strange as it might seem.

At last her ardent desire was granted, and the impresario announced that a very good engagement had been offered in the South Coast resort. Jenny clasped her hands in her joy; she felt that she would see Philip.

Her first duty was to visit her mother, now recovered from her illness and spending her days in comfort. Then came the evening of the first concert.

The fame of the company had spread everywhere; they came with a great reputation, and Jenny was the greatest of them all. She was greeted with a storm of applause; some of the audience had seen her in other parts, while some remembered her as she sang in the street four years previously. She sang, and the audience was wild with delight.

"You must go on again, my child!" declared Harrison, jumping about in his excited style. "You must, or they will never leave off clapping!"

She appeared again and sang, but the demands for more were just as great.

"You must give them another!" said the impresario. "After that, they must have somebody else!"

Jenny went to a corner and arranged something in her dress; when she turned, the company saw a red heart, just a little one, hanging from her neck by a silken thread and resting on her bosom. She went on, and sang the old English song. But Philip was not there!

"Is he dead or—has he ceased to love me?" she asked herself. No, he was not dead, she felt certain! "I feel that he is near; I have never had that feeling before! I must find him!"

Her turn in the concert was an early one: she had asked that that it might be so. She slipped away to a dressing room, which was empty, and there she donned a garb which was in strange contrast to the beautiful dress that had graced her lovely figure before the audience. Throwing a rich cloak over this attire, she made her way out.

"It is superstition, Harrison would tell me," she murmured, "but I know it will serve to bring me to him or him to me. The old dress will bring me luck!"

She made her way through the lighted promenade and then into the darker streets; here she took off her cloak and carried it in a roll. She hurried on to the house where old Peter had lived. As she came within a few yards, she started and listened; the strains of a violin fell upon her ears.

"It is he!" she gasped. "Why did he not come to me?" She passed her hand over her brow.

"I will soon test his love, and if it is dead——"

She shivered; then boldly approached the door. Here the tones of the violin became audible once more, and this time the air was "Home, Sweet Home."

"He loves me!" she whispered.

"Philip, it is I, your Jenny!" she cried, entering the room.

Philip, for it was indeed he, dropped the instrument and sprang to his feet. Before him stood the *prima donna* in her gorgeous cloak.

"Away!" he cried feebly. "Such as you are not for me! Forget the past as I have tried to do, and leave me in my——"

"You swore that you would love me and come for me one day!" said Jenny unsteadily. "I have the token of our betrothal. Have you ceased to love me, Philip?"

"No, no!" he cried, at the sound of her pleading tone. "My love is unchanged, but I would not drag you to my level. You are rich, admired! I foresaw it when I had your first letters, and I would not answer. I love you still, but you must give that token back to me and forget me!"

"I cannot! Philip, I cannot! I would rather return to the old life with you! See!" She threw off her cloak, and he saw her in the ragged dress of four years ago, with the little heart resting on her bosom and hanging by its silken thread. "I will come to you as I was four years ago rather than lose you. Philip," she whispered softly, tenderly, as she went up to him, "play the old song, as you were playing it just now, and I will sing it as I sang it on the stage—for you!"

Under the spell of her beauty and intreaties, he picked up the instrument and began to play. As the last notes died away, she stooped and kissed him, for he had sunk into a chair.

"Philip," she whispered, "you encouraged me and helped me when I was in despair! Now that I am able to return it, you must not hesitate to accept."

Philip was a prey to a great inward struggle, but he was conquered when the soft arms incircled his neck.

There was another faint attempt at rebellion on his part. How could he take his place by her side, how could he agree to share her wealth? But she stopped him by a kiss.

"Love levels all!" she whispered again. "If you make me happy, if I cannot be happy without you, then you bring to me something that is worth more than gold."

There was a merry wedding two months later, when Jenny, the celebrated singer, was married to Philip Atwood. Quite a romantic love story, said the gossips; nobody knew exactly what the love story was, but they were sure that it was romantic because no one had ever heard of the husband before, and Harrison said it was romantic!

George Day.

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AN ACROSTIC AND A COINCIDENCE.

Also a Meeting on the Bridge.

REGGIE BLAKE was a bank clerk in his working hours, and a poet in his moments of ease. The stern realities of ledgers, pass-books, and trial "balances" had been unable to quell the nascent fire that glowed in his youthful soul, and it was not very long before the local paper of the little town of Baymead began to quiver with Reggie Blake's effusions.

He had been drafted to Baymead from the head office of the bank, and he found life unutterably lonely in the small market town. But for the diversion afforded him by the spinning of rhymes, he told himself he would have drifted into acute melancholia, and whilst this view was perhaps unduly pessimistic, there can be little doubt that existence at Baymead was dull enough after the exhilaration of life in London.

One evening, after a particularly heavy day's work, he was sitting in his dingy little lodging when the maid entered with a letter. The missive was from Mr. Bloxam, the editor of the *Baymead Argus*, and it ran thus—

"MY DEAR SIR.—*I have been much pleased with the poetry that you have been kind enough to contribute to this journal and shall be very glad to receive further metrical contributions whenever you feel inclined to forward the same.—Yours faithfully,*

"JOHN BLOXAM."

"Come, that is a trifle more encouraging," thought Reggie, as he smiled and re-read the communication, "I never could have believed that an editor could write in cold blood to a man and ask for verses. I'll knock off something fresh at once."

Drawing his chair closer to the table, the young man seized a pencil and plunged into thought.

"Now, what can I write about?" he pondered. "'That is the question,' as our friend the melancholy Dane would say."

For nearly twenty minutes he sat with a perplexed look upon his brow, until at length an inspiration darted into his brain.

"By Jove, I have it!" he murmured. "I'll write something to be called "A Face in the Crowd." Brown was saying this morning that every face in a crowd held beauty for some one, and the idea is worth celebrating in verse. Here goes!"

After manifold erasures, alterations, and all the other efforts that go to make up the writing of a poem, Reggie produced the following somewhat feeble effusion, which he flattered himself, however, was "rather good." It ran thus—

"Dear face that looked to mine, and then departed,
O, tell me, shall we ever meet again.
Rich was the joy that thy dear smile imparted,
And thro' my soul thy image beams again.
When on thy charms my raptured fancy ponders,
Entranced I stand in worshipful delight,
Stricken with love my memory vaguely wanders
To that sweet hour when first thou metst my sight.
Wheree'er thou art I send thee this love token
In proof of what my heart would fondly say—
Call me thy knight, thy slave, with faith unbroken,
Kindred in souls though strangers for alway."

"The final line isn't quite clear," he thought after a short interval of reflection, "but it doesn't matter. A touch of vagueness often helps a poem considerably. If people don't understand it, they fancy it must be abnormally clever. I shall let it stand as it is."

Fortified by this brief converse with himself, the poet made a neat copy of the sentimental sonnet and inclosed it to the editor with a short letter, thanking that gentleman for his note. Then he went out and posted the communication, and having returned to his lodging and consumed a frugal supper, betook himself soberly to bed.

* * * * *

On the following Friday afternoon, the *Baymead Argus* made its appearance, and on column four of the fifth page Reggie Blake's poem, quoted above, was duly published.

It bore his initials at foot, and the young man beamed with delight as he scanned the lines.

"Upon my word, it looks even better than when I first wrote it," he pondered. "It's wonderful how print improves the whole aspect of literary composition!"

Three days passed, and Blake was sitting in his room, hammering out a further poem for the *Argus*, and endeavouring to find a rhyme for the word "cupid," without employing the word "stupid," when the postman's knock resounded through the house, and presently an envelope bearing the handwriting of Mr. Bloxam was handed to the scribe.

"Wonder what he's writing about now?" he murmured, as he tore open the flap, and then Blake's eyes assumed a puzzled expression, for the editor had communicated nothing, but had merely inclosed a letter which was addressed—

"To R. B., author of 'A Face in the Crowd.' c.o. *Baymead Argus*, Baymead."

"Great Scott, it's a girl's hand!" cried Reggie excitably. "Upon my word, this is interesting, and no mistake!"

With trembling fingers he drew forth the letter. It bore the address—"Campion Villa, Baymead," and was in this wise—

"DEAR SIR.—*I fear that I am behaving wrongly in writing to you, and that you will think me a fast and forward girl, but I cannot help thanking you for your really beautiful acrostic on my name. How you came to discover it I do not know, and I am also at a loss to call to mind what crowd it was in which you saw me, for this reason—I have only been to one flower-show, and then, owing to the rain, there was hardly anybody in the grounds. Perhaps, however, you have taken what is called a 'poet's license' in using the title in question, and in any case, let me congratulate you on your beautiful poetry.*

"*Thanking you once more for having selected poor me as the subject of your acrostic—I am, yours very gratefully,*

"DORA WESTWICK."

"*P.S.—Do you ever walk in Campion Park towards twilight? I do sometimes.—D.W.*"

Reggie Blake read the letter half-a-dozen times, and then sat down to think.

"Well, of all the extraordinary misconceptions in the world," he muttered, "this is quite the most wonderful. I haven't written a single acrostic since I was a kid. That sort of poem has gone out of fashion. Anyhow, I'll just acknowledge the note, and pretend to understand it, though for the life of me, I can't make head or tail of this business."

Half an hour later, the following note was on its way to Campion Villa—

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"DEAR MISS WESTWICK.—*Allow me to thank you very sincerely for your kind and appreciative letter. I also walk in Campion Park in the half-light, and shall be there to-morrow evening. If you happen to be on the bridge over the lake at about seven-thirty, I trust I may have the pleasure of seeing you.*

"*I hope that you will not be annoyed by this proposal, and, meantime, remain—Very sincerely yours,*

"REGINALD BLAKE (Author of the Acrostic)."

There was little sleep for our poet that night. He lay upon his couch in a fever of anticipation, asking himself a thousand times what Miss Westwick would be like. Perhaps she was a spectacled old maid, of a sentimental cast of mind, who dabbled in poetry herself. He hoped with all his heart that such might not prove to be the case, and, presently, he fell into a fitful doze, wherein all sorts and conditions of ridiculous dreams concerning his unknown correspondent held the high place.

Next day he contrived to perform his duties at the Bank without perpetrating more than a dozen blunders, and when at length the hours of thraldom were concluded, he rushed home, consumed a hasty meal, arrayed himself in his most gorgeous raiment, and sallied forth to Campion Park, a picturesque little demesne on the borders of the town.

He approached the bridge with swiftly-beating heart. Standing by the parapet was a tall, graceful girl, with wonderful dark eyes and comely cheeks.

Some instinct seemed to rise up in Blake's heart and proclaim to him that this was Dora Westwick, and an instant later he was bowing and holding out his hand—

"Miss Westwick, I think——"

"Yes. That is my name. And you are—Mr.—Mr. Blake. I—I hope you don't think very badly of me for writing!"

To this day Reggie is unable to recount with any degree of exactness what he said and did in the exquisite moments that followed that meeting on the bridge. The girl's beauty took immediate possession of his heart and brain, and when, an hour later, he bade her adieu, he began to think that he was very much in love.

"I suppose I ought to have told her that she was under some misconception as to that acrostic," he reflected as he walked home, "but I was so delighted to find that she wasn't a spectacled old maid after all that the incident passed completely out of my mind. Anyhow, it doesn't matter much one way or the other."

* * * * *

In the weeks that followed, Miss Dora Westwick and Reggie Blake were constantly together, and in the fulness of time he was invited to Campion Villa, where Dora's aunt, a benevolent old lady with whom the girl resided, took an instant fancy to the poetical bank clerk and made him exceedingly welcome.

"I am very, very fond of you literary people, Mr. Blake," she said graciously, "but don't you think you were just a trifle bold when you addressed an acrostic to a young lady to whom you had not been introduced?"

"We poets often do bold things," he replied evasively, "and I think Dora—er—Miss Westwick, I mean, has forgiven me by this time."

"I have," returned Dora promptly, and then changed the subject by offering her admirer some cake.

The inevitable happened in due course. When Reggie Blake was promoted to the position of assistant-cashier, and was notified that a substantial increase in salary would accompany his new dignity, he "took his courage in both hands," as our Gallic friends would say, and asked Dora Westwick to be his wife.

"You know that I have loved you ever since that evening on the bridge?" he said, as he took her hand in his.

Dora pouted deliciously.

"Only since then?" she whispered. "I—I thought it dated from the hour when you saw the 'Face in the Crowd'?"

"Oh, ah, yes, of course," stammered Blake, turning scarlet. "That remark about the bridge was a clerical error, as we say at the bank. But, darling, we can afford to ignore such trifles now, for I—I want you to be my wife."

The hand that lay in Reggie's palm twined lovingly round it, and he knew that he had gained his heart's desire on that summer night.

Throughout the halcyon days of the engagement period that ensued, Reggie Blake had resolved time after time to tell his *fiancée* the truth regarding the poem, but the words died unspoken on his lips, for he could not bring himself to voice the syllables of disillusion, and to inform the girl of his heart that he had written no acrostic in her honour, and that she was under a complete misapprehension in thinking so. In fact, it was not until they had been duly married at Baymead Church, and were enjoying the first days of the honeymoon beside the sea at Jersey, that he found courage to speak.

They were sitting in a remote corner of the pier, hearkening to the strains of the band as it discoursed pleasant melodies from *San Toy*. Presently Reggie observed in a low voice—

"Darling, I want to tell you a secret. I meant to have told you long ago, but somehow I had not the—the courage!"

She looked up with a quick glance.

"A secret?" she echoed. "Nothing very shocking, I hope?"

"Well, it depends entirely on the point of view. To me it seems trivial enough—it may appear otherwise to you."

"Oh, Reg, how mysterious you are! Have you been robbing the bank, or what?"

He laughed lightly.

"No. I haven't aspired yet to criminal honours," he replied, "and my secret has nothing whatever to do with the Bank. It concerns you—and—and the acrostic."

"Me and the acrostic?"

"Yes. Dora, you'll think me all sorts of bad things when I tell you that I have written no acrostic on your name, or on anybody else's. The verses headed 'A Face in the Crowd,' were addressed to an imaginary person."

"An imaginary person? Oh, Reggie, what nonsense! You are only trying to tease me."

"I assure you, dearest, it is the living truth! I was awfully puzzled at the time when you wrote and said that I had composed an acrostic on your name, but you were so—so charming and sweet that I had not the heart to disillusion you."

"But I don't—I can't understand. See, here is the poem. I have carried it in my little purse ever since. Now look at the initial letters of the lines, and see if I am not right."

She handed him the cutting from the *Baymead Argus* as she spoke. Reggie Blake stared at the poem beneath the yellow light of the pier lamp, and then gasped out—

"Great Scott! You *are* right. Well, of all the extraordinary, mysterious, and inexplicable coincidences, this is the most extraordinary, the most mysterious, and the most inexplicable. 'Dora Westwick!' Of course! By Jove, I see it all now, and the mystery is a mystery no longer!"

There was a long pause. Reggie was sitting in amazed wonder, asking himself what unknown power had guided his hand to trace this unconscious acrostic, whilst Dora was regarding him with eyes that held similar astonishment.

"It seems far more like a fairy-tale than real life," she said at length.

He threw his arm round her waist, drawing her nearer to himself.

"Yes," he replied, "just like a fairy-tale, and the good fairies who brought us together were Chance and——"

"And the acrostic," whispered Dora with a satisfied smile.

"God bless the acrostic!" said Reggie fervently, and never was blessing more heart-felt—more sincere.

P. Beaufoy.

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"Provided Always."

The Story of a Will—and a Woman.

"PROVIDED always, and I do hereby declare that if my son, Clement Hugh Heaton, or his issue, lawfully begotten, do not within ten years after my decease, appear in England and claim the said estate called Rexholme, or if my said son Clement Hugh Heaton be dead, and such issue, if more than one, shall die before attaining the age of twenty-one years, then in either of the said events happening, I give the said estate called Rexholme, unto my second son, Jasper Leigh Heaton and his heirs for ever."

The young lawyer laid down the will, in which occurred the above clause, upon the table, and looked steadily across at the gentleman who sat opposite him.

"You see, Mr. Heaton, that it would be a very risky thing for any client of mine to advance you fifteen thousand pounds upon the security of an estate, which, at any time during the remainder of the ten years after your father's death, may be claimed by a child or children of your brother—or, for that matter, by your brother himself, whose death has not been absolutely proved; at least to my satisfaction."

"Then you refuse to negotiate this loan for me?"

"Yes, undoubtedly, on the security of Rexholme. If you have no better than that to offer, I am afraid that you will have some difficulty in raising the money."

"Well, then, give me the deeds of the two estates, Rexholme and Havilands, and, though he will charge me a ruinous interest, I will go to Abrahams to-morrow and get it from him."

"Mr. Heaton," said Robert Morley, "the legal business of your family has been in the hands of our firm for more than three generations. Now, I do not want, just after succeeding my father, to break the link; but if you go to Abrahams, who is more money-lender than lawyer, I give you definitely to understand that I will leave no stone unturned in order to establish the fact of Clement Heaton's being still alive, or at any rate that he married, and has, living to-day, child or children, who inherit his claim to the Rexholme estate."

"The deeds, man, the deeds! As for your threats I treat them as the ravings of a madman."

"Well, sir—there are the deeds—I have no power to withhold them from you. If Mr. Abrahams lends you the money, all I can say is, that the ruinous interest to which you referred, and which he most certainly will exact, will be a tacit admission on his part that the Rexholme title-deeds are undoubtedly bad security."

"Thanks for the opinion. Good-day!"

"One moment, Mr. Heaton. I have this morning received a communication from Richard Dennis, of Rexholme Port, requesting me to ask you for the two years arrears maintenance money, on account of your ward, Elsa Hanbury. As it is your business, and I know nothing whatever about the matter, I beg to hand you the letter, with which, no doubt, you will be able to deal."

"The blundering idiot!" muttered Jasper under his breath; then, with an airy nonchalance, addressing the young lawyer, "didn't you know I had a ward? Oh, yes!—but, thank goodness, she's nearly of age, and then my responsibility ceases. An old friend's daughter!—I will deal with the matter. Good-day, Morley!"

Had Robert Morley seen the scared, evil expression on Jasper Heaton's face as he passed along the passage into Bedford Row, he would have had ample confirmation of certain vague suspicions which had been aroused in his mind in connection with the (practically) threatening letter of Richard Dennis, ex-gamekeeper, and now the shady proprietor of a tenth-rate public-house on Rexholme Quay.

As it was, the thing remained with him, with the result that he determined to pay a visit to Rexholme without delay.

"Reed!" he shouted to a clerk in the outer office, "bring me a Bradshaw!"

"Guv'nor's got something on—bet it's about that black-looking Heaton chap!"

"Oh, Reed!" said Robert Morley, running his finger down the Great Eastern main line departures, "I'm going to Rexholme—may not be back before to-morrow night. Send the boy in a cab to my house for my emergency Gladstone; it's packed ready. And should Mr. Jasper Heaton call during my absence, you know nothing—understand?"

"Very good, sir."

"Tell the boy to take my bag to Liverpool Street; he'll find me in the booking-office."

"My dear Mr. Jasper," he added to himself, "I have long suspected you of underhand dealing; but I rather think that I am now on the verge of discovering you to be at the bottom of a very pretty piece of serious villainy."

* * * * * *

When Robert Morley walked unannounced into his friend Blythe's private office, the Rexholme lawyer welcomed his brother professional with more than ordinary effusion.

"My dear fellow!" he cried, "you could not have come at a more opportune moment—for me!"

"I shall be glad if I can be of any service to you, Blythe; but what is it? I'm down on a bit of important business myself, and don't want to lose more time than I can help in doing it."

"All right, Bob! You know Dennis, old Sir Frederick Heaton's ex-gamekeeper?"

"Yes, yes!—the very man I am come to make some inquiries about."

"No!—well, we'd better have Dobbs in—that drunken old clerk of mine, you know—for once his drinking habits are likely (unless I am very much mistaken) to lead to the righting of a great wrong. We'll have him in, and you shall hear his story."

Touching a bell on his writing-table twice, Mr. Blythe added, "If all he says be true, it's the most extraordinary case of judgment on the wrongdoer that I have ever known. Dobbs, Mr. Morley isn't a stranger to you; I want you to tell us all that you told me this morning."

Dobbs, who even then had the evidence of surreptitious

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refreshment about him, coughed nervously, and nodded to Robert Morley.

He was an undersized, thin man, with wispy grey hair, and a hesitating manner.

"You must let me tell it, gentlemen," he said, "in my own way. While old Sir Frederick was alive, you know, of course, that Mr. Clement and Mr. Jasper quarrelled—what about nobody knew—Whatever it was, it resulted in the elder brother going abroad, to be no more heard of from that day to this. Mr. Clement Heaton has never been seen since.

"Sir Frederick's favourite son, the old gentleman, as you are aware, while feeling almost sure that he was dead, before dying himself, made provision by will, in case Mr. Clement, or any child of his, should be alive, that they should have the Rexholme estate, if claimed within ten years of the testator's death. The ten years is up next month; Mr. Jasper comes into all that he hasn't lost by mortgage, and cent-per-cent loans; which brings me to what looks like the final situation, gentlemen, of the Heaton family mystery. I was coming from the Lamb and Flag hotel late last night, and on my way had to pass the Anchor, Richard Dennis' house. Half way up the narrow lane which runs up one side of it, I saw a man I know—Tully, the messenger at the bank—with his ear glued to the closed shutters of the little side window. The house had been shut a quarter of an hour, but through the two holes at the top came a light which showed that the room had occupants. Tully beckons to me, the moment he spots me, and putting his finger to his lips motions me to listen at the shutters."

"Well, what did you hear?" queried Robert Morley eagerly.

"I'm coming to that, sir. I first raised myself up on the sill, and looking through one of the shutter-holes, saw Mr. Jasper Heaton, and Dick Dennis sitting one on either side the table. I was just in time to hear Dennis say that he wouldn't move a step in the business, unless the two years' money due for the keep of a girl—was paid down on the nail. Mr. Heaton tried to soften Dennis down, protesting that he had no money, but might have some in a day or two, when the claim should be paid."

"Yes, and then?" interrupted Morley.

"Then, sir, Mr. Heaton said the girl was an obstacle; and that if he, Dennis, would help him to remove it, he would make a man of him for life."

"The murderous scoundrel!—well?"

"'You would!' said Dennis. 'Yes,' replied Mr. Jasper, 'I'd give you three thousand pounds!' 'What is it you want me to do?' said Dennis then. 'I have a letter here from a man offering to advance me a large sum of money. The girl is the only obstacle. Should she be taken ill, and die within the next six weeks the money will, on that event being satisfactorily proved, be advanced at once.' Then Dennis said 'What you mean is, if I kill Elsa, I shall have three thousand pounds—I'll have nothing to do with it.'"

"And what did the other villain say then?"

"He reminded Dennis that the death of a fellow gamekeeper, while both were in Sir Frederick Heaton's service, had never been satisfactorily cleared up; adding that he, Jasper, had met him on the night of the occurrence under very suspicious circumstances. 'One murder more or less won't heckle your conscience, man,' he said, 'besides I might say something awkward for you about the first, you know. Dennis then asked when it was to be done. 'Within six weeks,' was the reply. 'Give me another glass of whisky, and I'll do it in six days—six hours, if you like!' Seeing that he had gained his point, Jasper Heaton prepared to depart, just saying that he would call again the following night and arrange everything. Tully and I then thought it time to shift our quarters. This, gentlemen, is true, every word of it; and if you, as I believe you can, will put two and two together, Mr. Jasper Heaton has not only nearly reached the end of his tether, but the 'provided always' of Sir Frederick's will, is likely to come into active operation."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Dobbs," said Robert Morley, gravely, "and you may rest assured that your evidence——"

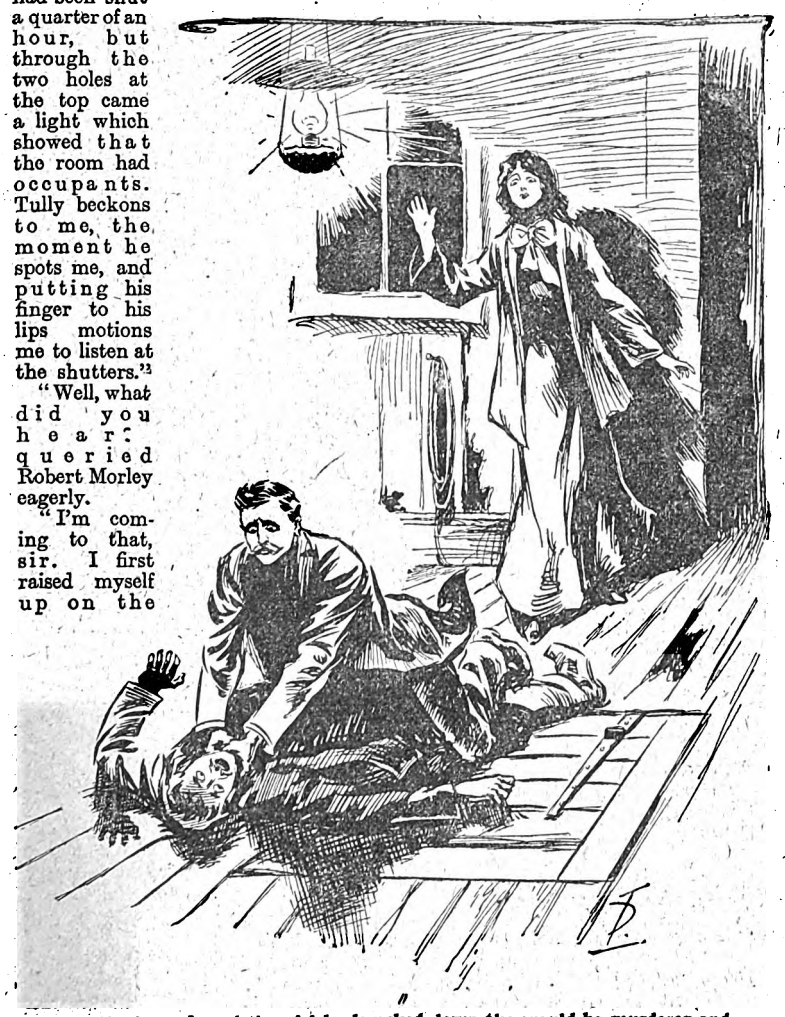
"And Tully's, Mr. Morley."

"And Tully's, Dobbs, will not be forgotten when accounts are balanced."

"One thing I should like to ask you," said Robert Morley to the old clerk. "This girl; this so-called Elsa Hanbury; is she kept in durance by the man Dennis?"

"She must be, sir; for not a soul in Rexholme has ever caught sight of her."

"Then, Blythe, our course is clear. Your business has resolved itself into my business, and the first thing to be done, is to swear out a warrant, on Dobbs' and Tully's testimony, for the arrest of Jasper Heaton on a charge of inciting and conspiring to murder Elsa Hanbury, who, there is every reason to believe, is his brother's child, Clement Heaton's daughter."



Having released the girl he knocked down the would-be murderer and pinned him to the ground.

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"I will attend to that, Bob, and you?"

"I," said his friend, "am going to interview Mr. Richard Dennis; and induce him, if I can, to turn King's evidence: so that no link may be wanting in the chain which is to bind Jasper Heaton for what is to be hoped for society's sake, the rest of his natural life."

* * * * *

It was the end of September, and the evenings were drawing in; so that when Robert Morley arrived at the Anchor public-house on the quay, it was nearly dark.

There was no one in the bar except a tall, swarthy-faced woman, of forbidding expression.

To the young lawyer's inquiry if he could see the landlord, she replied that her husband was out.

"Will he be long?"

"I dunno!—p'raps he will—p'raps he won't. Do you want him partic'lar?"

"Yes, I do. If you think he'll be in in an hour, I'll call again."

"You can call if you want to—he may be in; and he mayn't."

"I'll chance it—in an hour."

Wending his way along the silent quay, Robert Morley found himself, in less than half an hour, some distance beyond the outskirts of the place.

The only house in sight was a grey, timber-built windmill, the torn and broken sails of which told of long disuse for corn-grinding purposes.

But for one thing, Robert Morley would have turned his face again towards Rexholme. Desolate and ruinous as was the building, he distinctly made out fully a twinkling star of light above the gallery.

"There surely can't be anyone living there?" he said to himself, "but at the risk of keeping Mr. Dick Dennis waiting, I'll explore a bit."

At that moment a piercing shriek came from the direction where the point of light glimmered.

"Something's wrong!" cried Robert Morley, running towards the mill with all the dash of his Oxford sprinting days.

It did not take him three minutes to reach the door, which he found to be fastened from the inside.

Picking up a short piece of the ironwork of the sails, with which the ground was strewed, he beat upon the crazy barrier of woodwork, until one blow, heavier than the rest, stove in two of the panels above the lock.

Clambering in through the aperture, he found himself in an atmosphere of semi-darkness.

Then, in a recess to the left, he stumbled upon the stairway leading up to the gallery floor of the mill.

It was the work of a minute only to grope his way up the rickety steps, another woman's shriek from above quickening his progress.

Just over his head he could see a dim light coming through a square opening.

Through this opening he sprang into the chamber to see a young girl lying prone on the floor, the grimy hand of Dennis, the black-browed landlord of the Anchor, on the quay, clutching desperately at her white neck.

Another second and Robert Morley would have been too late; but now he rushed across the chamber, seized the would-be murderer by both hands round the throat, and with all his strength pulled him backwards on to the floor, where he knee-pinned him to the verge of suffocation.

Calling to the frightened girl to pass him a length of rope, which hung on a nail by the window, he securely bound his prisoner hand and foot, and rising, turned his attention to the ex-gamekeeper's intended victim.

She looked to be about twenty, small and delicately formed, but with an unearthly pallor, that told a tale of years of shutting-out from the outside world.

Robert Morley's first words were to calm her, and then to debate what was best to be done.

"Do you think you could find your way to the police station in Rexholme?" he asked her, "and tell them to send two or three constables at once."

"Yes—I will go as fast as I can, but you?"

"Oh! I am all right! Besides, I want a little uninterrupted conversation with our friend here. I do not like to ask you to do this, feeling, as you must do, weak and excited with battling with this ruffian."

"Oh, I don't mind—I'm better now."

"One thing more, Miss—well, Miss Hanbury for the present. When you have summoned the police, do not return to Dennis' house, but go direct to lawyer Blythe, two doors from the Lamb and Flag hotel, on the Holme Road—he will look after you—till I have seen you, at any rate."

During the three-quarters of an hour interval, Robert Morley drew from his reluctant captive the whole shameful history of Jasper Heaton's scheme to defraud his elder brother's child of her rights.

It seems, that being determined to make an independence for himself before returning to England, Clement Heaton died on his cattle ranch in Texas, as he was on the point of selling his property. He had married some time before this, his wife having died soon after the birth of her little daughter.

Clement Heaton was just able to make arrangements for his daughter's return to the care of his father, as he supposed, never having heard of Sir Frederick's death.

With the child came the proceeds of the sale of Clement's Texan property, which, meeting his niece at Southampton, Jasper Heaton laid hands on, and used for his own purposes.

The child being only a burden to him, he paid Dennis and his wife a yearly sum to keep her out of the way. This they did, the subsequent inciting by Jasper of Dennis to silence her for ever on the eve of her coming of age, being, of course, already known to Robert Morley.

Jasper Heaton had been arrested in his own house about the same time that Dick Dennis was captured by Robert Morley. The evidence against him, that of his accomplice, of Dobbs, and Tully, the messenger, was overwhelming, and had he not died, two days before the trial of a malignant fever, he would undoubtedly have received the full reward of his crimes.

* * * *

It is pleasant to have to chronicle that Elsa Heaton and Robert Morley have agreed to walk through life side by side.

The impression each formed of the other, on that fateful night in the old windmill chamber, was destined to grow and to intensify, so that though, by reason of Jasper Heaton's criminal extravagance, the estate of Rexholme was much diminished in value, there was yet enough left for the lady of his heart to bestow upon Robert Morley, her knight-errant and best-beloved.

E. Ralph.

THINGS TO NOTE.

Miss Madge . . Morris' Wedding.

(See Page 677.)

How to Win a Gramophone. .

(See Page 682.)

Our New Serial, "The Albert Gate Mystery." . . .

(See Page 702.)

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A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

Which Made all the Difference in the World.

I.

THE following letters appeared consecutively in the *Daily Tatler* for August 24th, 1900:

"*SHOULD WOMEN PROPOSE?*

"SIR,—*The 'Mere Man' who advocated in your columns the liberty of women to make proposals of marriage, has surely never put himself in the position of the man proposed to. I can imagine nothing more ignominious or humiliating than to listen to a woman declaring her heart, and pleading for the honour you will do her by joining your life with hers. Any man in such a situation would look and feel an absolute idiot, but what of the woman who makes the confession? She would be trampling under foot the two prime qualities of womanhood, which I take to be modesty and reserve. No really nice girl, whatever the circumstances or however backward her lover might be, would take the first step in the declaration of love. It must be always the man's prerogative and privilege to propose.—Yours, &c.*, R. T.

"SIR.—*May a mere girl venture to lift her voice against the arguments of a 'Mere Man'? I'm afraid I'm old fashioned, and perhaps not very experienced, but the idea that creatures of my sex should be presented with the right of proposing sends a cold shiver down my back. The notion may appeal to the 'new women' and the 'shrieking sisterhood' generally, but what true girl under any condition would dare or even wish to take such a step? And would men stand being proposed to? My own private opinion is that they would all emigrate to Timbuctoo if ever such a social custom came to prevail. No, Sir, the old order of things is best. My 'Mr. Right' (if there exists such a being) will have to speak first, or no engagement ring will ever glitter on the third left-hand finger of*

MAUD."

II.

IDLY and dreamily Ralph Trevor and his friend Cecil Orchard were sculling down the river. A summer's day had really come at last, and everything that breathed seemed to feel the magic influence of sunshine. To-day for almost the first time this season the Thames could be said to be properly alive.

"Isn't it hot?" remarked Ralph, not for the first time. "What do you say, Cecil, to our running in the boat under that willow, and having a rest till the sun goes down for a bit?"

"I'm your man. I was just thinking what a hard-working day's holiday you were giving me."

With a few skilful strokes the boat was brought alongside the bank, securely moored, and the two young men stretched themselves out, one in the bow, the other at the stern, both the picture of ease and comfort.

"You seem very dreamy this afternoon," said Cecil, when the other had smoked half way through a cigarette without making a remark.

"Do you know what I was thinking? What an infernal thing money is!"

"Dear me! It hadn't struck me in that light before. Now if you had said the shortness of money I might have agreed."

"No, it's the having too much that's worrying me."

"My dear chap, hand it over! I'm dying to relieve you, and short of finding a more worthy recipient."

"Ah, Cecil, you don't understand. I've not too much. It's she."

"She! What 'she'? Some great-aunt of yours who insists on squandering what should some day come to you?"

Ralph Trevor laughed in spite of his somewhat serious mood.

"No, I've no expectations of that kind. Well, I'm in the confessional box this afternoon, and had better tell you everything. The 'she,' Cecil, is the girl I'm in love with, and should like to marry."

Orchard started up from his recumbent position and looked curiously across at his friend.

"Good gracious, Ralph, fancy your being taken that way! I had hoped you had passed the susceptible age and were going to keep me company in my dotage. But tell me all about it!"

Ralph's cigarette had gone out. He lit it afresh and, drawing a cushion more comfortably under his head, continued the conversation.

"There isn't much to relate. You remember I went down to Bournemouth for Whitsuntide, and what a spanking time I told you I had. There was a girl staying at the boarding-house. Her name was Maud Napier. Her people were there, too; they were stopping all through the summer. Cec, I saw her and loved her, almost at first sight. It was as simple an affair as these affairs usually are."

"Well, Ralph?" said his friend sympathetically, when the other paused. Trevor pursued his train of thought.

"And yet it's wretchedly complex. You see she has money—about £160 a year. I've found that out from the Judson's, who know the girl intimately. And I—well, I can look the income-tax man boldly in the face, and truthfully say that I'm not yet taxable. You understand the point, old man?"

"Perfectly, but aren't you a little too sensitive?"

"Surely not! You know how people misunderstand one in a case like this. They would say it was her money I was after, and not the girl herself. One hundred and sixty pounds a year of her own—ah, that young man knows which side his bread is buttered! You can fancy that being said, Cec?"

"I can, but why mind the world?"

"I shouldn't, if the girl herself understood my motive. But would she? If she hadn't that money, it would be all right. I could speak out at once, tell her all about my position and prospects, and be refused or accepted, as the case might be. Oh, it's a queer position to be in!"

For some moments the two friends smoked in silence, the only sound being the quiet lapping of the water against the keel. Trevor had gone off into a brown study, which Orchard was too sympathetic to interrupt. A fish jumping out of the river near at hand caused a temporary diversion.

"A lively one, eh, Cecil? Well, shall we be moving on?"

"If you're ready! Made up your mind how to act about the girl, Ralph?"

"I'm going down to Bournemouth for August Bank Holiday. What will happen there I don't know. Destiny principally directs one in an affair of this kind."

"May it be a good destiny, old man! One thing I'd say to you. Don't let the girl suffer because you don't speak—that's where timidity on the man's part very often leads. There, you didn't think I knew so much about human nature, did you?"

"No, but I thought you knew more about a boat. You are trying to shove her off without unloosing the painter."

Both laughed heartily, and, as they rowed away, conversation drifted to lighter matters.

III.

An evening concert was in progress at the Winter Gardens, Bournemouth. The big glass pavilion was crowded, and upstairs in the gallery promenading was a matter of difficulty. Visitors and residents had alike turned out on this August Bank Holiday in quite exceptional numbers.

Maud Napier had eagerly accepted Ralph Trevor's invitation to accompany him to the concert.

"You'll be surprised," she had said, "but, though we have been a long time here, I've only been to a concert once before. My people don't care for music, you know."

"And do you?"

"Passionately. It just lands me in heaven!"

They had arrived some twenty minutes before the music commenced, and had secured a couple of seats in a position from which the vocalists could be clearly heard and seen. Never had Ralph felt so happy as to-night, and yet with the happiness were mingled feelings of uncertainty and unrest. He knew his own heart clearly, absolutely; if only he might know too the heart of the girl at his side!

For a while she seemed absorbed in the music, scarcely giving heed to her companion. The orchestra rose to the size of the audience, and played as though it meant to enhance its already great reputation. Maud was enthusiastic; Trevor caught the glow of her enthusiasm, and between the various items on the programme they fell to discussing warmly the points of appreciation. How many tastes they had in common! The girl's face lit up with the enjoyment she was feeling, and almost against his will Ralph found himself again and again looking into her eyes.

"One more song, and then the interval!" she said. "Shall we go outside for a little then?"

"If you like, and won't catch cold."

"Oh, I shan't do that! We can get our seats again?"

"Yes, I've the counterfoils of the tickets. It is hot in here, and I shall be glad of a breath of fresh air. Ah, here comes the singer!"

It was the "Jewel Song" from "Faust," sung superbly by a lady who, though not of great reputation, had clearly considerable knowledge of the stage business and took the trouble to realise, even though it was only on a concert platform, the character of Margaret. She was recalled again and again, but wisely refused to spoil the effect of complying with the calls for an encore.

"That was too lovely for words," said Miss Napier, when the applause had finally subsided.

Trevor glanced closely at her; there was strong emotion in the accents of her voice. If only he were less diffident in speaking, surely it would not be hard to win a girl with such sensitive feelings.

"We'll go outside then now. You'll put on your cloak?"

"I suppose I'd better. Thank you very much!"

Ralph's hand trembled a little as he adjusted the cloak around her.

"I'd turn the collar up," he suggested.

It was a simple remark, but something in the voice made her look into his face. It was very pale, and there was a queer haunting expression in his eyes. As they passed out together, their shoulders accidentally brushed one another. A new and tremendous knowledge for which Maud had been groping thrilled her from head to foot.

As for Trevor, he moved like a man in a dream. Unconsciously their steps took one of the more obscure paths where two only could walk abreast, and in a minute they found themselves away from the bright lights of the pavilion, away from the chattering crowd, along with the magic and rapture of thoughts that were far too deep for immediate words. Ralph was tongue-tied. Fearful of disappointment, he could not put the great, great question hanging on his lips. It was the girl who spoke first.

"Do you mind if we sit down on this seat. I am tired."

It was true. The gust of personal felings which she had never experienced before took much of the strength out of her.

They sat down under the shadow of the shrubs. A slip of the moon just showed through an opening above. It was the very night for intimate confession, and yet through pride and timidity Trevor seemed likely to let the golden chance go by.

In that brief glance before they left the building Maud had read him like a book. She was always a girl of intuitions, and she could trust them. Yes, she was loved, and the note from her own heart was no echo but a responsive voice. She had been offered love twice before—in very plain words too—but she had never felt like this, though nothing had been said. Dare she reply to a question that was not openly put? Surely, surely, if the reason at which she guessed prevented Trevor from speaking!

"You looked very strange just now," she said slowly. "I think I understand. I know you so well and—words aren't always necessary, are they? There!"

She put out her hand. He took it, and at last the words came.

"Maud, I can tell you now. I love you, dear."

"And I you, as you know. Did it matter my speaking first? Love was so mutual, Ralph, wasn't it?"

And they sealed that matter of mutual affinity in the usual way.

* * * * * * *

Three months after the date of their engagement Maud was spending one Saturday afternoon with Trevor in his home looking over some of his treasures.

"Oh, you keep a newspaper cutting book!" she observed. "How interesting!"

"Yes, I once had a mania for writing to papers."

"What's this? A lot of letters on 'Should Women Propose?' I seem to remember——"

"They're silly, Maud. Pass on!"

"Wait a moment! Is this yours, signed R. T.?"

"Yes, that's mine!"

Her eyes scanned it, and travelled to the next.

"How funny, Ralph; why, the next one is by me!"

"You? You were that Maud?"

"I *was* that Maud. I'm not now. Oh, how stupid and childish it reads. Don't circumstances change one's opinions?"

"They certainly do. Let me see what you wrote!"

Their heads bent together over the page. They raised them simultaneously, and she looked him roguishly in the eyes.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed, "I'm wearing an engagement ring" (she touched it lovingly) "and you didn't speak first, did you, Ralph?"

Herbert Jamieson.

Extremely Silly.

CLARA: "Well, dear, I am going to marry the Earl of Broadstairs." Maud: "Then, what are you looking so glum about it for?" Clara: "I am afraid my *fiancé* won't like it. Men are so silly."

Girls Will be Girls.

ADELINE: "What would you do if you were in my shoes?" Madge (after a glance at them): "Get a pair about four times smaller."

A Good Reason.

"HULLO, Jones, what are you doing with your coat buttoned up to your chin? Are you ill?" Jones: "Hush; don't mention it. I have on a tie that my wife chose."

One Thing She Hadn't Seen.

"AND now," said the country cousin to the City girl, "I have shown you everything on the farm." "Oh, George, you haven't done any such thing. Why, I heard father say before I started that you had a mortgage on it that covered nine-tenths of the ground."

Papa Forgot Himself.

LITTLE NELL: "I don't like my papa one bit. He's awful selfish." Mamma: "Is he?" Little Nell: "Yes. He nearly sat down on my dollie, an' then, instead of takin' another chair, he took her chair right away from her, an' left her on the hard floor."

Thought She Was Qualified.

MRS. DE JAR: "Is there an idiot asylum near here?" Mr. De Jar: "I believe so." "Do they take people on their own recommendation?" "My stars! How should I know? Why?" "Oh, nothing, only to-day I got hold of a package of my old love-letters."

The Lion and the Carrot.

A YOUNG married lady was explaining the difference between silver and electro to a small domestic, and said: "Mary, you will always find a 'lion' on anything that is real silver." "Yes, mum," said Mary, "I'll remember, and I've heard say as there is always carrots on gold, though I ain't seen them."

What She Said.

CLARA: "Oh, I am so glad to see you! I have some good news." Maud: "What can it be? A proposal?" Clara: "Yes. But you don't know who it's from." Maud: "Let me see. Why, it must be from—from——" Clara: "Charlie Haskins." Maud (hiding her surprise): "Oh, yes, of course. What did he say, dear?" Clara: "Oh, he was so nice. He began by declaring that he had always thought of me." Maud: "Then—he was sitting in the chair, wasn't he? He moved over to the sofa and took your hand in both of his, and told you how he had gradually learnt to love you, and remarked incidentally that he thought that kind of love was the more lasting." Clara: "Why, so he did!" Maud: "Then he was silent for a time, and finally said you must excuse him, but he was so overcome by his emotions. Then his arm slipped round your waist, and he said you were the only girl he had ever cared for in his whole life, adding he could not live without you. No, no, that would be impossible. And would you not say just the one little word that would make him, oh, so happy?" Clara: Well, I don't see how you know, but it was something like that." Maud: "And what was your answer?" Clara (beaming): "Why, dear, what would you have said?" Maud: "I said no."

A Very Different Colour.

"I SUPPOSE the baby is a delicate pink—eh, Smith?" Smith: "No. He's a robust yeller."

Not Always Thus.

TRAMP: "Madam, I was not always thus." Madam: "No. It was your other arm you had in a sling this morning."

Couldn't Master Those.

WICKERS: "They tell me, professor, that you have mastered all the modern tongues." Professor: "All but two—my wife's and her mother's."

Two Birds.

HE: "Will you marry me?" She: "No." He: "Then will you marry Harry Sawyer? He wanted me to ask you for him, too, while I was about it."

Bertha was Cautious.

BERTHA: "Grandma, is oor teef good?" Grandma: "No, darling; I've got none now, unfortunately." Bertha: "Then I'll give oo my nuts to mind till I come back."

No Family Likeness.

"AND are you the captain's boy?" asked the old lady on deck. "Yes'm," he replied. "Well, you don't look like him at all," she said, "and I never would have believed it."

Willie's Ambition.

"WILLIE," said the visitor, "what is your ambition?" "I'd like," said the boy, putting down his yellow-covered story of the plains, "to have people tremble like leaves at the mere mention of my name."

Wasted Sympathy.

"AND that is your answer?" "It is. But I hope my refusal will not cause you unhappiness, Mr. Perkins." "No, indeed. Smith said you'd snap up the first man that offered himself, and I bet him you wouldn't. I'm a box of cigars ahead."

A Source of Income.

MINISTER'S WIFE: "I think it is perfectly scandalous the Widow Bentley marrying again, and for the fourth time. Don't you think so, my dear?" Minister: "Well, it would hardly be right for me to say anything against Mrs. Bentley, my dear; she has been too good a customer of mine."

Diplomatic Wickwire.

MRS. WICKWIRE: "From the happy expression you had when Mrs. Potts was singing, one might imagine that you enjoyed that sort of thing. You don't break out into happy smiles over my singing." Mr. Wickwire: "I wasn't smiling over her singing. I was just thinking how lucky I was that she belonged to Potts instead of to myself."

Perfectly Safe.

THEY were standing at the front gate. "Won't you come into the parlour and sit a little while, Georgie, dear?" "N-no, I think not," replied Georgie hesitatingly. "I wish you would," the girl went on; "it's so awfully lonely. Mother has gone out, and father is upstairs groaning with rheumatism in the legs." "Both legs?" asked George. "Yes, both legs." "Then I'll come in."

Excellent References.

A MAN who looked extremely suspicious applied at a boarding-house for a home, and was received by the landlady. "I presume," she said, after inspecting him critically and hearing what he had to say, "that you can give references?" "What kind do you wish, madam?" he inquired with a smile. "Well," she hesitated, "I don't know who you are, and I would like something in the way of a recommendation." "All I can offer, madam," he said, pulling out some papers, "are here; they are receipted bills from every landlady I ever boarded with, up to date, as you will observe." Her face brightened. "Oh," she exclaimed, "that will do. You can have anything in the house you want."

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The Parting of the Ways.

A Pathetic Little Love Incident.

BERTHA, standing at the window of the room, held a seashell to her ear. By her on a table was a vase, a sea-gull with wings curved curiously under, for the holding of flowers. Her left hand rested on the gull.

At the back of the room among a laughing crowd sat Ernest. He was busily engaged in drawing caricatures.

A young girl drew near to Bertha.

"Why do you hold the shell to your ear so long?" she asked.

"I am listening," she explained, "to the sound of the sea. No matter how far inland you take it, a shell like this sings of the sea. It is like the soul singing of eternity."

"Bertha, Bertha!" voices came calling from the other end of the room. "Come. Have your caricature drawn. Look. Such ears, such noses, such mouths! Stand still for yours. There, Ernest, she is posing. Commence."

Ernest took a fresh sheet of paper. He sharpened his pencil to a point.

"A little this way," he commanded. "Now." And he scratched it swiftly over the paper, drawing.

The others gathered round him, some kneeling by his side, others leaning over.

"Splendid!" they cried. "Oh, Bertha, if you could only see! It is worse than ours. Those eyes!"

They laughed convulsively, one girl until she coughed.

By and by Ernest, rising, presented the picture to Bertha with an elaborate bow in which the slim white fingers grotesquely swept the floor.

She looked at the sketch a moment, frowned almost imperceptibly, and laid it back on the table.

Ernest reached out his hand for it.

"Shall I tear it up?" he asked.

"No," replied Bertha. "Leave it there. I want it for future reference."

The chill of her manner fell upon the rest. They dispersed in twos and threes, some going into the drawing-room, where they played duets and sang snatches of song, others to the little parlour glimmering through the width of open doors, and the two were left alone.

"I have offended you," said Ernest; adding, "It seems to me that lately I am always offending you."

"It is hardly your fault," she returned gently. "It is the fault of our natures; that is all. They clash."

"Sit here," he begged, pushing forward a chair, "and let us talk about it."

She sat down and idly took up the caricature. He, opposite, watched her face as she studied it.

"And this is how you see me," she mused. "There is something abnormal about it. The artist nature is perforce peculiar, else it would not be an artist. It is almost impossible. The nature of the caricaturist is impossible. To see people and things so distorted suggests distortion in the one who sees. It is as if your mind were a twisted X-ray which fantastically reveals the skeleton."

Leaning back in the armchair he had taken, he regarded her out of amused eyes.

"Go on," he insisted. "Don't spare my feelings."

He said it laughingly, but there was a cynical look about his mouth that she had got to know.

"The picture is as I shall look ten years hence," she went on. "If you are always to see me ten years older than I am, all the saints and angels protect me! Such foresight is rife for the breeding of unhappiness."

"You cross bridges before you get to them, Bertha. You borrow trouble."

"Sometimes it is just as well, Ernest."

"Yes."

"We shall never be happy together."

"If it was the drawing of the picture, Bertha, that was a little thing. Let me tear it up and let it be as if it had never been drawn. Will you?"

"Life is made up of little things. They are the straws that show the way the wind is blowing. No; don't tear it up. I want it for future reference, as I said. I want to be reminded by it that if I should be married to you not only my face but my every action would be distorted thus."

"No, no!"

"Yes. And that is not all. We are too alike for happiness. Both sensitive as flowers, both jealous. We quarrel now; we would quarrel then. After marriage the making up is not so sweet as before. It grows monotonous, and then come the sleepless nights and the tears—the tears. Already with me they have commenced. The night you kissed Mabel I waked at four o'clock and never closed my eyes again. I lay still, half heartbroken, watching the pattern of the paper on the wall grow out of dimness and take to itself its old fantastic shape in the light of the dawn."

"Mabel is hardly seventeen. She is only a child."

"Children grow to be women, and soon. Suppose we were married and two years from now she came to our house and you kissed her again."

She tapped trembling fingers on the arm of her chair.

"I should die of it," she faltered.

He drew up his chair nearer and, taking the trembling fingers in his own, he caressed them.

"Somewhere or other in Grimm's fairy tales," he said, "there is just this sort of story. Isn't there a girl who goes down in the cellar and sits there weeping because some day she might marry and the storks might bring her a little child, and the little child might fall down the steps to that cellarway and break its leg?"

"It is only when you love a man," she continued to muse, following up her own train of thought, "that you lose the blessed sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care."

"Didn't I come to you early the next morning and comfort you, Bertha?"

"Her kiss was on your lips," she answered.

With a shrug of his shoulders he laughed.

"You are ridiculous," he affirmed.

"Once you were mine," she resumed, as if he had not spoken. "I should want you to be all mine. So far as I have been able to judge, no man ever belonged solely to one woman. Therefore, since the thing is impossible, it is best to tear ourselves apart before it is too late."

He dropped her fingers.

"You speak very coldly of tearing ourselves apart, Bertha," he complained.

"I am not cold, but I scent unhappiness. Living alone is a negative unhappiness. Living together would be positive."

After a pause, she continued—

"Besides, I am a rover. Already I have stayed in this one place too long. I begin to grow restless again."

"If you put your head on my shoulder a little while, wouldn't that take away your restlessness?"

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"For a little while, perhaps; but it would return, and then I should have to go back again to my Mother Nature for comfort. She comforts with flowers, with dew, with soft, sweet breezes, but most of all with the sea. The moan of it, the sob, the sometime sigh; its lights—rose lights, white lights, soft, mellow lights of the setting sun—drifting while you look into the silver shimmer of a crescent moon. I long for the sea."

"Bertha, you make me sad, as sad, sitting there, as if you were alone, longing for the sea. You are not alone, my sweetheart. I am here."

She regarded him with a gaze that seemed not to see him.

"For months I have studied you," she began. "You have given me much happiness, but more unhappiness. If you had not overbalanced the happiness with the unhappiness you would not have been a man."

There came a look about his mouth which was like that of a hurt child. She had grown to know that also.

"You have many lovable qualities," she soothed, "but with the exaggeration of the artistic temperament you possess an exaggerated power to hurt. This you make use of frequently. My life with you would be part ecstatic happiness and part acute despair. And the despair, I am afraid, would far outweigh the happiness."

The snatches of song drifted from the drawing-room in upon the silence which had fallen between them.

"Alone we come into the world," she said slowly, "and alone we go out of it. But I, it seems, am one of those creatures born only to live alone from the cradle to the grave. I wish to be the only one. Few women in this old world have that happiness. I can hardly dare to hope that it will be meted out to me."

"You are the only one with me now, Bertha."

"Now!" she repeated. "The 'now' is characteristic. I am your girl while the summer lasts, but there are winters to come and other summer times. How will it be then? Others came before me. Others will follow."

He shook his head in dissent.

"I know your nature," she averred. "It is summed up in one word—'artist.' There are many synonyms for the word—volatile, ephemeral, vacillating, irresolute, weak. But the one word suffices. To turn it into an adjective you are artist and that describes you."

He rose.

"I will go," he said, "and come back by this way again when you are in better humour."

"If you are wise," said she, rising also, "you will never come back."

He stopped short.

"Do you mean that, Bertha?" he questioned, the words coming distinctly clear with a touch of infinite sadness.

"I mean it," asserted she.

He made a step forward.

"Will you kiss me good-bye, then?" he asked.

"If I kissed you I should want to keep you, and I am very sure that it is best for you to go."

He walked through the room out into the hall to the door. He put his hand on the knob and looked back at her. Though her face had paled to the whiteness of her gown she made no effort to recall him. He turned the knob and went out. The door shut on him.

She started forward with a sharp, quick cry as if she would have opened the door. Then, clasping one hand to her heart, she caught up the sea-shell and held it close to her ear, listening.

The group at the piano, rushing laughingly in, found her standing motionless as the statue of a woman with the shell to her ear.

"Are you still listening to the sound of the sea, Bertha?" they asked.

"Still listening," she answered, "to the sound of the sea."

"But why," they queried, "are your eyes so sad?"

"They look on life," she answered, "and life is sad."

Z. A. Norris.

Your Editor Chats.

THIS week I have received the following letter from a Glasgow reader:

"In introducing 'How I Chaperoned Belinda' you tell us that we are to learn how men of honourable names use the basest means to force a young woman into marriage, because she is the heiress to great wealth. Now, seeing that the law in no way forces a woman to share her wealth with her husband, and that the law also allows a woman to abandon her husband (either with or without cause) at any moment she pleases, and, further, that the law compels a man to support his wife, no matter how rich that wife herself may be, does it not seem absurd to expect intelligent people to take an interest in the so-called 'revelations'? Had you given us some accounts of the base means used by women to ensnare a wealthy young man into marriage they would no doubt have been worth reading, as, in that case, they need not have been ridiculous."

I am glad to have an opportunity of clearing up this point, which may have occurred to many other readers. What my correspondent says concerning a married woman is undoubtedly correct. She has the control of her money and can claim her liberty at will—if she has the courage. I must point out, however, that the series of articles criticised deal not with a married woman, but with an inexperienced unmarried girl of seventeen. A girl of that age, with but a limited knowledge of the world, is not likely to have as keen a grasp of the law as my Glasgow friend appears to think. Certainly we never met one with so exhaustive a comprehension of the Married Women's Property Act!

The case of Belinda is, unfortunately, a typical one. Every year men of wealth, but of plebeian origin, on this and the other side of the Atlantic, procure titled husbands for their daughters. The fact is palpable—refer to the list of fashionable marriages. How often this is done against the daughter's inclination it is our purpose to show. The bargain is concluded in hard cash, the title is bought for so many thousands down, and the girl is handed over to the tender mercies of the husband her father's wealth has bought. Once married she can, of course, leave that husband when she likes. But how few young girls have the knowledge or the courage necessary to take a step that invariably incurs the odium of Society! Surely prevention is better than cure, and it is in the hope that in calling attention to this matrimonial sale and barter we may quicken public feeling against it, that we have decided to set forth the facts contained in Lady Peggy Carstairs' revelations.

I am always delighted to receive criticisms of any of the stories that appear in this little paper, whether such criticisms are favourable or otherwise, and I am delighted to be able to say that all those letters I have received concerning the opening chapters of "How I Chaperoned Belinda" (with the one exception above) express the great appreciation that readers feel concerning them. One correspondent in particular, who seems to know what he is talking about, says:

"I like David Carr already, for I think him a rattling good Britisher, and I do not think Lady Peggy will get rid of him so quickly as she thinks. A man's true love in the middle classes is not so easily brushed aside as it is in the 'smart set.' David's personation to get near his love is remarkably witty, and Honoria being embraced by the Egyptian is just as it should be, and, in my opinion, could not be nearer the truth. Being a Customs House officer myself, I have a lot of dealings with big passenger boats, and I have heard and seen enough to convince me that all Lady Peggy is writing is genuine."

YOUR EDITOR.

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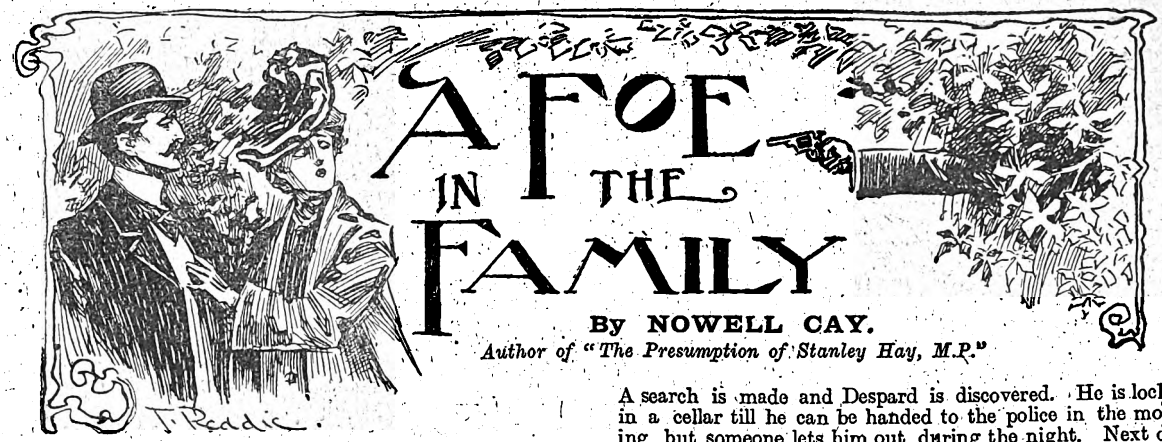

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Plot to be Frustrated.

GEORGE ILDEN, Baron, of Ilden Castle, while staying with his uncle Jasper, at Pennybrook Hall, suddenly discovers that several suspicious events which have taken place during his stay at the Hall, point to the existence of a plot against his life. He has been shot at, poison has been placed in his pocket-flask, and other attempts, fortunately futile, have been made on his life. He confides in Cathie Hay, his cousin, and they agree that as many members of his own family would materially benefit by his death, the attempts must have their origin in that direction. They suspect Percival, Ilden's cousin. Ilden asks Cathie to marry him, as a means of circumventing his enemies' designs, but she has to refuse.

At about this time he meets Florence Courthorpe, the sister of an old college chum who was drowned while boating. She is very poor, and has taken a situation as governess at Witterby, a village not far from Pennybrook. In seeking to escape his foe, Ilden inadvertently settles down just opposite Florence's temporary home.

Late one night Florence sees a man attempt to enter Ilden's bedroom window with evident criminal designs. She leaves the house clad only in dressing-gown and warns Ilden of his danger. For this exploit her employer dismisses her.

She now has no home, so next day leaves Witterby to stay with some friends at Lallerton. Ilden accompanies her. Arrived at Lallerton, however, they discover that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left suddenly, and no trace of them can be found. Florence, of course, is greatly distressed.

Ilden, however, feeling that he is responsible for her position, and desiring to baulk his enemy, proposes to her, is accepted, and marries her secretly. An announcement in the papers informs his family of the wedding.

Shortly after their marriage Ilden receives a message urging him to return to Pennybrook, his uncle Rupert being dangerously ill. Leaving his wife at the apartments he has taken at Sydenham, Ilden leaves for Pennybrook. He is met at the Hall by Cathie, who informs him that his uncle is dead, and that he is again exposing his life to danger.

Cathie informs him of her belief that Guy Despard is in the plot, and insinuates that his own wife, being a friend of the Despards, is possibly implicated.

That night her fears for his safety are shown to be well founded. For in the middle of the night the alarm bell is violently rung, and as Ilden opens his door to ascertain the cause, an attempt is made to stab him. Ilden immediately gives chase to his would-be murderer, and, catching him, throws him down, and is half-strangling him when Grant appears with a light, the rays of which show Ilden's captive to be none other than his cousin Percival. Percival, however, declares that he saw Despard entering Ilden's room and thought he was stabbing at him.

A search is made and Despard is discovered. He is locked in a cellar till he can be handed to the police in the morning, but someone lets him out during the night. Next day Ilden leaves the Hall to make inquiries regarding Despard at Lallerton, and finds that Despard has been there before him and knows of Lady Ilden's assumed name of Mrs. George and her hiding place at Sydenham.

He immediately changes his plans and hurries to Sydenham, only to find that Florence has gone, no one knows whither.

It appears that shortly after Ilden had left his wife to go to Pennybrook, a girl had called on Florence, and had asked her to go to the death-bed of her friend, Miss Despard, who was living close by. While gazing at her unconscious friend, the maid had made the astonishing announcement that Lord Ilden was not Florence's husband, but the husband of the dying Miss Despard. Unable to realise the import of the words, Florence had simply replied, "Lord Ilden is *my* husband."

(*The above is a short synopsis of the opening chapters.*)

"He is My Husband!"

SHE spoke the words bravely in spite of the terrible fear clutching at her heart, the fear that she would not allow herself to realise.

The maid changed colour at this open expression of disbelief.

"If he is your husband, then it is funny that he should want you to live with him here under a false name," she said mercilessly, and Florence made no answer.

She could not explain to this girl, but of course the explanation was a full and satisfactory one for herself. She tried to deafen her ears to the mocking voice that said it was not. There had seemed something unreal and impossible in the plot against her husband all along.

What, said the voice, if it were only a pretence, intended to make her agree to a secret marriage, hurried on without any introduction to her husband's friends—any acknowledgment by them of the tie?

For the moment she had lost consciousness of the silent figure on the bed, and she started, every nerve quivering, as a faint but perfectly articulate call came from it.

"Clara!"

The maid was bending over her mistress instantly.

"Yes, miss, I am here."

"Is Mr. Guy here?" asked the voice, weakly.

"No, miss, he was here this afternoon, but he has gone away again.

"I heard you talking. I suppose that it is nurse."

Florence came forward, her heart beating violently at the thought that the moment of perfect consciousness which the doctor had anticipated had come.

"It is I, Florrie," she said, her voice trembling, and the dying girl smiled faintly, as their lips met.

"Poor Florrie," she said softly, "I am so sorry! But I hope that he really loves you, and I shall not stand in your way now. I felt very bitter just at first, when I saw your name in the paper; but I felt that you could not know, and I suppose he never loved me really, although I have trusted him all through."

The words came slowly and with an effort, and Florence seemed to hold her breath listening. The name she dreaded to hear had not yet passed the dying woman's lips.

She had paused as if to collect her thoughts.

"I am sorry that Guy is not here," she went on, even more feebly. "I should have liked to have told him. It cannot matter to George, or affect his prospects, now that I am dying; and it might make poor Guy less bitter against him if he knew that we were really married. I told him a lie to please George. I should like you to tell Guy if you see him, and tell him that I want him to forgive Lord Ilden. He must put away this terrible idea of taking his life. You will urge him for yourself, will you not, to put away these thoughts of revenge, although Lord Ilden has injured you too? You would not have Guy injure him?"

She paused for an answer, and Florence's voice came almost as low and faint as hers.

"No, I love him."

"Then you will not tell Guy where he is? He has sworn that when he sees him he will take his life. You will not tell him?"

The heart of her listener gave a great throb. Suddenly, as in a flash, it came to her that it was Guy Despard who had been waiting outside the lighted window of the inn at Witterby. He had been at Pennybrook when Ilden's life had been attempted in the coppice. It was because she had told him where his enemy was that he had gone away without waiting for his sister to recover consciousness, hoping that he could come back to her with news that he had taken the life of the man who had broken her heart.

"You will not tell him?" the dying woman urged again, as she remained silent, paralysed by the thoughts which crowded into her mind. "George has injured you deeply, I know. I suppose that he must be cruel and unfair, although it is so hard to think it. I have had bitter moments after I saw the announcement of his marriage, when I have felt as though it would be right for him to die. I thought of him breaking your heart as he has broken mine, and I almost felt that Guy was right. But it is for God to avenge, not man, and I only pray now that poor Guy may not find him."

Florence's voice, harsh and strained, interrupted her.

"It is too late. I have told your brother where Lord Ilden is."

But even the tragedy in her voice seemed unable to shadow the tired serenity of the girl who lay dying.

Her eyes had closed wearily.

"Poor George!" she murmured drowsily, and after a pause, "Poor Guy!"

They were her last words.

Florence had fallen on her knees by the side of the bed, and she seemed to awake from semi-unconsciousness to find the doctor and nurse in the room. The latter was speaking to her.

"She is gone, poor dear, and no grieving can bring her back."

Florence rose to her feet unsteadily; but her thoughts were not of the tragedy of death which had taken place before her eyes so much as of the tragedy of the living in which she had unconsciously played such an important part.

Guy Despard was on his way to Pennybrook to kill George. She could not doubt it. For what other reason would he have left the death-bed of the sister to whom he was devoted? Despard was on his way to kill George, and it was she who had betrayed the latter to his enemy.

He had deceived her, perhaps. She could not think clearly of that. Daisy had said that he was not her husband. But whatever he was or had done she loved him, and she had betrayed him. It was for her to save him. Her mind held no other thought.

Already she was losing valuable time when she ought to have been following him to Pennybrook, and she only waited to bid a silent, tearless farewell to the silent figure of the girl she had loved as a sister, before leaving the house to begin her journey.

A feverish impatience possessed her now, and she made her way direct to the station without even returning to the house in the next avenue which had been her home, and which she realised vaguely would never be her home again.

Florence Visits Pennybrook.

THE night that at Pennybrook Hall was disturbed by the capture of Guy Despard was spent by poor Lady Ilden at a York Hotel. She had advanced that far on her journey only to find that the last train even for Rickerby had gone, and she had spent the night without sleep, only waiting till the morning should come to make the continuation of her journey possible.

The interruption had come as a great blow to her, killing the hope that had made her journey to the North one long fever of impatience.

When she went on in the morning it was with a dull hopelessness, a feeling that Fate had been unkind and that she was doomed to be too late.

It was a pale, pathetic ghost of the happy girl-wife of Sydenham who reached Pennybrook at last, barely fifteen minutes, had she known it, after Ilden had started on his disturbing visit to Lallerton. Only fifteen minutes that might have made everything so different, which might even have averted the final tragedy.

Catherine Hay had barely returned to the Hall after seeing George off at the station when Florence approached the house, the terrible foreboding in her heart quickened almost to a certainty by the sight of the drawn blinds. Somebody was dead at the Hall. Who could it be but George? She had come too late to warn him. And he had been all the world to her. It held nothing but him.

She hesitated uncertainly in dread of the confirmation of her fears which must meet her when she reached the house and made her inquiries, but her trembling limbs carried her on.

Wardle, the old butler, answered her timid ring, and was not a little exercised in his mind as to who the beautiful girl could be whose white face seemed in a way familiar, and who inquired so timidly whether Lord Ilden was at the Hall.

She stared at him with a strange incredulity when he said that his lordship had left the house half an hour earlier, as if she suspected him of a wilful attempt to deceive her.

"But the blinds are drawn. Somebody is dead," she said.

"Yes, ma'am, Mr. Rupert, the master's brother."

She remembered for the first time since she left Sydenham, that it was to see his uncle, who was ill, that George had left her. If he had deceived her, this at least was true. Her heart leapt to know that the mocking voice had for once been wrong. At Sydenham by Daisy Despard's death-bed it had suggested that this was an excuse he had made for deserting her.

"And can you tell me where he has gone?" she asked.

Wardle could not say. He would inquire,

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and he was asking her into the hall to wait when she stopped him with another anxious question.

"Do you know whether a Mr. Despard has been here to see Lord Ilden either last night or this morning."

The butler's face changed instantly. His master had just been announcing that he would give a reward of twenty pounds to the person who recaptured this Despard or the accomplice who had unbolted his prison door.

"Yes, ma'am," he said diplomatically, "may I ask whether you are a friend of Mr. Despard's?"

She was answering in the affirmative, leaping at the hope that she might meet her friend's brother and turn him from his purpose, when a girl of about her own age came forward from the hall, her naturally pleasant face clouded with angry suspicion.

Catherine had been passing through the hall and overheard what had passed. Here was a friend, probably an accomplice of the man who threatened her cousin's life, who evidently had not yet heard that the identity of her ally had been discovered. The opportunity of obtaining damaging admissions from her was not to be lost, and she disappointed Wardle, who had been thinking exactly the same thing, by taking the matter into her own hands.

"If you will come in," she said trying to keep the suspicion and hostility which stirred her out of her voice, "I can give you any information you want about Mr. Despard and Lord Ilden. You can wait here, Wardle."

She was leading the way to a little room opening from the hall, and felt safer for the presence of the old butler outside. The accomplice of a man like Despard might be dangerous.

But even to Catherine the precaution seemed a little absurd when she was able to observe her visitor clearly. This graceful girl, with her beautiful and anxious face, was as different as she could be from the typical desperado. Her big violet eyes were so pathetic in their questioning anxiety that Cathie found it difficult to steel her heart against her. But the suspicion that these same violet eyes had clouded her cousin's judgment made her voice cold.

"You are a friend of Mr. Despard's, I think you said. May I ask why you inquire for him here?"

"I have a message for him from his sister who is just dead," said Florence. "If you know where he is, I must beg you to let me know at once. It is of the utmost importance."

Catherine resisted the appeal.

"What I was trying to ascertain is why you should expect to find Mr. Despard here?" she said with as much indifference as she could command.

"I have reason to know that he is following Lord Ilden."

Catherine nodded. This was the admission she had been anxious to obtain.

"You are a friend of Mr. Despard's, and you knew that he was following Lord Ilden," she said judicially. "Can you tell me why he was following him?"

But poor Florence could restrain her anxiety no longer.

"Something has happened," she cried. "Lord Ilden is dead. Why will you not tell me?"

Cathie found it more necessary than ever to steel herself against the agony in the appeal that sounded so real.

"You knew, then, that this Despard intended to take his life. He made the attempt, but I am glad to tell you that it was unsuccessful. Your friend is at the present a fugitive from justice with a price set on his recapture."

Cathie felt half afraid of the open but justifiable hostility she was showing as she watched her visitors' face. It seemed impossible to believe that the glow of relief over-spreading it could be anything but genuine. Her own hostility seemed lost sight of.

"And Lord Ilden was not injured?" she asked, anxiously.

"Thanks to the courage and promptitude of his cousin, Mr. Grant Ilden, he escaped without a scratch. But you have not told me who you are."

Florence looked at the questioner hesitatingly. She had entered Pennybrook Hall with even more vague apprehension than Catherine had felt in admitting her. Clearly, as it seemed to be shown all Lord Ilden's danger was due to Guy Despard and his resentment on Daisy's account, she could not entirely free herself of the distrust which he had made her feel of his relatives. She could still remember that he had imagined it unsafe for anybody at Pennybrook Hall to know where she was, and, although she had been compelled to transgress his wishes and show herself there, she was still hoping to hide her identity.

"I would rather that you did not ask me, please," she said quickly. "I only want to know where Lord Ilden is gone, so that I may follow and warn him. You say that Mr. Despard is still hiding?"

Catherine's face clouded with fresh suspicion at the refusal. If, as she had suspected from the first, this was the adventuress whom George had made his wife, what object could she have in hiding her identity, unless she was playing a part of which she did not want her husband to hear.

"But if you do not give me your name," she said, "how do I know that you are not in league with this man, Despard, with whose plot against my cousin's life you admit yourself acquainted? How do I know that you are not seeking Lord Ilden's whereabouts to betray them to your accomplice?"

And she opened the door.

"Wardle, will you ask your master to come here?"

The butler hurried away to obey the order. But Florence had already taken alarm at it. The Honourable Jasper Ilden would probably recognise her, and her identity could be hidden no longer. Her nervous fear of her husband's relatives came back with redoubled force. They would not tell her where Lord Ilden was. They might even detain her. She had run into the danger against which her husband had warned her. And with a sudden remorse she realised that she had disobeyed him uselessly. At the best she had done no good. She might for all she knew have fallen into a plot which he saw more clearly than she.

She made her way to the door.

"I do not wish to see anybody," she said with dignity. "You will not tell me where Lord Ilden is. I must discover for myself. Please allow me to pass."

For Catherine, more suspicious than ever, had her back to the door. The fact made her visitor desperate, and she exerted all her strength to fling it open. Once out of the room into which she had been entrapped she would be able to get away from the house and escape.

But as she reached the hall a fresh obstacle presented itself. Two young men were entering from the grounds, and for a moment she stopped hopelessly. Then with a sudden thrill of happy surprise she started forward, calling her husband's name.

But the hope lived only for a moment. As the elder of the two young men turned his face she realised that she had made a mistake. It was not her husband, and panic seized her again. Catherine was close behind her, red and excited, the two men staring in surprise in the doorway.

Then Percival Ilden came forward raising his hat.

"Lady Ilden, I believe. You have heard of this attempt

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on Ilden's life, and come to assure yourself of his safety. I am afraid that he has already left Pennybrook."

To the frightened girl, prejudiced in his favour by his superficial resemblance to George, his voice sounded sympathetic. She turned to him appealingly.

"You will tell me where he has gone, and let me follow him to warn him of his danger?"

"I imagine that Ilden has received as much warning as he needs," said Percival; "but of course you will be anxious to join him."

Grant, who remained in the doorway, had eyes only for Catherine. It was apparent that some hostile passage had taken place between the two girls, and the fact sickened him. Had Catherine allowed her jealousy to carry her so far as that?

"Surely nobody wishes to prevent you following your husband, Lady Ilden?" he said suspiciously, and her instinctive glance at Catherine answered the question eloquently.

But she was replying to Percival, on whom her hopes of escape centred themselves.

"I have a message to Mr. Despard from his sister which might change his terrible purpose. If he finds my husband, and I am sure that he is pursuing him still, I must be there to make them understand."

Percival changed colour.

"You have a message from Despard's sister?"

"A dying message," she answered quickly, "which must surely affect him. She died yesterday, and they were her last words"

Percival's face had grown even more ghastly. He was not sorry that Catherine saved him the necessity of replying. He wanted time to think.

Grant's glance had made Cathie's colour flame higher, and made her feel the need of justifying herself. Perhaps it had made her wonder a little also whether the justification was possible. As usual, she had acted on impulse, and was troubled now by the second thoughts that always punish impulsive action. Had she permitted her prejudice to make her unjust and horrible? The girl's admitted acquaintance with the Despards seemed to awaken no suspicion in the minds of the men listening to her.

"Lady Ilden would not tell me her name, although I guessed it," she said, hotly still. "She admits that she knew Despard was coming here to attempt George's life. I do not think we ought to let her go until she tells us how she knew."

"She has already told us," said Grant coldly. "She is acquainted with the man's sister, and received a death-bed confession from her yesterday, which naturally brought her here."

"She ought at least to tell us why her *friend*, Despard, has been attempting George's life," protested Cathie. "If she will tell us *that*, I shall be willing to admit that she is not Despard's accomplice."

"An accomplice of the man who has attempted her husband's life!" cried Grant, sharply. "That is preposterous."

"And as for Despard's motive, that is of more importance for Ilden to know than for us," put in Percival. "We only waste Lady Ilden's time when she ought to be joining her husband. I can quite understand your eagerness, Lady Ilden, and will see you to the station at once, if I may."

The sound of footsteps on the stairs, which warned him that his uncle and the butler were approaching, made him throw open the door impatiently, and he was relieved to find Florence fully as eager as himself to leave the house. She followed him gratefully, welcoming the quick pace at which he strode down the avenue.

The master of the house reached the hall, to find the suspect gone.

"What is this," he said thickly to Grant, "Wardle tells me that we have an accomplice of Despard's here?"

(*Continued on next page.*)

Slept for Three Months.

No one has ever explained satisfactorily the mysterious arts of the Indian jugglers. One of these men performed some time ago the remarkable feat of putting himself to sleep, and allowing himself to be buried in a sealed vault for three months. This trick of being able to induce at pleasure a prolonged sleep is one which, were the secret generally known, would save a great amount of suffering, for when one cannot obtain proper rest at night by reason of pain, the whole system becomes undermined, and rendered exposed to diseases even deadly in their nature. It was while she was in this condition that Chas. Forde's bile beans came to the rescue of Mrs. Davidson of Dunhead Farm, Monikie, near Dundee. "For twenty years," said she to a Dundee newspaper man, "a night's sound sleep was denied me on account of acute biliousness and indigestion. Night after night I sat up in bed racked with pain. I had awful pains across my back, shoulders, and stomach, and I was also subject to dizziness. Often a mist would rise up before my eyes and almost blind me, and the terrible pain would make me feel quite faint. A doctor whom I consulted told me that I should never be properly cured, so you can imagine that I was in despair. One day one of my sons brought me a box of Bile Beans, and I began taking them. For the first few days I felt no better, but then, as I continued to take the beans, my health slowly improved. I got a night's undisturbed sleep, the first for twenty years! Then my ailments slowly but surely left me, until after a few months I found myself quite cured. I can always rely on having a good night's rest now. That it was bile beans alone that cured me I am quite certain, and I shall never be without a box in the house." If you are suffering as Mrs. Davidson did, give bile beans a fair trial, and you, too, will have cause to bless them. For biliousness, indigestion, dizziness, sleeplessness, liver and kidney disorder, Chas. Forde's bile beans are the best possible remedy. They are also a certain cure for constipation, piles, neuralgia, colds, rheumatism, anæmia, and all female ailments. They cost one and three halfpence or two and nine, of all chemists, or from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, E.C. They are a boon to sufferers from sleeplessness, curing this by removing its causes.

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"Catherine will tell you about it. I confess that I cannot understand her view."

Meanwhile Percival had begun to talk as they passed out of the avenue gates, after giving a long backward glance to make sure that they were not being followed.

"Did Miss Hay tell you where Ilden had gone?" he asked, and was relieved to find that Catherine, probably the only person at the Hall who actually knew, had given no information. Catherine's attitude was a complete puzzle to him; but the fact that he could not understand it at all rendered it none the less fortunate for him.

"It is lucky, then, that my cousin took me into his confidence over his plans," he went on easily. "The attack on his life last night, together with the knowledge that the man who wishes to kill him is still at large have, of course, made him very nervous. His idea is to keep out of the way so far as possible, until Despard is captured. My uncle has offered a reward for his arrest, and we are, of course, scouring the neighbourhood. Meanwhile Ilden thought it best to retire to Scotland. You know, of course, that he has a small hunting-box there at Lochtarry?—he wrote to you last night, asking you to meet him there. Did you not get it by this morning's post?"

"I have been travelling all night," she said, her voice trembling a little to think that she must travel so far before her quest was ended. "But if you are quite sure, I shall, of course, go there at once without returning to Sydenham."

Percival glanced over his shoulder once more. Nobody was following.

"Oh, there is no doubt at all that Ilden has gone to Lochtarry. You will probably overtake him, though, before he reaches Edinburgh."

Her face brightened at the hope, but fell again suddenly, and she walked on in troubled silence.

"You think it best to follow your husband at once, do you not?" he asked nervously, as she remained silent, and Florence answered timidly.

"I have no money. I came direct from my poor friend's death-bed with her message, and did not think of money. I had just sufficient in my purse to bring me here, but now——"

He was thankful to remember that he had a five pound note in his pocket, and offered it very gracefully.

Poor Florence felt more than ever grateful to him.

"But I do not know to whom I am indebted for so much kindness," she said, as she accepted it. "You speak of Lord Ilden as your cousin. Are you, then, Mr. Percival Ilden."

She wondered as she spoke that George should have expressed some suspicion of such a man if her surmise were correct.

But Percival had always been chary of giving his name when engaged on an enterprise for which a reckoning might have to be paid.

"No, I am Grant Ilden," he said, and held out his hand to her.

"I am sorry that I cannot see you all the way to the station, but I start very shortly for Mordenhale. My poor father's body is to be taken home to-day."

Prudence had suggested that it would be impolitic to be seen more than was necessary with Lady Ilden, now that his purpose was achieved.

There was little chance now that Daisy Despard's message would be delivered either to her brother or to Ilden till after the funeral at Mordenhale, and by that time, if he judged Despard's mood rightly, one would be dead and the other a murderer under lock and key.

So far, all, apparently, was working exactly as he would have desired.

"THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY," Our New Serial, will commence shortly.

Florence Goes North.

Meanwhile, Catherine had felt her suspicion against "Despard's accomplice" only increased by Percival's championship. For in Ilden's opinion, at least, it was Percival who had permitted the would-be murderer to escape. If George was right, it was not likely that his cousin would wish the woman to be questioned about Despard's motives.

She found it impossible, however, to make the Honourable Jasper share her suspicions.

"Why have they let the young woman go before I have questioned her?" he asked, as Grant turned away with an indignant scorn which he was at no pains to conceal.

"Because she is Lady Ilden," said Catherine, and the old man burst into an amused laugh.

"What! George's new wife and you thought her that man's accomplice. Well, this is a good joke. But you have not let her go away again without taking anything. How far has she come, poor girl?"

"I don't know. Lady Ilden seemed very reticent about her movements. And she certainly had no desire to stay. She took alarm when I sent for you."

Mr. Ilden stared at the tone.

"What do you mean?"

"The fact that she is Lady Ilden does not necessarily prove that she is not Despard's accomplice. If he married an adventuress who only wanted his money and title—she knew that Despard was coming here to try and kill him."

"And came to warn him, I suppose. My dear child, you are talking rubbish. I have seen the girl myself at church, and a very nice girl she seems too. You must not take any notice of the stuff that jealous women like—well—Mrs. Haydon, talk about a pretty woman who has made a good match. If she were an adventuress, she would know better than to let Ilden be killed and lose her position at the Castle. It seems to me that everybody has gone mad about this business. Why, Percy has been telling me that Ilden accuses him of letting that rascal out of the cellar. I hope you have not been saying this sort of thing to the poor girl herself, after the trouble she has had coming here."

"I only suggested sending for you and she took to flight," said Catherine.

"Well, go and bring her back then, and tell her that she had better stay here until George can be wired for. Good gracious, I don't know what George will say when he hears that his wife has been frightened away from the house!"

"Percival is escorting her to the station. If I have been discourteous, I have no doubt that he will atone for it," she said half ironically, thinking meanwhile that the two were spending the time plotting together.

"Oh, if Percival is with her it is all right."

The Honourable Jasper's generous impulses were, as usual, easily satisfied, and he returned to the decanter with which he had been fortifying himself for the funeral arrangements.

Catherine was left to continue her justification of what she had done to herself. And already she was troubled by some very serious misgivings.

As Mr. Ilden had instantly suggested, Lady Ilden's knowledge of Despard's purpose by no means made her an accomplice. It was possible that she had heard of it only in time to take this journey to Pennybrook to warn her husband against it. Had she been implicated she would scarcely have appeared at the house as she had done.

Catherine found herself conjuring up, to her discomfort the picture of an anxious and distraught wife appealing for knowledge of the man she loved, after a night of anxiety, only to be met by suspicion and reticence. And the girl's face had been so sweet and innocent. Was it possible that she had

(Continued on page 702.)

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made a mistake? She could never forgive herself if she had.

For a moment she paced the hall in an agony of indecision. Then she put on her hat hurriedly and set off for the station, missing Percival on the way by taking the short cut to the road through the fir coppice.

She had plenty of time she told herself; for no train started for Rickerby on its way either to London or Ilden Market for fully an hour, but the desire to make amends, if amends were needed, made her walk breathlessly.

As she approached the station a train was coming in, but the fact did not affect her for it was going north. It was in the station when she approached the other platform searching in vain there for the figure she expected.

Had Percival not taken her to the station at all she asked herself, with a growing suspicion of the man to compensate for that of his companion.

At the other side of the station they were already closing the doors of the standing train preparatory to its starting again.

But Catherine crossed the bridge without haste. It was only as a matter of form that she was going to assure herself that Lady Ilden was not on the other platform.

The train was beginning to move as she reached it, and the station-master, recognising a lady from the Hall, questioned her with a glance.

Catherine shook her head, she was not going on in the train, and he closed the door he had been holding open.

Then to his astonishment Miss Hay rushed suddenly across the platform, threw open one of the doors for herself, and scrambled into the train just as its speed had made the performance dangerous.

She had acted as usual on impulse, the turn being given to her decision by the fact that the face she had seen at the window of the compartment, and recognised, was the face of a woman in tears.

(The plot against Ilden comes near to being unravelled in next Tuesday's instalment.)

Another New Serial.

THE story which starts in a fortnight's time will, as I told you last week, be from the pen of Mr. Louis Tracy, the clever author of many serials and successful novels.

To those of my readers who have been readers for some years past, there is no need to emphasise the excellence of his fiction. For he it was who wrote those excellent stories "The Lost Lady Delia" and "The Shadow Hand." My new story is every whit as good as these two, and I am sure will rivet your attention from the opening to the final sentence.

The story deals with the mysterious robbery of some priceless jewels from the residence of some Turkish officials in London, both the plot and the incidents of the story being most graphically and thrillingly presented. The first instalment will appear in a fortnight's time.

THE tramp who had been into the house prospecting came out and joined his companion on the roadside. "What luck?" asked the waiting one. "None," growled the other. "I don't like this business of asking for bread and getting a stone." "Well," said the first one in a tone of philosophic resignation, "'taint half as bad as askin' for bread and getting a bulldog."

LITTLE MISS LILY has been allowed to come to the table on the occasion of her mamma's birthday, after promising that she would be very, very good. Unfortunately she was seated opposite a gentleman who was entirely bald. After some time spent in contemplation of the phenomenon, she could not help remarking to her mother, in a quite audible stage whisper: "Oh, mamma, see that gentleman. His head is all naked."

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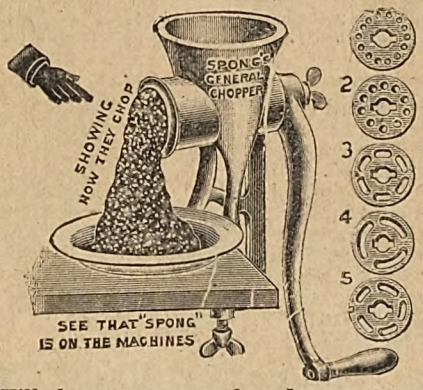

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

My Well Wishers.

I HAVE received a swarm of kind letters from numerous readers on my approaching marriage, such as I never could have expected. Certainly I cannot express how much I thank one and all for their encouraging words, but next week, in taking farewell of my readers (for a while at any rate), I must at least make an attempt at doing so. Meanwhile, though, as you must know, my time is very, very well occupied, I must snatch a few moments at my favourite work of trying to help readers in their little difficulties and misunderstandings.

Wants to Go Abroad.

"H. B. M." is very interested in my recent correspondent from Africa. No, this gentleman did not send me his photo, but I fear you do not quite understand what an "African" gentleman means at the present day. My correspondent is a Scotsman living in Natal, and not coloured and the possessor of "thick lips," which you say you do not like "very much." But why are you so anxious, "H. B. M," to go abroad? You would not really much care about living in South Africa, unless true love were the motive of your settling down there. I am sure there must be plenty of nice young men in your district, and as you are only twenty, why not give them a chance before thinking of those beyond the seas?

A Case for Patience.

"HALIFAX" has known a girl for a year, but his parents object to their friendship because she has a deformity in the left arm. He is twenty and will abide by any advice I may give him. I do not see why "HALIFAX" should not be friends with a girl, no matter what may be her deformity. But as he is only twenty, I suppose he is sensible enough to know that it is not yet time for him to think of getting married. Let him continue his friendship so long as he and the girl are attracted to each other. If when he arrives at an age and position enabling him to marry, he finds that the girl is still the only possessor of his affections, then he would be silly to allow a deformity to stand in their way.

A Case for Perseverance.

So, "HOPELESS," you are in love with your country cousin, and have sent her your photograph. She replied saying she did not wish to be bothered with a young man, and had not one of her own to send in return. Now you hear she is very upset at having replied like this.

* * * *

I suppose if she does not want to be bothered with a young man, you will not bother her. But she probably did not know her own mind. You should try and find out what she really feels in the matter. There is no reason why you should not continue to write to her of pay other attentions. In time, she will perhaps let you know her true state of mind. I do not at all see what there is to be "hopeless" about. When a man finds that his love is not returned at first, he should continue to pay attentions until he learns definitely that there is or is not hope for him. But do not *bother* her. Surely a man can admire a girl without being a burden to her. Continue to express your feelings, and be "hopeful," not "hopeless," and something is sure to result.

Is He a Consumptive?

"ADA" is receiving attentions from a man whom she likes very well, but his appearance suggests that he is consumptive. Do I advise her to continue the affair?

* * * *

Who said he was consumptive, "ADA"? There are few things about which people are more deceived than consumption. The least likely-looking people have it, and those most likely in appearance, to the lay mind, are often quite free from it. I advise you to try and meet your friend when a doctor is present, and ask the latter privately what he thinks of the young man's appearance. He may be merely in delicate health, or overworked. Certainly find out first before you allow such a circumstance to interfere with your fondness for him. If, of course, he really is consumptive, you should not go on with the affair, as there may be a heavy penalty to pay in the future for doing so.

The Doubtful Rival.

How should a man act towards a girl he admires, when he believes she is the victim of unwelcome attentions from another man? "L. D." is attracted towards Amy, but she is always seeing another man. Once or twice he has noticed that she looks weary and bored in the latter's presence. At other times she has said little things about the other man which suggest that he is not a great favourite with her. What the facts are he does not quite know. They are not engaged.

* * * *

Does she appear pleased to see you? Does she talk intimately of people and things to you? If so, there should be some opening for you to press your own suit. As to the other man, I should say nothing about him to her. If she likes to volunteer any information, take it, and as much as you can. In time, you should have got together evidence enough to enable you to get at her real feelings towards him. But do not jump to conclusions. She may, for all you know, have a real fondness for him, in spite of outward signs, and until you are convinced to the contrary, you have no concern with such attentions as he may pay her while you are as yet only an outside admirer.

The Stage Beauty.

So, "H. F.," you are in love with a most charming young actress, just because of her beautiful stage face, and winning smile. You are only a clerk on a modest salary, so any overtures would not carry you far. How had you better act?

* * * *

You are probably one of a hundred who feel the same towards that young lady. Does this encourage you to further effort? One, probably, of the hundred has the possession which is nine points of the law of love, and any advances on your part might be met by strong muscles. What you are suffering from is not really love at all. People get into similar states over heroines in novels, statues, or pictures. It is a very delightful state to be in, to feel you are drawn towards any image, but it is just as well to separate that from any connection with serious love. Certainly try and meet the girl if you have the slightest chance. How you can do so on ordinary social lines depends on whether you have a mutual friend able to give the introduction. The next step will be the progress you make in interesting her in you. But let me warn you, you have not a very hopeful prospect in front of you, and I think it would be better to cure yourself of the infatuation, and remember that all is not gold that glitters, and that every pretty face is not necessarily that of an angel.

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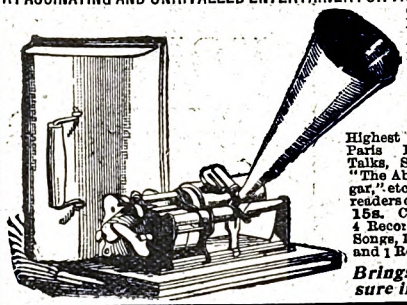

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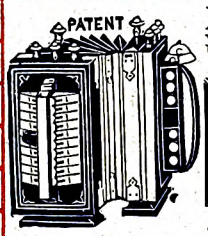

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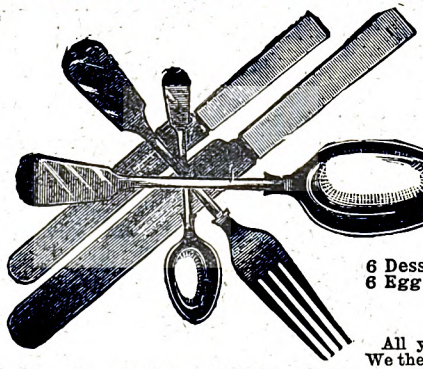

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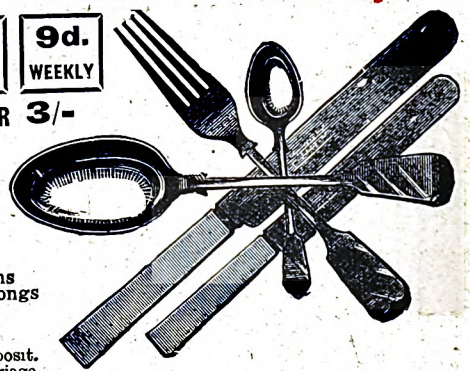

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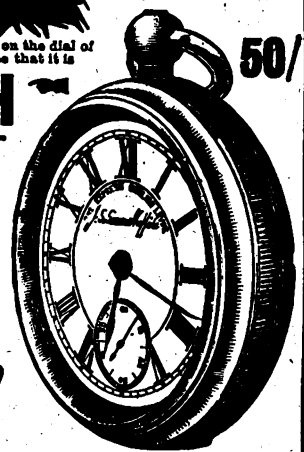

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Short Stories.

No. 727. For the Week Ending December 6th, 1902. One Penny.

ASTOUNDING SOCIETY REVELATIONS. BEGIN TO-DAY.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who is staying at Cairo.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. They manage to arouse the wrath of the fanatics, but are delivered by the dragoman, who turns out to be David Carr. Belinda signifies her gratitude by publicly hugging him.

The dragoman is dismissed, and back at the hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes Lady Peggy to task for the occurrence. Lady Peggy retorts that not long ago she saw the Duchess' own daughter Honoria in the arms of a real Egyptian. The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and after storming at her, is slapping her face when Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room. Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, we discover that Belinda has just prevented Honoria from poisoning herself.

The next evening, Lady Peggy discovers the Duke of Eastacres and a new comer, Stanley Forbes, about to fight a duel. Realising the possible disastrous consequences to her matrimonial plans for Belinda, Lady Peggy rushes forward and places herself between the two men.

Sending Eastacres off on some errand, she takes Forbes aside, and after telling him she knows that the quarrel is connected with a girl named Sheila Kenwyn, whose whereabouts Forbes wants to find out, promises to extract the address from Eastacres if Forbes will forego a scandal. Forbes consents.

Lady Peggy then finds Eastacres and refuses to allow his suit with Belinda till he gives her the address. Eastacres gives it.

Later on Lady Peggy is rewarded by discovering Belinda in the Duke's arms.

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Belinda Falls Into a Trap.

At that, the psychological moment, I appeared upon the scene.

"Dear me," said I, "this is very unexpected." And I glanced from one to the other in benignant surprise. "However, I suppose I must not scold—congratulations would be more to the point, eh, Belinda?"

For a moment she made no comment, but stood with flushed cheeks, her breath coming and going in little pants. She had retired some distance from the Duke. Then with an abruptness mightily disconcerting, she turned to Eastacres, and, in a passion of anger, touched with tears, cried:

"Oh, *how* I hate you!"

"*Belinda!* What ever are you thinking of?" I gasped. "What *do* you mean?"

"He's horrid," she said defiantly, "rude and ungentlemanly. I'm not going to marry him. I will never marry him, I hate him," and with that she stamped, yes, actually stamped her foot.

"Belinda," I said gravely, "your conduct calls for explana-

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tion. If you are not engaged to the Duke, how do you account for your—your attitude a moment since?"

"It's not my fault," replied the girl, with flaming cheeks.

"The Duke asked me to be his wife. I said I wouldn't do that, as, though I liked him—so I did *then*—I didn't care enough to marry him. I suggested we'd better be friends instead, and gave him my hand, and he, he—you saw yourself what he did," she concluded wrathfully.

"Lady Carstairs," interposed the Duke, "permit me a few words of explanation. I made Miss North a proposal of marriage, as she tells you. She did not return me a decided answer—in words. Something she said about looking upon me as a friend, and then—with what I took for a charming gesture of compliance—put her hand in mine. Am I to be blamed if I misread her meaning?"

"Not in the least, Duke," I said emphatically. "Belinda will be the first to see that, when she is quieter. At present she is excited, overwrought. To-morrow she will appreciate the position, and will express her sense of the honour you have done her."

"I shall say then as I say now," cried the girl, "I will have nothing more to do with him."

Eastacres, I think, was about to expostulate, but at a sign from me, kept back his remonstrance, and with much tact slipped out of the door.

I and my charge were left alone.

For the first few minutes Belinda seemed to doubt whether to rage or weep. The tears were very near her eyes, and her hands were tightly clenched. Finally, however, defiance came to her aid, and in a spirit of bravado, she perched herself on the table and began to whistle!

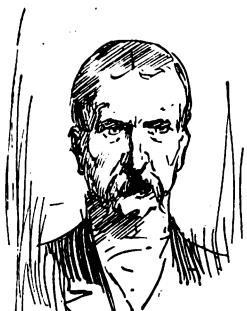
Finding that this unladylike conduct left me untouched, she shortly desisted.

"Lady Peggy," she said at last, "why should you blame me instead of the Duke for what has happened? You should be angry with him, not me."

"I am not aware that the Duke addressed you other than courteously," I returned. "You, on the contrary, spoke to him in the rudest possible manner. You have been guilty of an outrage on good taste, not to say good feeling."

"I am sorry you think that. Perhaps I shouldn't have said he was horrid, but—but—Oh, Lady Peggy, how could you think I meant to marry him?"

"I mistook you for a girl of refined perceptions," I said grimly. "I didn't think you would encourage a man, as you have encouraged the Duke, unless you had some intention of marrying him. Had I known you to be a girl of that description I would never have taken charge of you. As it is you have deceived me, insulted my friend, and hopelessly compromised yourself. I was not the only one who saw the Duke's embrace, and what preceded it. To-morrow, unless your engagement to Eastacres is announced—you will be looked on as an immodest, forward girl, you will be laughed at by the men, and cut by the women. Society doesn't permit conduct like yours to go unpunished. You are a young girl, remember, and as such the least suggestion of lightness or impropriety will be fatal to your social career; I do not see, indeed, how I can continue to act as your chaperon."



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

Belinda's face grew white.

"I didn't mean to encourage him, Lady Peggy," she said. "At first, indeed, I didn't like him, but when he was so nice to Honoria I changed my opinion, and after he'd saved me from falling down that horrid place in the pyramid, I felt quite friendly. I enjoyed going out with him. He can ride splendidly and he doesn't talk so badly."

"You accepted his attentions, and encouraged his hopes to gratify your vanity. Is that it?"

She shook her head. "I felt friendly, that was all. I've had men friends before now—lots of them."

Her coolness nettled me.

"What you may or may not have done in the backwoods of Australia has no bearing on the case," I said sharply. "You are not among savages now, but living under civilised conditions, and these conditions prohibit a girl from tolerating familiarities—such as you have permitted from the Duke—unless she is going to marry the man,"

"I didn't know," said Belinda despondently. Then, "I think Society is horrid," she went on with renewed vigour. "If a girl can't be nice to a man without nasty things being said of her."

"It's idle to rail against Society," I observed. "You can't change it. If you live in it you must conform to its usages, or"—I paused—"go under in disgrace." I spoke coldly, almost contemptuously; the girl looked distressed, a dim sense of the enormity of which she had been guilty stole upon her. She was gradually verging to a state of mind favourable to my influence.

"What shall I do, Lady Peggy?" she asked wistfully, which was exactly what I wanted her to ask.

"I can't tell. I'm too upset, too grieved to decide. I really think the best thing will be for me to cable to your father, and ask for advice." She flushed, I gazed at her fixedly. "Your father has such a keen sense of honour, he's so upright, so just a man. I shouldn't suppose he knew the meaning of double-dealing. His actions are the outcome of his intentions. He——"

"*Don't*," said Belinda piteously, "please, you mustn't cable, Lady Peggy," she went on earnestly. "I've got myself into this fix, and I must find my own way out of it." She stood up with an air of resolution, and gave herself a little shake. "I suppose I'd better apologise to the Duke?" she said, "to commence with."

"*The Duke*," I repeated, "it's not he I am thinking of. It's *you*. Don't you understand, you foolish and unhappy girl, that you've furnished such an occasion for scandal as Society will not readily let slip? Do you or do you not realise that within the last month you have more or less publicly embraced two men? The first was a mere outsider. As such Society could afford to ignore your behaviour. The Duke of Eastacres is a different matter. Belinda"—I paused—"your reputation is at stake. I cannot, I will not countenance a girl whose name is a bye-word."

"And yet," she said indignantly, "you cheerfully accept Mrs. Murchison-Lee, and she's a married woman."

"And, therefore, exempt from the criticism applied to young girls. Society has one law for married women and another for the young girls."

"It's shameful," cried Belinda.

"You're going from the point," I reminded her. "If you don't like Society, leave it. I will cable to that effect to Mr. North if you desire. If you elect to remain in Society, however, you must conform to its usages."

For a moment she hesitated, her blue eyes dilated, her figure thrilled at the thought of freedom. I feared I had gone too far, feared that my wild bird would choose to take flight back to the wilderness from which she came.

"I should like to go," she said, "so much. And yet——" Her mouth tightened, the smile went from her eyes. "I promised I'd stay with you for a year," she said slowly, "and, if possible, I'll keep my word."

"Very well, Belinda, in that case I'll do my best to help you. You are sure of your decision in regard to the Duke's proposal?"

"I cannot possibly marry him!"

"It's a pity you did not realise that a little sooner," I returned drily. "However, we must deal with the matter as it is. The only thing to do under the circumstances is to persuade the Duke to announce his engagement to you."

"Lady Peggy, I can't, I——"

"Allow me to finish, if you please. The engagement will be one in name, no more. In a month's time when we leave Cairo I will announce that the engagement has been

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broken off. You can then start afresh with the benefit of your experience."

"But it isn't honest or straightforward," she protested. "People will think it's a real engagement, and all the time it's pretence."

"Just as the Duke thought you really cared for him," I remarked. "And——"

"That's not the same," she said, "he mistook friendliness for love. I was not to blame for that, Lady Peggy."

"Blameless or otherwise you must accept the consequences, Belinda. Your engagement to the Duke must be announced to-morrow, or—" I paused significantly—"Come," I added more gently, "it's not so very dreadful. The engagement will be one in name only. At any rate, it is the only way to stop all gossip. You had better consent, Belinda, indeed, if you can't do so, I shall in self-defence be compelled to cable to your father."

"Very well," she said desperately, "it must be as you say."

"I will send for the Duke at once," I answered, "and ask him to consent to the arrangement."

A few minutes later the Duke appeared. I took him aside and explained in a few words what was required of him. He behaved beautifully, and with the greatest tact.

"I am more sorry than I can say that I should have distressed you, Miss North," he said to Belinda. "That my indiscretion should have caused you unpleasantness is a terrible thought. I think, however, Lady Peggy's notion will solve the difficulty. I understand that the world in general, and the Continental in particular, are to believe we are engaged? A formal engagement, meaning just as much or as little as you wish. You leave here, I think, in about a month? For a month then, Miss North, we are engaged. Do you consent?"

I caught my breath and waited in suspense for her reply. It did not come readily.

She was trying to think out the matter steadily and fearlessly.

For a moment things trembled in the balance, but only for a moment. She was so young, so inexperienced, so utterly unable to weigh the pros and cons. She thought, poor child, that she had really committed a grave breach of decorum, and never for a moment suspected I was laughing in my sleeve. She had made a mistake, and—however innocently—according to her simple creed she must suffer for it. She would not appeal to her father. She would find a way out for herself.

With a long-drawn sigh and a little quiver of the mouth, she answered:

"I consent."

The Duke bowed; I smiled upon Belinda and congratulated myself.

I redoubled those congratulations the next minute. Close on Belinda's words, the door opened, a tall, straight figure entered, and walked up to me.

It was David Carr himself, just sixty seconds late!

"I've come to say 'Good-bye,' Lady Carstairs," said the intrepid young man, after he had exchanged greetings. "I am sure you will be glad to hear your influence has obtained me the offer of a lucrative position. Sir Willoughby told me how much you had interested yourself on my behalf. I am going to St. Petersburg to superintend the building of a bridge across the Neva."

"Charming place, St. Petersburg," drawled the Duke. "I congratulate you, er—er—Mr. Carr."

David did not trouble to respond to the congratulation. He turned abruptly to Belinda.

"I may not see you again before the year is up," he said. "The year of waiting that you have imposed on me. You will see me then?"

"Surely," she answered, "I look forward to the end of that year as eagerly as you do. You'll remember that," she glanced at him pathetically, "*whatever* you may hear?" She put out her hand as she spoke and clasped his with a strong and steady pressure.

"I will," he answered gravely, then with a curt nod to the Duke, and a more courteous salutation to myself, he prepared to depart.

"A moment." The Duke's voice stayed him at the door. "You are interested in Miss North, I think?"

The young man frowned. Belinda, with terror-stricken eyes, watched Eastacres' face. Was he going to tell her lover here, before her face, of that ill-considered promise she had just made? It could not be, she thought. It was impossible a man could be so cruel.

With a smile, Eastacres continued to regard his rival.

"If you're not interested, there's nothing more to say," he continued languidly. "I had a piece of information to give you concerning the young lady, that was all."

"Well?" David's tone was not conciliatory.

The Duke paused, and lit a cigarette.

"I don't know that it concerns you really," he said, "still it's as well for you to know." Then with a sudden change of voice he drew himself up, and laid his hand upon Belinda's arm.

"We're just engaged," he said calmly. "Miss North accepted me a minute before you came into the room."

For a moment I thought that David would have struck him. The veins stood out on his forehead like cords, his face worked convulsively. Then from his throat came the words, half-inarticulate with passion:

"A lie, *it is a lie*," and then with a quick uplifting of the voice, a short sharp cry of agonised appeal:

"*Belinda!*"

White as death she came a step or two towards him, but what she was about to say or do I cannot tell. For of a sudden her will gave out, her nerves collapsed. Without a cry or call she fell. For the first and only time while she was with me, Belinda fainted.

David was bending over her in a second, pushing Eastacres aside. Without ceremony or excuse I put them both out of the room, and ministered myself to the fair-haired heap upon the floor.

She came round very quickly, and was horribly ashamed of her weakness.

"Will you do something for me, Lady Peggy?" she said wistfully.

"I suppose you want me to interview this dragoman of yours, is that it, Belinda?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I should not think of such a thing. I want you to persuade the Duchess to let Honoria sit with me for a bit, that's all. Will you send and ask her now?"

The request seemed harmless enough for me to grant it. Honoria, I knew, had not the sense to take a message to David undiscovered—let alone the courage. I saw Belinda to her room, and fetched Honoria to keep her company.

Then with a not unwarranted sense of self-approbation, I descended to the card-room with a view to finding out if anything unpleasant had occurred between Eastacres and the young engineer.

David Carr caught sight of me in the doorway, and, seizing my arm, he drew me back in the passage.

"Is she better?" he cried hoarsely.

"Yes," I said, "it was only a slight attack—the heat, I suppose."

"Is it true"—his fingers tightened on my arm—"true that she's going to marry *that*"—he pointed scornfully to where the Duke stood the centre of a group of men in the card-room.

"She's engaged to the Duke of Eastacres, if that is what you mean," I answered readily.

"You swear it?"

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"Don't be absurd," I said sharply. "You're behaving like a madman. For goodness' sake pull yourself together."

With an impatient gesture I shook off his grasp and walked into the room. He followed me. Apprehensive that he would make a scene I asked Sir Willoughby to reason with him.

The Baronet, who had a real liking and esteem for David, readily agreed. I had the satisfaction of seeing the young man's face gradually settle into acquiescence if not resignation. Another few minutes and he would have left the Continental, convinced that henceforth his life must be apart from Belinda's. He would have made an effective exit and have rendered things considerably easier for me.

That he did not thus depart was entirely owing to Honoria, whose base ingratitude to me I cannot find adequate words to condemn.

She entered the room in her usual helpless fashion, drifting against people and things in a way that made me want to shake her.

At last she landed on the hearthrug, immediately in front of David Carr. Before I had time to realise what she was about to do, the wretched and ungrateful girl, with an unpardonable breach of faith, commenced as follows:

"I've brought you a message from Belinda, Mr. Carr. She says she won't be married for a year at least, and will you please come to the wedding."

With a flash of his dark eyes David took Honoria's hand in his.

"I will," he said. "And thank you very much." And with Belinda's last words ringing in his ears, a strange new hope in his heart, he left.

Honoria did not escape so easily however. Her punishment followed close upon her crime. With quiet deliberation the Duke beckoned a tall, bearded individual lounging by the window.

He rose at the Duke's invitation and came towards them.

"Honoria," said Eastacres calmly, "here is Mark Striven," and his look said all the rest.

Mark's appearance was not unprepossessing. Broad shouldered, loosely built, he had the easy carriage and affected the easy manners of the "big" man. Not till you came to know and study him did you realise that as his trim, torpedo beard hid a cruel and sensual mouth, so the apparent heartiness of his bearing veiled a crafty and treacherous disposition that only recognised the claims of "self."

What chance would the weak and wavering Honoria have against him?

Mark's poverty and not his will consented to the match. I gathered that £1,000 was the price of his liberty. For that sum he was prepared to love and cherish dear Honoria to the best of his limited capacity in that direction.

It was no business of mine, and yet, knowing all I did, I could not restrain a shudder of pity as I met the agonised appeal in her eyes. She was a poor specimen of a woman now, and what would she be a year after her marriage with him? I got up and left the room. I felt the necessity of a change of thought.

For the next week or two things went on fairly well. Belinda accepted the inevitable, if not with a good grace, with rare courage. She received calmly all congratulations, and smiled sweetly, if vaguely, in reply. I had of course informed Hardy North of the engagement, and had received a joyful, not to say triumphant, epistle in reply. Belinda read it with stoicism.

"I shall explain everything to dad when we leave here," she said. "It's not worth while to trouble *now*."

I commended her decision and pronounced the fact of her engagement far and wide. I was determined public opinion should force her into marriage. In the face of an outraged Society she dared not draw back.

Belinda and the Duke were together only in public. She declined to be alone with him for five minutes, and I thought it better on that point to give way. For the most part she went about with Midge, Honoria being in attendance on Mark.

The little Yankee had forgotten her grief at Reggie's defection, and was flirting desperately with an artist, a new arrival at the Continental. Reg still worshipped Belinda, but at safe distance. She had begun to learn the lesson of discretion.

Our stay in Cairo was drawing to a close, the Khedive's ball would end the season. It would also, unless I were careful, end the Duke's engagement to Belinda.

My plans, however, were well laid. On the occasion of the ball, the most important function of the season, I determined to make Belinda's marriage with the Duke inevitable. I had arranged for her special presentation to the Khedive, and that personage, prompted from the right quarter, would doubtless refer to her approaching wedding.

It would, I thought, need a stronger will even than Belinda's to disavow her undertaking in the face of Royal congratulations.

I had sent to Paris for her ball gown, and I was genuinely delighted with her appearance when she tried it on.

"You must wear your pearls, Belinda," I said, pondering, "and some jasmine in your hair. Get your necklace, dear, and let me see the effect. Come, don't be lazy, child, it is not very late."

Belinda, however, made no attempt to move, but stared straight before her into space.

"What's the matter?" I cried. "You don't mean to say you've lost the pearls? Why don't you speak?"

"I've not lost them, Lady Peggy," she said, flushing, "but they are gone all the same. Somebody has stolen them."

"When did you miss them?" I said sharply.

"A few days ago," she replied.

"Why on earth didn't you tell me, Belinda. One would think you knew the thief and were trying to screen him. Why don't you say right out what you know."

"I know nothing for certain," she replied, "and I mean to keep my suspicions to myself. You'd much better let the matter drop, Lady Peggy," she went on earnestly, "I don't mind much about the pearls."

"But I mind a great deal. In fact I shan't know peace until they are recovered."

"Please, Lady Peggy, don't say anything more about it, to-night, at all events."

She looked so pathetic that I was obliged to yield. Considerably mystified and more than a little troubled, I withdrew.

Who was the thief, and why should Belinda try to shield him? Even stranger than her reticence was her resignation at the loss of the necklace. One could more easily understand her foregoing vengeance than giving up the jewels.

It was a difficult situation, I felt my inability to cope with it unaided. In this dilemma I decided to seek the assistance of the Duchess. She would, I felt sure, give me valuable advice. I decided to see her that night; it was barely twelve o'clock, and we never stood on ceremony with one another. Relieved at this decision I took my way towards the Duchess' apartments. They were three in number, bath-room and bedroom, with a smaller room opening out of the latter, the resting place of the unfortunate Honoria.

I heard voices in her Grace's domain, and wishing for a private interview, I decided to reconnoitre before making my presence known. Her room had two entrances, one from the passage, one through the bath-room. I entered the last-named, and peered through the door of communication. It was not tightly shut, the interior of the apartment was visible through the opening.

At the far end of the room, on the threshold of her own chamber, stood Honoria, lean and lank in her long white nightdress. A brush was in her hand, and an expression of fear on her countenance.

I leant forward to ascertain the cause of her alarm. I followed the direction of her eyes, to where they rested on her mother. And as I gazed, a cry of horror rose to my lips.

The Duchess of Eastacres stood in the middle of the room, immediately beneath the electric light. One hand was raised in a threatening attitude towards her daughter.

And in the other lay—Belinda's pearls!

(The explanation of this scene will be given next Tuesday.)

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Clouds in a Summer Sky.

Telling of a Quarrel, a Horsewhip, and a Reconciliation.

Harry Neville and his wife had lived one happy year of married life. They had their little differences, of course, odd little corners had to be smoothed off. Both were somewhat impulsive, sensitive and quick-tempered, but the magic of love, combined with common sense, had helped him, and he was increasingly thankful that he had met, and wooed and won her; while she was proud of her strong, manly husband who, for her sake, had altered so much of life, and, except for a rare visit to his old club, or once or twice playing in his old football team, had settled down to home, to find all his happiness in it, and the society of his bright young wife.

They had known little of each other before marriage. He had met her at some friends with whom she was staying in London. He had heard how she, after enjoying the comforts of easy circumstances, and after she had just finished her college course, had been thrown on the world to seek a livelihood on the sudden death of her father, when it was found that he was so deeply involved that there was nothing left for his only child but a good education, strong will, and health.

Harry, from their first meeting, had fallen desperately in love, and holding a fair position in a city firm, had soon persuaded her to share with him the comfortable suburban home, where they had so happily passed the first year of their married life.

And then suddenly, without warning, came the rude shock, and the dark cloud and storm.

On Thursday morning, while breakfasting somewhat hurriedly, for he had been spending the previous evening with some old club friends, and had risen late, Harry said:

"I am sorry to play truant so much, darling, not seeing you all day yesterday, and now I want you to spare me again this evening, and after that I will be a good boy and stay at home."

"Why, you gadabout!" she answered. "Where are you going to-night?"

"Well," he replied, "Jim Thornton, an old chum of mine, is going abroad to a good appointment he has secured, and came round to the office yesterday to ask me to dine with him and some other fellows at 'The Holborn' to-night. I do not think I shall be very late; but as I am rather busy, and do not wish to leave the office early, I think I will take with me what I want and change there. Put up my things, dear, and I will make up for leaving you so much by being extra good. You know where I am most happy, but I cannot break off all old friendships at once!"

"And I do not want you to," she answered. "You devote too much time to me now, and I sometimes fear lest you should tire of so much woman's society—I love to have you with me, but I want you still to mix with men. It must be better for you sometimes."

She ran off, and soon came back with a small bag containing what he required, bade him a warm good-bye, and he went off, as happy a man as entered the city that day.

By one of those strange chances which, unimportant as they may seem at first, are pregnant with vast issues, he found it necessary during the day to make an appointment for late in the afternoon, which brought him very near home, and so he altered his plan of dressing at the office, and resolved to give his wife a pleasant surprise; spending an hour at home, and going thence to keep his evening engagement.

He let himself in with a smile, as he pictured her surprise, and going through the hall found her in the little room opposite the dining-room, which they used as library, smoking, writing and reading-room, in fact a snug little place where rigid order was not enforced, and where either together or separately they have passed many contented hours.

Coming in suddenly upon her, she started and, as he thought, with a look of some disappointment, said:

"You told me you were not coming home till late!"

He went over to her and kissed her, when he noticed a letter which, after writing, she had apparently let fall on to the floor by the writing-table.

Stooping to pick it up he said, laughing.

"Going to resign, and writing for another place?"

She coloured, and hastily made for the letter, saying:

"Oh, it is only a spoilt letter which I re-wrote this morning, I meant to have torn it up!" But he had already picked it up, and without any intention of reading it had caught sight of its first words and suddenly grew stern.

"Give it to me!" she cried, as he held it from her with one hand, while with the other he pushed her almost rudely away. Then, glancing again at the letter, he uttered an oath, thrust her down upon a chair, and exclaimed—

"You false-hearted Jezebel!"

"Harry, how dare you? What do you mean?"

"Silence," he said, pressing his hand heavily on her, and holding her fixed, and she, for the moment terrified, remained quiet, while he read the letter, which ran—

> "My Dearest George,—I cannot tell you how I have felt since, after three years, we so unexpectedly met yesterday, and I feel how great a wrong I did you in leaving you without knowledge of my movements, and to suppose I was indifferent. But after yesterday's meeting, when you put your arm round me with the old tenderness and forgave my folly, all the old feeling has come back, or rather revived, for really it never left my heart, which poured itself out to you so freely in the dear old days, and I love you still more since you tell me you have never loved me less than then.
>
> "But I cannot write all I want to say, and am sending this rather that we may take advantage of a grand opportunity which has unexpectedly presented itself for us to have an hour or two *quite alone*.
>
> "My husband this morning told me of an engagement which keeps him in town till late (probably eleven o'clock) to-night, so you must contrive to come to me about seven o'clock (what a pity you are engaged all day!)
>
> "Our interview yesterday was all too short. I am longing to have you with me, to lay my head on you in the old way, and tell you all my thoughts, and show you that you hold the same place ever in the heart of your loving Kitty."

For a moment after reading this he remained silent, then, turning with an expression of terrible sternness to his wife, he said:

"Do you say that this was re-written and posted?"

She had recovered herself partially now, and was angry too.

"Yes, I do," she answered, "and how dare you speak to me like this? I can do as I like, I suppose? I am not your slave, to answer for every act to *you!*"

Not noticing her last words he demanded:

"Will this appointment be kept?"

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"Yes, it will, and I shall do just as I please in the matter," was her angry reply.

"You brazen-face! Tell me at once the fellow's surname and address," said he.

"Fellow! Fellow!" she exclaimed scornfully—then suddenly stopping, she looked fixedly at him for a moment as though deciding what course to take. A resolute expression came to her eyes, and angrily stamping her foot, she said: "Find out all you want to know for yourself. Take your hand away, unless you are coward enough to strike me. I might, had you spoken differently, have spared you a part of the pain you shall feel now. But you can do your worst, and I will see that *you* and *you* only shall suffer." He released her, and she rose, and was about to leave the room, when he interposed, and controlling himself by a great effort, spoke again:

"You are utterly shameless; fool that I have been. If I am not coward enough, as you call it, to strike you, be sure of this—the cad to whom your letter is addressed, shall take the punishment for both, and will be in no condition to receive or respond to your brazen confessions."

To this she responded with a curl of the lip, and a scornful laugh which only maddened him. But he said nothing further—only took her firmly by the arm and led her into the dining-room, placed her at the end farthest from the door, pushed the table to the same end of the room in front of her. She made no resistance, and did not speak—contenting herself with looking angrily at him as he sat her down, and putting on a look of sneering defiance.

He rang the bell, and as the maid responded, went to the room door to screen the view of her mistress, and said:

"A visitor will call shortly, about 7 o'clock, whom you are to show straight into *this* room, and to whom on no account you are to say I am at home. Mind you do exactly as I have told you." The girl, half-frightened at the stern mood of her usually good-tempered master, withdrew. He then stepped into the hall, and returned with a heavy riding-whip (an old treasure of his boyhood, which had been given him by a farmer uncle when staying in the country). Throwing this on a chair he looked at his watch and sat down.

Then she spoke, passionately, disdainfully, as though determined to goad him to the very utmost.

"You brave man, armed. Let me give you warning. You think to make me suffer in seeing, and another suffer in bearing your vengeance. Do not be too sure. Strong men have met defeat, and" (raising her voice) "so will you. In less than half-an-hour you will be cowed, humbled, and, as sure as I am here, you shall be thoroughly punished."

Such unabashed defiance, such absence of all compunction, and evident desire, that not content with the wrong he suffered, she should have him still further outraged—this was unbearable. He started forward, and for a moment it seemed he would strike her. Then her face changed, and she looked him straight in the eyes, with a glance which while he looked, seemed to disarm him, and she said as her voice seemed for the first time to betray something of fear:

"Harry, would you strike me?"

His hand dropped down again, and for ten minutes he sat buried in deep thought. It is wonderful how in the great crises of life, thoughts shape themselves so rapidly, and present so vividly, in so brief a space of time, the events of the past and the possibilities of the future. As the past months were lived again in those brief moments, even he himself was surprised to realise how his first anger turned to yearning love. As the memories came back of the tender glances of those beautiful eyes, which had just looked into his, of sweet endearing words, and tender caresses; of the devoted kindred soul (as he had thought) which looked through those soft eyes, to meet and mingle with his own. Then notwithstanding her unabashed and defiant attitude, and the terrible disillusionment which had come—so far as *she* was concerned, his anger was lost in grief, and thoughts of vengeance lost in care for her.

At last he rose, and seeing that he had but a few minutes probably at his disposal, said:

"Kate, after you leave this room to-night, we meet no more. There are two courses open to you. Go to your aunt, if it can be arranged; or if you prefer it, take this house and its contents and have with you some middle-aged lady companion. My salary shall be equally divided between us so long as you give me no further reason to alter the arrangement, and on the express condition that you never willingly see again the—the—person you will see here shortly. Let me have your decision by letter in the morning, and if you decide to remain here, I shall leave for good.

"If, at any time you need protection or any help, write to me at the office, and so far as I can render it you shall have it. Although it has all proved a delusion, and my earthly heaven a fool's paradise, I cannot forget it, and for the sake of the fair dream, although it turns out but a dream, you shall not want a friend."

"You are exceedingly kind," she said. "But these are matters we can discuss later on when you are less lordly, and in a far humbler state of mind, as most certainly you will be before this is finished."

Her sneering tone again aroused his fury. To feel that she had not only so deeply injured him, but gloried in the hope that he would be cowed, perhaps beaten by her unknown lover—made him conscious of a burning desire to strangle the very life out of the man he hoped soon to have in his grip.

At that moment the visitor's bell rang, and they heard the maid answer it. Starting up, he grasped the riding-whip, and threw himself behind the door, just as it swung open, and the maid announced:

"Miss Georgina Foster."

And there came into the room a tall, lovely woman, evidently some two or three years his wife's senior—to whom his wife, pushing back the table from her, flew with outstretched arms crying:

"George, darling, I am so glad you have come. Finding you were coming, my husband here insisted on running home just to wait for an introduction to my dearest friend, and helpful confidante of the old time, of whom through my folly I had so long lost sight.

"Harry, this is my dear friend Georgina Foster, or George, as I always call her, who used to be sister and mother all in one to me, and whom I met yesterday. She has come to live very near us and, as you know, is going to spend the evening with me, so hurry up, and leave us quickly. For I have so much to tell her."

He came forward dropping the whip behind him, whispering to himself "idiot," "fool" and, with the best grace he could, stammered some common-places. Then, as a great wave of gladness came into his heart, he turned to his wife and began:

"Kitty."

But she turned on him sharply, and bade him make haste, or he would be late for his engagement—adding, I have so much to say to George, whom I only saw for a little while yesterday, and to whom I want to tell all our doings *right up-to-date*.

"But, Kitty"—and his eyes pleaded for compassion——

"Come! Hurry up," she said lightly, and with a smile—but when as she pushed him out of the room her back was to her friend—she answered the appealing glance he gave her with a look of stern anger, and waving him off, closed the door upon him.

After dressing, during which operation he communed with himself, using expressions which it would have been anything but safe for others to use *to* him, he went out. But pausing for a moment at the door of the drawing-room, he heard the merry laughter of two women, who seemed to be enjoying it with infinite relish.

It took him some time, and much persuasion next day, to obtain forgiveness, which, however, was really waiting behind the little storm he had to bear, in a heart which beat with truest love for him, and which had, on reviewing the circumstances, found excuse for his mistake, and was not ill-pleased with him.

G. A. Morrant.

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THE SEABOROUGH MYSTERY.

A Tale of an Artist's Love.

"You will always love me, Dick?"

"Till my death, Flossie!"

The unpleasant memory of those words came to Richard Filby, as he sat on the cliffs a mile away from the little village of Seaborough painting, or rather attempting to paint. What a fool he had been! He had flirted disgracefully with the inn-keeper's daughter Flossie, who had seemingly taken all his attentions in earnest, perfectly unaware that there was another young woman up in London to whom he was engaged. Last evening they had walked out together as usual, wending their way along the shore, and there the declaration of love recorded above had been made. How on earth was he to get out of this imbroglio?

After a few minutes Filby dropped palette and brushes. Ambitious as he was to be famous, he really could not paint this morning. He slipped off his camp-stool and throwing himself full length on the grass, gazed up reflectively into the sky. What a nuisance this artistic temperament was! He was formally betrothed to Freda Withers at Forest Hill, and had no desire to end the betrothal, and yet down here in this romantic little spot the temptation to enjoy himself with Flossie Barnett, who had attracted him the very first moment that he arrived at the inn, had proved too strong to be resisted. It was an innocent entanglement, but how great the cost! He had come down to work and he had been philandering instead. And now the last day but one of his stay had come. What follies were committed in the name of so-called love!

"Nice day sir!"

Filby looked up. It was the coastguard on his round.

"Yes! Rather warm for working though and for walking too I should imagine."

"Oh, I don't mind that. sir! Used to it you see. That's a grand bit of cliff you're painting, sir."

"If I could only get it right it would be."

The coastguard mused, his hand stroking his chin, his eyes taking in the points of the picture.

"Ah, I mind that spot well. There was a suicide from there about a year back. A chap (he was the son of a farmer round here) as was gone on a girl that he couldn't get jumped right off there into the sea. His coat was found on the cliff—he'd taken it off before he jumped—but his body must have been washed away by the sea, for though we searched high and low we never found it. It was a sad case."

"Very! I didn't know events like that occurred in this part."

"Sometimes, sir! Folks do silly things for love all the world over. Well, I must be moving on!"

"Have a bit of tobacco?"

"Thank ye, sir! That's real stuff. Good morning!"

Directly the man had passed on, Filby began pacing up and down on the cliff. An idea had come, the execution of which might solve the difficulty he was in, and with free movement of his limbs Filby always thought better. The notion presented difficulties at first, but one by one he saw his way out of them. What a lucky thing to have had that conversation with the coastguard! The means of relief from all his troubles was at hand.

That night an unusual thing occurred at the Seaborough Inn. Unseen by anyone, a man stole out at midnight, holding some dark objects under his arm, and made straight for the edge of the cliffs. Not a soul was about; only the distant sighing of the waves broke the stillness. Hour after hour passed by, yet the man did not return. But the wind rose, the sighing of the sea became a tumultuous roar, and by the time the light broke a regular tempest was in progress.

* * * * *

Two hours prior to that mysterious midnight flight Flossie Barnett sat in her bedroom, her usually smiling face most seriously set. A letter on foreign note-paper and bearing the Cape Town postmark was in her hands and she had committed the contents to memory for about the tenth time. It was from her soldier-lover, Jack Preston, written a couple of days before he was to embark on the transport for England. "In a very short while the writer would be here in person, with the plainly stated object of claiming her as his bride.

Now Flossie was in a quandary. Her little flirtation with their visitor, Mr. Filby, had taken a far more serious turn than she had anticipated. She had merely intended to amuse herself with him during the absence of her real lover, and surely a girl left by herself for two whole years had liberty to seek some mild amusement. On a higher social level than herself he had treated her as an equal, and that had rather turned her head. Besides, a halo of romance encircled his ample locks—he was an artist; in a few short years he would write R.A. after his name and have the free right of hanging mediocre pictures on the Academy walls. In a confidential moment Filby had drawn for her this vision of the future, of course omitting any allusion to mediocrity.

Yes, the affair had gone much farther than Flossie intended. As a matter of fact, she was enjoying herself so hugely that she had not the strength of will to draw back before the mischief was done. Last night she had been drawn into a horrible lie. She had told him that she loved him, whilst all the time her heart was with her old lover abroad. And this morning had brought a letter from him, a letter whose every line sat in judgment upon her and rebuked her for her folly.

She recalled Mr. Filby's manner and looks of the previous evening. How dreadfully solemn he had looked—and yet how finely picturesque! She had certainly made a splendid conquest, and if his heart was won but to be broken afterwards, still her achievement would provide food for her vanity for years.

Leaving that side of the question, however, Flossie turned to the consideration of the more practical matter—what was to be done now? Mr. Filby must be informed, and that speedily, of Jack Preston's existence, but how could the information be most delicately conveyed. A personal interview would be most satisfactory, but Flossie shrank from cutting a poor figure at that. What would be the gent'est way of letting this artist lover down?

Ah, she had it! Mr. Filby was returning to town on the morrow. She had his London address, and would write there a letter, which should reach him soon after his arrival home, explaining as best she might her previous commitment to another. It was an easy and capital solution of the difficulty.

The plan was no sooner settled than put into effect. Flossie took from a drawer paper and pen, and after a little cogitation fashioned the epistle. She read it through, approved, sealed and stamped the envelope. She would run out and post it herself the first thing in the morning.

Her mind at ease Flossie got into bed and was soon asleep. Had she only remained awake a little longer, she would have

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heard the stairs creak under passing footsteps and the old inn door squeak as it was being stealthily closed.

* * * * *

Directly she was up next morning Flossie went out and posted her letter. A blustering gale was raging and the wind lashed fiercely in her face, but her mission was far too important to admit of delay. On returning to the inn she ran in the passage into the arms of Bell the barman.

"Oh, miss, I was looking for you everywhere! There's someone in the parlour as wants to see you most particular."

"Who, Bell?"

"A sailor man I should reckon by his rig-out. He seems most excited."

Wondering who her visitor could be at this early hour Flossie turned the handle of the parlour door. A man whom she recognised as one of the local coastguards rose and touched his forehead.

"Beg pardon for disturbing you so early miss, but I've some very bad news. There's been, I'm afraid, another case of suicide from the Seaborough cliff."

"Who?" queried Flossie, turning pale.

"A gent as I've had one or two chats with of late. I don't know his name, but he was stopping here he told me. One of those painter chaps."

"Mr. Filby? You can't mean it. You must be mistaken." A wild look came into the girl's eyes.

"Don't think I am. Perhaps you recognise these articles?"

Going to the back of the chair upon which he had been sitting, the man picked up some objects from the ground. They were a man's coat and waistcoat of a rather pronounced check. Startled recognition stood in Flossie's face.

"Ah, I see you know them, miss. They're the very clothes—a little stained with paint, you see—that that artist fellow was wearing yesterday. But that's not all. When I found those on the cliff, I turned them over, and there, pinned to the inside pocket, was this envelope. I'm not much of a scholar, but I think it's addressed to you, miss."

Flossie took the note with trembling fingers, and, finding herself unable to stand any longer, subsided into a chair. She guessed the contents. Mad with love for her, Dick Filby must have committed suicide. At last she got the envelope open, and the few brief lines within confirmed her worst fears.

"Dearest Flossie," *it ran.* "*Forgive me the step I have taken—believe me, it was the only one. We loved one another too passionately to be happy apart for a single moment and there was a life between that would always have divided us. I cannot explain but, dearest, I could never have lived without you, so I have chosen what they say is the pleasantest method of departing from existence. Treasure the lovely time we had together. Your broken-hearted,*

Dick."

"*I should like you to keep the one painting I did at Seaborough as a souvenir.*"

Flossie read it through twice and at last the sense began to beat in upon her brain. She had driven the man who loved her into a watery grave.

The coastguard stood quietly by, waiting for her to speak. Finally with an apologetic little cough he broke the silence.

"So he has drowned hisself, miss?"

Flossie nodded.

"He seemed a morbid kind of chap—I thought that when I spoke to him yesterday. So dissatisfied-like about his painting. I suppose it isn't a love affair like that young Perkins'?"

Flossie had recovered sufficiently to be on the defence.

"Oh, no, you mustn't think that! Mr. Filby wasn't very successful as an artist."

"Says so in that note, perhaps?"

She must baffle the coastguard's curiosity.

"No! This—er—simply leaves a little picture of his as a gift for me. Have you been to the police-station yet?"

"I came here first but I must go there straight now."

"Do me a favour! You must speak about the clothes, of course, but don't mention this note! It's quite unimportant!"

The coastguard scratched his head.

"I know I'm silly but I'm engaged, and all that will get about the village, and I don't want my young man to know that I've had a present from this Mr. Filby."

The coastguard, won by her pretty looks, promised, and Flossie breathed afresh.

"You haven't found the body?" she asked.

"Not yet, miss! Perhaps this storm will have swept it miles down the coast. Well, I must go and tell the police."

He was no sooner gone than Flossie burst into tears. The affair was terrible. Even if her part in the matter did not transpire, she would suffer compunctions of conscience for weeks for letting him proceed so far.

She went upstairs to the room which their visitor had occupied. The bed had not been slept in. Most of his belongings had been dispatched to London by train the previous day. Flossie once more broke down. She would never, never flirt again as long as she lived.

* * * * *

That same afternoon Richard Filby in the flesh arrived at his lodgings in West Kensington. He did not look like a man who had lately undergone a fatal experience. His cheeks were bronzed and his step was brisk—indeed the first remark which his landlady made was to compliment him on his improved appearance.

"Thank you, Mrs. Seymour, I've had a very good time. By the way, has my luggage come?"

"Early this morning, sir, by railway van."

"That's all right. I'll dine at seven as usual, Mrs. Seymour."

Filby went upstairs and proceeded to unpack. The few articles left at the inn to allay suspicion, could be replaced at a very small cost, whilst a breach of promise case might have landed him in hundreds.

He smiled as he thought of his clever and successful ruse.

He pictured the local constable assuming terrific importance, declining to give any information whatever, and all the inhabitants clustering in knots and discussing the news.

Now Filby was not a hard-hearted man, and he felt just the least bit sorry as he thought of Flossie Barnett. She would naturally be much cut up, for she loved him tremendously—but there, she was a high-spirited girl and took life pretty easily. And then, of course, marriage between them had always been quite impossible.

Dinner was duly served, and Filby did the meal ample justice. Over his cigar he commenced to nod, and remembered that he had lost a night's rest. He would go to bed very early to-night.

A knock at the door. The maid entered with a letter. He looked at the envelope and started. It bore the Seaborough postmark; it was from Flossie Barnett. He was thoroughly roused now. Had his trick been discovered?

He tore the letter open feverishly. The date reassured him; it was written last night. What on earth had Flossie to say?

Three minutes later Filby was pacing the room, waving the letter irritably in the air. His scheme had gone for nothing; all his trouble had been wasted. This chit of a girl had been simply playing with his affections all the time, and here was her confession.

He seized pen and paper. That night the following communication was dropped into the post.

Mr. Richard Filby begs to inform Miss Flossie Barnett that he is still alive and well, and has returned to town. On second consideration, he did not think Miss Barnett worth drowning for, and her letter to hand this evening confirms him in this opinion. Mr. Filby hopes that Miss Barnett will attain happiness in her projected union and that his little picture may find a niche on her walls.

But by return of post without line or comment, Filby to his great indignation, got his picture back disfigured almost beyond recognition.

Herbert Jamieson.

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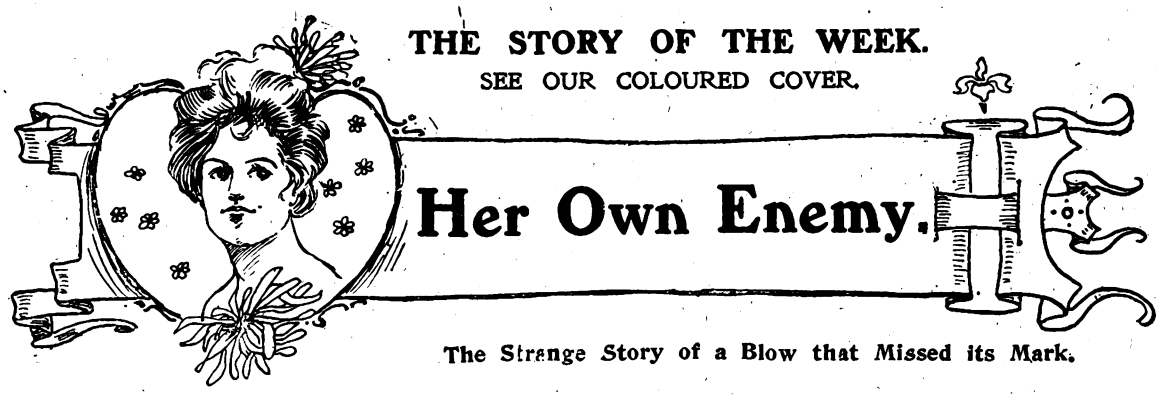

THE STORY OF THE WEEK.

SEE OUR COLOURED COVER.

Her Own Enemy.

The Strange Story of a Blow that Missed its Mark.

CHAPTER I.

The Key and the Letter.

"I CAN say no more, Mrs. Brereton, than that we are very well satisfied with the immediate results of the operation. The next few hours will, of necessity, be somewhat critical, and as the most absolute quiet is of vital importance to your husband's chances of recovery, I would beg of you to leave him entirely in his nurses' hands."

"But surely, Sir James, they will allow me to—to assist. A wife's place, at such moments as these, is by her husband's bedside."

The words were uttered naturally enough, a half-suppressed sob lending them a note of feminine pathos. The speaker raised a small, white hand—rendered still smaller and whiter by the drooping lace ruffle at its wrists—as though to brush away a tear.

The great West-end physician frowned and shook his head. "Your husband needs at his bedside," he said, "those who have been specially trained for emergencies like the present, and who have no relationship with the patient to unsteady their nerves. When Mr. Brereton has definitely rallied, your co-operation will be most valuable; your presence now could only agitate him. I repeat, the slightest excitement will be disastrous, to put it plainly, fatal."

The black-robed, still youthful figure sank into a couch and the delicate brunette features were hidden on the cushioned arm of the lounge. The other shrugged his shoulders and took up his hat.

"After all, Mrs. Brereton," he observed, "I have every confidence in your good sense and your wifely affection. Edward Brereton is an old friend of mine, as well as a distinguished patient; you will forgive me easily enough when, in a month or two, you take Ned to Brighton to brace him up after his little experience of modern surgery, before giving back to the Law Courts their most brilliant ornament."

With a curt, yet polished farewell, he stepped noiselessly from the room. As he did so, Hester Brereton abandoned her crouching posture and sat back among the cushions of the lounge. Her cheeks were dry, her eyes cold and hard.

"You do not like me, Sir James Jardine," she said aloud; "what trick are you trying to play me? You banish me from my husband's room, perhaps from his death-bed, very politely, no doubt, but you do it—you!—you who tried to reinstate Douglas Brereton in his father's good graces when luck enabled me to oust him from them, you who refused to become a trustee of the will by which he was disinherited! 'Charming young step-mothers, my dear madam,' you told me, 'do not see these things as men of the world do.' Oh, no, Sir James, you are no friend of mine! And shall I leave you at a moment like this, to whisper who knows what counsels of reconciliation into my husband's ears?"

She put up her slippered feet indolently on the couch and fell into a reverie—a reverie that lasted for some time. The gloom of the Autumn afternoon deepened insensibly, the glow of the smouldering fire in the grate beside her began to illuminate luridly her handsome, selfish countenance.

Outside an occasional cab rolled, with a muffled rumble, through the stately square, its wheels subdued by the straw that covered the road before the residence of Edward Brereton, the most brilliant of many brilliant King's Counsel, a rising member of Parliament, and one of the wealthiest practising barristers in England. Upstairs the keen brain and marvellous memory that had built up an almost international reputation were still vaguely clouded by the sickening fumes of the chloroform that had rendered him mercifully oblivious to the surgeon's knife.

The stealthy entrance of a servant disturbed Mrs. Brereton's reflections, and she rose to her feet. The man brought her a card on a salver, and she took it abstractedly, then started. It read, "Mr. Douglas Brereton."

"Mr. Brereton asked to see you most particularly, ma'am," she was told, "he asked me to mention, ma'am, begging your pardon, that he would not quit the house till he had done so."

Hester Brereton bit her lip thoughtfully. "I will see him," she answered slowly; "here."

The footman bowed, switched on the light to the electric pendants above and about her, and departed. When the door opened again it was to admit a young fellow, fair-haired and stalwart. He was well-dressed, and his shrewd yet pleasant face wore an expression of mingled sternness and melancholy. Hester looked at him, playing with the lace at her wrists.

"Well," she remarked, "and what do you hope to gain by this extorted interview?"

Douglas Brereton moved across the thickly-carpeted floor, and paused, studying her.

"You have done your work thoroughly," he said, "when my father can come to the very verge of the grave and I not hear of it. A paragraph in this morning's *Times* was my first intimation of his sudden illness—I only noticed it at my club a quarter of an hour ago."

His step-mother sneered. "And you have hastened hither to try and make your peace with him and his hard-won fortune before it is too late?" she said. "You are unlucky, Douglas Brereton, your father has just undergone a serious, almost desperate operation, and even his wife is not allowed to see him. You are already disinherited, as you know, and under the circumstances you can scarcely count upon the chances of a death-bed reconciliation."

Douglas Brereton shuddered. "My poor, poor father," he exclaimed, "and this is the woman who came between us!"

Hester smiled. "You mistake," she objected, "it was not I who came between you, but another woman. You cannot wonder that your father, brilliant, successful, ambitious refused his assent to his son's engagement with a low-born hospital nurse."

Her step-son folded his arms disdainfully. "Ambitious my father may be," he retorted, "but my mother was only a curate's daughter, and they were as poor as church-mice when they married. Better to be poor and happy than be

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TURN TO PAGE 719 AND WIN A HANDSOME GRAMOPHONE.

rich and marry a woman capable of parting son and father, that she may inherit undivided the fortune for whose sake she can count upon her husband's death."

A spasm of ferocity wrung Hester's face. "You came to insult me then," she said, "though you know your father would have you put out by his servants if he could hear the cowardly accusation you have made against his wife. Go, if your father dies, you are a beggar; if he lives so long as there is a spark of love in his heart for me, he is dead to you. Go!"

Douglas Brereton hesitated, but his step-mother extended a hand towards an ivory button in the wall at the fireside. Yielding to the inevitable, he crossed without a word the threshold of the room.

In the corridor beyond he lingered, the old house was familiar to him. Mrs. Brereton's drawing-room was on the first floor, a passage on the right went to his father's chamber. He stepped a pace or two along it thrilling with emotion, but halted abruptly. No, no, he must think of the sick man, rallying slowly from his dangerous operation—he could do nothing, nothing!"

Someone brushed by him—a woman in nurse's uniform—and an exclamation broke from Douglas Brereton.

"Winnie," he whispered, "great Heavens—you here!"

The nurse turned, a gentle, irrepressibly girlish face showing itself under the stiff cap. She had a letter in her fingers—an envelope addressed but unstamped.

"Douglas!" she murmured. "How strange that we should meet like this! Yes! I was sent in a hurry as a night-nurse to take the place of another one who could not be spared. I did not know the patient was your father. But I had to go through with it for a while, and, of course, they had never seen me. Even your friend, Sir James, doesn't know me by sight. I am so glad they have allowed you to come, though I was afraid when I didn't see you about the house that—that the quarrel was irreparable. I do wish I had never said 'Yes' to you, dear. But there, I mustn't stay, I go on duty in a moment, I was looking for Mrs. Brereton with a letter. Perhaps we shall see one another again soon."

She glanced at him—a shy, tender, hasty glance, that lent a sudden beauty to her grave features—and, giving him no time to answer her rapid sentences, slipped past him down the corridor.

Revolving bewilderedly the coincidence that had brought Winifred Carr, his betrothed wife, to wait upon the father who, on her account, had disinherited his son, Douglas Brereton went down the wide staircase and let himself out at the heavy hall-doors. He had scarcely rounded the head of the flight before Hester Brereton, emerging from her drawing-room, encountered the nurse with the letter.

"Anything wanted, nurse?" she asked coldly, "one of the servants would have answered the bedroom-bell; you need not leave your patient."

Winifred drew herself up. "I am not yet on duty, madam," she said, "and we are anxious to keep everything as quiet as possible in this part of the house. Before Mr. Brereton took the chloroform he insisted on writing this note, which he wished to have posted. It has been overlooked for half an hour, so I just brought it down. No doubt you will take charge of it."

Hester assented haughtily, and with pulses beating unaccountably, carried the envelope back into the drawing-room, as Winifred Carr, having administered her snub, retraced her steps to the sick room. Alone in her apartment, Mrs. Brereton was scrutinising the envelope in her hand. The name on it was "Robert Osler," and the address was one in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The name and address were those of Edward Brereton's own solicitor, and there was something in the envelope, something that felt like a key.

Moved by an impulse, Hector pulled at the flap. It was imperfectly attached and came open. She plucked out the inclosed missive—in which was folded a small steel key of intricate design—and read it. It began with a brief reference to Edward Brereton's approaching operation, and went on:

"Herewith is the key of the little strong-box in my bedroom. It contains the will you last made for me. I am glad it is in existence, in case of accidents. Had the previous one stood, I could not have been content to jeopardise my life. It was a cruel, unnatural document; you had better destroy it at once, that there may be no record of it."

Hester knitted her brows. So she was cheated, after all, and her husband had relented towards his only child. If he died she would lose a great part of his wealth; if he lived, he would be reconciled to his son. What should she—what could she do?

Her fingers closed upon the key, which was that of the strong-box where the new will lay. Destroy that document, and the old one—the one the solicitor had in his possession—held good.

But what was the use if her husband recovered? He would make a new will reinstating his son. Some words came into her head—startlingly. "The slightest excitement now would be disastrous—to put it plainly, fatal." That was what Sir James Jardine had said to her twenty minutes before. A shiver passed over her, and she sat down suddenly, the letter shaking violently in her hand. All at once it ceased to flutter; Hester Brereton had regained her self-control.

Putting the letter in her pocket, she stole out of her apartment and went down the passage leading to her husband's room. There was a room on either side of it—the three doors confronted her, closed and silent. One room was an empty guest-chamber, one her husband's own dressing-room, leading to his sleeping chamber.

Hester slipped into the first of the three, she knew that it also communicated, by a locked and disused door, with Edward Brereton's apartment. She had a master-key in her pocket—sure sign of a jealous and suspicious nature!—and opened the communicating door, aware that it was covered on the other side by a tall wardrobe.

Drawing it cautiously ajar, she found that she could just see between the door-frame and the piece of furniture. On the bed, motionless, and extended in an almost death-like position, lay the sick man, a vague and occasional sigh his only token of life. The chamber was dimly illuminated and empty. In the lighted dressing-room beyond, the nurse she had met in the passage was leaning over a tiny spirit-lamp, apparently preparing some food.

Noiselessly Hester pushed the wardrobe on its castors until she could get through. A stride, and she had reached the polished wooden cabinet that concealed her husband's strong-box. She stooped down, slid a walnut panel, and put the key into the inner lock. It turned easily, she whipped open the iron door, and ran through a medley of documents.

A long envelope caught her eye—it was indorsed, "My Will, Edward Brereton," and bore a date. Hester broke the seal and withdrew the inclosure—it was the usual legal-looking document; a glance showed her her step-son's name and the words, "One half of the residue, being approximately, as I believe, about one hundred and twenty thousand pounds." She had been right—Douglas Brereton was co-heir with herself.

Reclosing the strong-box she locked it, folded the will, and began noiselessly to tear the document into fragments. Then holding these, she started up and crossed to the bed.

"Edward," she murmured, "Edward, can you hear me?" The sick man's eyelids lifted, and he smiled faintly at her. Hester held up the torn will.

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"Do you know what this is?" she whispered harshly. "It is your will—the will by which you made your son—whom you love more than me—a rich man. Well, I have destroyed it, you understand, destroyed it! Make another if you like—if you can!"

A ghastly change came into the drawn, white face on the pillow, a look of confused horror and incredulity.

"Hester, Hester!" said the pale lips, in a voice like the ghost of speech, "oh, my mad, my reckless darling, you——"

The sick man's shoulders moved as though he were trying to rise. A spasm shook him, the livid white of his face became a terrible ashen grey, a strange sound shook his throat, and he lay still.

There was a quick step and someone bent over him—it was the young nurse, and she turned an alarmed, condemning face on Hester.

"Madam! madam!" she cried, "why are you here? You have killed him. Go! go! send someone for the doctor, quickly."

Hester quailed before her stern gesture, and, hastily secreting the fragments of the will in her own pocket, swept from the room with well-affected excitement.

The nurse raised the nerveless form of her patient and tried to pour some brandy between the cold lips. She made a despairing gesture and set down the glass. "Too late," she murmured, "his blood is on her head."

CHAPTER II.

"I am on my Defence, then."

"Have the goodness to ascertain if Mrs. Brereton can see me for a few minutes."

Sir James Jardine made the request. He stood in the hall of the silent house to which, only a few hours before, he had been called in hot haste to find his friend and patient dead of heart-failure, and Hester Brereton in apparent hysterics. A night had passed and another heavy November day brooded over the metropolis and sent its foggy breath into the room where Edward Brereton lay in his last sleep.

The footman ushered the physician into a large and darkened library, and went to make the indicated inquiry.. The visitor put down his hat, crossed to the window, and peered out through the drawn blinds. On the opposite side of the way, two men and a woman were strolling to and fro—the latter was the young hospital nurse, Winifred Carr. One of her companions was Douglas Brereton, the other a short, stout, smartly-dressed man in a furred overcoat. Sir James tapped lightly at the pane and the three glanced significantly in his direction.

A sound made the physician turn about hastily. Mrs. Brereton herself had just entered the apartment—she walked with affected unsteadiness and carried a jewelled smelling-bottle.

"Ah, Sir James," she said, "so you have come to see me. How good of you. I am better to-day, though sadly shaken. Oh, if I had only taken your warning, my darling Edward might be alive now. It is that thought which is killing me." And she sank into a chair and hid her face in her hands.

Sir James approached her quietly. "Don't distress yourself by recalling the past," he advised her; "by the way, you should have kept one of the nurses with you until your nerves recover their balance somewhat. That little Nurse Carr is most gentle and capable."

Mrs. Brereton put her smelling-bottle to her nostrils. "I—I couldn't bear to see her again," the physician was told; "she reminded me too vividly of that awful moment, so I allowed her to go at once."

Sir James would have spoken, but his observation was prevented. The footman had re-entered with a card. Mrs. Brereton looked at it—it was inscribed "Robert Osler," On a corner was the one word, "Urgent."

"You will excuse me, Sir James," said Hester, showing him the card, "Mr. Osler is my poor husband's solicitor."

The physician had been watching her covertly. "By all means," he answered, "Osler and I are more than acquaintances, I will take the liberty of warning him not to tax you unduly."

Mrs. Brereton made no comment upon the proposal and Sir James lingered persistently. Suddenly there appeared in the room a small stout man with a furred coat—it was he whom the physician had seen walking on the other side of the way. He came deferentially across the floor, hat in hand.

"So sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Brereton," he began, "a terrible time for you, I am sure. Ah, Sir James, you here! But then Mrs. Brereton is in careful hands, I know. I can guess what you are going to say, that she must not be troubled with business—she shall not. All I wish is to have access to the strong-box in Mr. Brereton's bedroom. He sent me a line before undergoing this—alas, unsuccessful!—operation, to say that, in case of accidents, his will could be found there. He also speaks of inclosing a key which, however, he omitted to do."

Hester Brereton gasped involuntarily and looked at the letter held out by the solicitor—it was the note that had been given to her, sealed, by Winifred Carr, the note that she had opened, read, and thrust into her pocket. She had forgotten all about it from that moment, and here it was, between the lawyer's fingers. How had it come there?

She forced herself to answer collectedly. "I—I will look for the key," she rejoined, "and you can go through the strong-box at your leisure. Sir James will tell you that I am not fit to assist you."

The lawyer bowed sympathetically and hastened to open the door for her. No sooner had she disappeared from the hall than he himself darted out of the library and made for the double doors which led to the street. Scarcely a moment elapsed before he was back again. And with him were Douglas Brereton and Winifred Carr.

Sir James held up a warning finger as they entered. "In there with you," he said, pointing to a recess behind a large screen, "and remember, not a sound till you hear your cue."

Douglas Brereton assented silently and drew to the flap of the screen. There had not been a moment to lose—his step-mother was approaching the threshold of the library. An instant more and she was passing unconsciously within an inch of the hidden couple.

"This is it, I think," she said, giving the solicitor a small key and touching the bell, "you shall be shown upstairs at once. Take Mr. Osler," she bade the servant who answered her summons, "to—to Mr. Brereton's room, and point out to him the cabinet containing the strong-box."

Her voice faltered and broke pathetically at the mention of her husband's name. Hester Brereton was no mean actress, and she felt instinctively that much was at stake. Who had sent that intercepted letter to its destination; who had—who could have dealt her that dangerous blow?

The solicitor followed the footman out of the library, and Sir James, with a great show of professional anxiety, put his dead friend's wife back into her chair, and felt her pulse with delicate, masterful fingers.

"You are in a most over-wrought condition," he informed her; "your pulse is simply galloping. Let me send out for a draught; otherwise you will be prostrate in another hour."

With elaborate slowness he wrote a prescription, rang for the footman, and dispatched it to be made up. Hester chafed inwardly, yet she dared not rebel. Thanks to this tactful series of delays, Sir James was still there when the solicitor came downstairs.

"Mrs. Brereton," said the latter gravely; "a most remarkable state of affairs has arisen.

DON'T FORGET THAT "THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY" STARTS NEXT WEEK.

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am sure, by the way, that I may speak frankly before Sir James—who is a trustee, along with myself, of your husband's will—a will that, in point of fact, is not to be found. There is neither will, nor trace of a will."

"No trace!" said a voice, the voice of Douglas Brereton, "then what is this?" As the question was asked, the screen was flung aside, and Hester saw herself confronted by her step-son. Near him was the woman who had said to her, beside Edward Brereton's deathbed, that she had killed her husband. In her step-son's hand was a scrap of stiff paper, covered with legal script. It was a fragment of the torn will.

Sir James took the scrap of paper. "Mrs. Brereton," he added, "we have adopted this somewhat dramatic means of securing a private consideration of certain grave problems. This nurse—who happens to be your step-son's betrothed—picked up in your husband's room the note which she had seen Mr. Brereton write and inclose, with a key, in an envelope, afterwards delivered to you by her. With it, on the floor, was this piece of paper, containing part of the wording of a will which your husband showed to me only a month ago, and which, according to his letter to Mr. Osler, was to be found in his strong-box. How came that note and this fragment in the room to which you were forbidden access, and which you entered by a circuitous route. Is it not the case that they slipped from your hand or your pocket during that visit which cost your husband his life—a visit made for the purpose of obtaining and destroying a will you feared might cost you dear?"

Hester Brereton faced them dauntlessly. "I am on my defence, then," she said; "so be it, your only witness is a woman whose relation to my disinherited step-son will destroy the weight of any false evidence you may have drilled her in. As matters stand, I am my husband's sole heir—no doubt he himself destroyed the will of which you speak."

"And by which," put in the solicitor; "you were left unconditionally half his fortune. The will still in my possession, and which the destruction of this later one brings into operation, was made two months ago after my client had determined to reinstate Mr. Douglas Brereton in his rightful position, and leaves you only a life annuity of a thousand a year, provided that you never re-marry. It was this last document which my client wished me to destroy as cruel and inhuman. His death renders it illegal for me to do so, and, in the absence of the later will, the document in question becomes his last and effective testament. Under it Mr. Brereton is master of this house, and of his father's fortune."

Hester put her hand to her throat, gasped, tried to speak, and fell fainting into the physician's arms. The trap which her own selfishness and avarice had set and baited had closed upon her.

* * * * *

By law, had the courts been satisfied with the evidence of Douglas Brereton and Winifred Carr, and the singularly preserved document, picked up by the latter in her patient's room and carried by her to her lover, who had taken them, forthwith to Sir James and Mr. Osler, Mrs. Brereton's theft of her husband's will could have earned her penal servitude for a term of years, if not for life. But Sir James and the discreet solicitor kept their dead friend's honour from that stain, and Hester still draws her thousand a year and lives, condemned by her own deed, to perpetual widowhood.

Douglas and his wife are worthier stewards of his father's fortune than she would have been. Well for them that they do not dream of the still darker crime that Hester Brereton committed, when she stung, with those envenomed words, the weak heart of a sick man, and slew him as certainly as if she had buried a knife in his bosom.

R. Norman Silver.

Tottie (aged five): "I wonder why babies is always born in de night time." Lottie (aged seven, a little wiser): "Don't you know? It's cos' they wants to make sure of findin' their mothers at home."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

December 2.—The next twelve months will be rather favourable for those whose birthdays fall here. Go quietly and have a care against chills and colds.

Girls will have some anxiety over love affairs.

The day is not promising for marriage, pleasure, asking favours, nor entering upon new undertakings.

A child born to-day will be rather moody and suspicious; should keep in the employ of others.

December 3.—An active and favourable time for business and finances. More than usual movement, doctors, military men, and metal workers are benefited.

Young girls will find the opposite sex rather backward this year.

The day is good for most matters; buy and sell.

A child born here will be active, courageous, and ambitious; would do well in the Army, or as a chemist.

December 4.—Some sickness and trouble in the domestic circle are threatened. Be prudent and cautious in business.

Love affairs will not go well, and girls meet with disappointment.

The day is evil for marriage, asking favours, dealing with landlords for property. Beware of colds and loss in business.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate, over cautious, and ill-tempered. Worse for a girl.

December 5.—A good year for business and general concerns. Sign papers and speculate. Insure against fire and accident.

Girls will find love affairs very interesting; they become engaged or marry.

The day is good for most matters; write letters, buy, sell, ask favours, engage servants, visit, and make new friends.

A child born this day will be active, jovial, and affectionate. Should go into business for itself and will be fortunate.

December 6.—Give careful attention to business and it will prosper. Changes made this year will turn out well.

Young girls will have attentions, but should not place too much confidence in opposite sex. A good year to marry.

The day is good for speculating, dealing with professional people, electricians, and bankers.

A child born to-day will be fortunate and much respected. If a girl she will have a fortunate marriage.

December 7.—A quiet and unimportant birthday. The mind will be inclined to foreign journeys.

Girls will be much interested in news, but little progress is shown in love affairs.

A child born here will be ingenious and cheerful, but will have a very ordinary career.

December 8.—An unfortunate birthday; change, anxiety, ill-health, and business worrips. Some bother over news and agreements.

Girls will meet with disappointment, and many crosses and obstacles come into love matters.

The day is one to let others make the first move; beware of deceit and secret enmity.

A child born here will be unfortunate, and should keep in the employ of others. It will be idle, and mix with bad companions.

Asturel.

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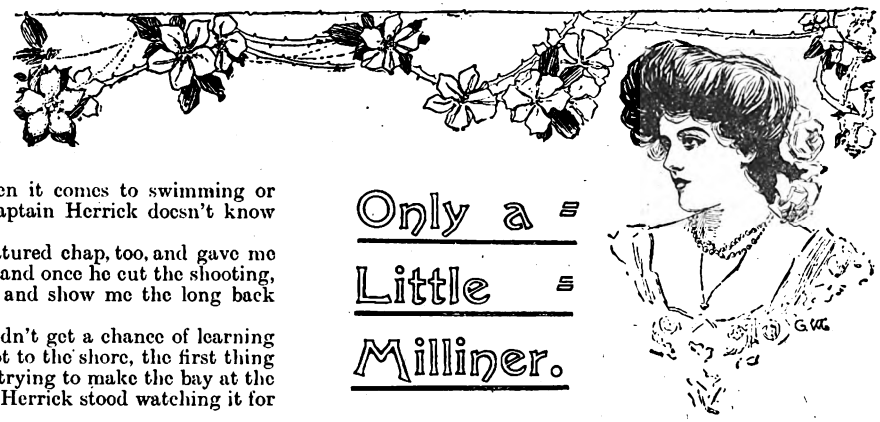

Only a Little Milliner.

I was awfully glad uncle Jack asked Captain Herrick to join us at Blairinch, although he declares he is about as much use on a grouse moor as a bull in a china shop.

That's all rot, of course, because though he is a sailor, he's not at all a bad shot, but when it comes to swimming or handling a boat, well—what Captain Herrick doesn't know isn't worth talking about.

He's such an awfully good natured chap, too, and gave me no end of tips about swimming, and once he cut the shooting, just to come down to the loch and show me the long back stroke.

However, as it happened, I didn't get a chance of learning it that day, because when we got to the shore, the first thing we saw was a small sailing boat trying to make the bay at the other side of the loch. Captain Herrick stood watching it for a couple of minutes then :

"By George," he said, "if the duffers don't take in that sail before they round the point, they'll be upset as sure as a gun !"

Then he whipped out his glass and watched the boat rushing up the loch. Just as she came from under the lee of the hills the wind caught her and she heeled over like a cockle shell. I could see one chap hauling away at the sail, but the second Johnnie seemed to be doing nothing except holding on to the first.

"They're a couple of awful duffers," I was beginning when Captain Herrick interrupted me.

"They're women !" he said, and before you could say knife he'd kicked off his boots, thrown off his coat and waistcoat, and made for the loch.

"Are you sure you can swim across the bay, Reggie ?" he shouted as I followed his example.

"Rather," said I ; "why, I did twice the distance yesterday."

"Yes, but not in a sou-west wind, and with a sea on like this. However, just keep on the lee side of me and we'll manage all right I daresay," said Captain Herrick.

And manage we did, though I'm bound to say when I heard one of the women give an ear-piercing yell, just as we were half way across the loch, I got such a fright that if it hadn't been for Captain Herrick I should have gone down like a stone.

He swung round in a second and put out his arm.

"Buck up, Reggie, old man," he said, "we'll reach them in another couple of minutes, and they're all right as long as they can make a noise."

All the same I was jolly glad when we got across and found the two women clinging to the bottom of the upturned boat. One of them was a stout old party in a big, mushroom-shaped hat and a waist—the other was a slim young girl, possibly her daughter. The old lady was yelling fit to take your head off. She stopped in the middle of a shriek when she saw Captain Herrick and me swimming towards them.

"Oh, save us ! Do save us !" she howled.

"All right, but you must obey orders, please," said Herrick. "Put your arm on my shoulder, so—no, not round my neck or we shall both sink. That's better ! Can you swim ?" he said, turning to the younger woman.

"Yes, a little."

"Then follow slowly, and Reggie here will give you a hand if you want to rest a bit. We're not far from the shore, and I'll come back presently."

He was off before I'd time to look round and when I did, if I hadn't been in rather a funk about having to look after the girl I should have felt inclined to howl with laughter, he looked so jolly queer swimming away with the fat old lady in the mushroom hat in tow.

The girl was awfully plucky, and though she wasn't a particularly good hand at swimming, she got along somehow, and only caved in once, and then I managed to keep her afloat all right till Captain Herrick swam back to us. I was jolly glad to see him I can tell you, and it was splendid to see the easy way he swam to shore with one arm round the girl who looked like a mermaid with her long black hair floating out behind her.

At least, I thought it was black until it began to dry in the sun, and then it curled up in brown rings and looked ripping.

She must have been a jolly pretty girl, too, for she even managed to look nice with her clothes all dripping wet and her shoes like a couple of wet sponges.

By the time Captain Herrick had finished buttoning the old lady into his dry coat and given her a pretty stiff drink from his flask, I had got the girl into my blazer, but she was most awfully pale, and shivered till her teeth chattered again. Captain Herrick poured some whisky down her throat as if she'd been a baby, but even then she didn't buck up.

If only we had been within a reasonable distance of a peat fire and a cup of hot tea we could have got the women round in no time, but there wasn't a cottage within three miles, and even Captain Herrick wasn't equal to carrying the stout old party so far as that, while as for the girl—I really didn't see what we were to do and I said as much to Captain Herrick.

"Do ? Reggie," he said coolly ; "why, fetch up the boat to be sure, it's been drifting in shore for the last ten minutes."

As it turned out there wasn't much wrong with her, though it took us a good time to right her and rig up a square sail which we found jammed under the seat in the stern.

The two women had bucked up ever so much, the old one in particular, and when we came back it was to find her scolding the girl for all she was worth.

"But, auntie," the girl said, "you know you wanted particularly to see St. Ronan's Creek, and if you hadn't jumped up and clung to my arm when I was hauling in the sail——"

"Don't talk to me about sails !" snapped the old woman. "I never did approve of your boating, and as for trusting myself again to such a cockle shell——"

Then Captain Herrick chipped in and said that if we were to make the mainland before sunset we'd better start at once.

The old girl was pretty obstinate at first. She began by saying that she wouldn't stir from the spot till a carriage came to fetch her from Craigdorn, and when Captain Herrick explained that as she was at that moment on the Island of Benmuir, a carriage to the mainland was rather out of the question, she rounded on him as though it was his fault.

Then I suggested our fetching a carriage from Blairinch, but when the old girl heard it was three miles away, she asked us how on earth we supposed she was going to wait all that time shivering in her damp clothes.

Then the girl snipped in :

"You know quite well, auntie, dear, that we are going back to Craigdorn in the *Sea Foam*," she said coolly. "You are far too wet to sit here arguing, so the best thing we can do is to start at once."

That settled the matter though it didn't prevent the old lady from grumbling the whole way back to Craigdorn.

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However, no one paid much attention to her, for to tell the honest truth we had about as much as we could do to manage the boat.

It wasn't until Captain Herrick was helping her into a fly at the head of Craigdorn Pier that the old girl remembered to thank him.

"You must forgive my being so ungracious, Captain Herrick," she said, "but the prospect of rheumatism is apt to make us old folk rather cranky and——"

Of course Herrick said she was as sweet-tempered as an angel, or words to that effect, and when she asked us if we would look in and have tea with them one day, Captain Herrick accepted like a shot.

"I ought to have a card somewhere, if I can only find my purse," she said.

"Ah, here it is!" producing a rather pulpy-looking red leather bag and handing Captain Herrick a very damp piece of pasteboard.

"You won't forget that we are at home most afternoons from five to six," she said.

"No, I shall certainly not forget," Herrick said, looking straight at the girl, who for some reason or other blushed right up to her pretty eyes.

It was not until the carriage was out of sight that he looked at the card in his hand.

"Miss Merryweather, Milliner and Ladies' Outfitter, 49 High Street, Craigdorn," he read.

Then he turned to me. "Was that the address you gave the cabman just now, Reggie?" he said.

I nodded. "But I don't believe the girl is a milliner, all the same," I said.

"Why not?" said Captain Herrick. "Plenty of ladies go in for that sort of thing nowadays, and besides, it doesn't make a scrap of difference to the fact that the younger Miss Merryweather is an extremely nice girl, and about as keen a sportswoman as they make them.

"Why, she landed a three pounder in the stream at Craigdorn only last week and she——"

"Oh, she fishes at Craigdorn, does she?" said I.

"Of course, why not?" said Captain Herrick sharply.

"Only that she'd better not let Lord Craigdorn catch her at it," said I; "he's awfully down on poachers."

* * * * *

A couple of days later when I heard Captain Herrick ask Uncle Jack if he might take the cutter as he was going across to Craigdorn, I smelt a rat.

"Do you mind my coming with you, sir?" I said; "at least, if you are going to call upon Miss Merryweather."

Captain Herrick looked rather sick for a minute, then he laughed.

"You certainly were included in the invitation, Reggie," he said, "so come along."

As we flew across the bay in the cutter I thought of what Captain Herrick's mater would say if she knew he was going to have tea in the back parlour of a shop in Craigdorn High Street. I've only seen Lady Herrick once, and then she looked at me through a long-handled eyeglass, and told my pater I was really a very pretty little boy.

Of course that was ages ago, but I remember I thought it rather cheeky of her to call me a little boy when I'd just got into the second footer team at St. Olave's. Sir James Herrick had a ripping place in Worcestershire, but, of course, that went to the eldest son, and they say Lady Herrick had made up her mind that Rupert—that's Captain Herrick, you know—had got to marry an heiress by hook or by crook.

Of course, marrying a woman for her money is a caddish thing to do anyway, so Captain Herrick wasn't likely to be taking any, and I expect he jolly well told his mater so.

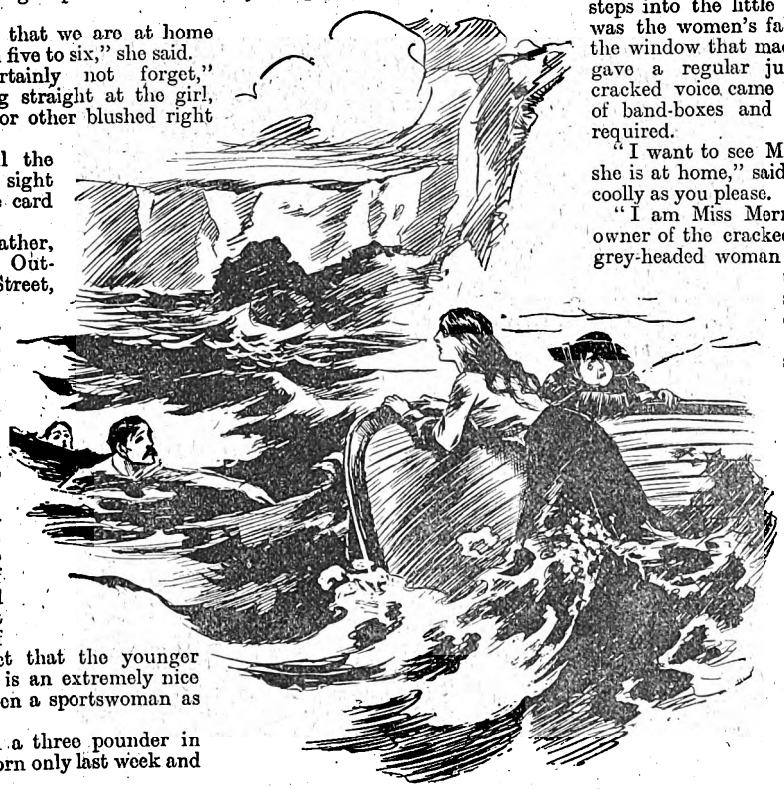
We got to Craigdorn just on five o'clock, and to see the way Captain Herrick strode up the High Street you would have thought he was in a mortal funk of being late.

When he came to No. 49 he had to stoop his head under the low doorway, and even then he nearly went a header down two steps into the little shop. I suppose it was the women's fal lals hanging across the window that made it so dark, but I gave a regular jump when a little cracked voice came from behind a pile of band-boxes and asked us what we required.

"I want to see Miss Merryweather if she is at home," said Captain Herrick as coolly as you please.

"I am Miss Merryweather," said the owner of the cracked voice, and a little grey-headed woman came from behind the boxes and stood smiling at us over the counter.

I've often wondered since how he did it, but Captain Herrick never turned a hair, only pretended he had come in to get some gloves for his mater, and felt sure he could rely on Miss Merryweather's taste to select them for him. He bought six pairs, and though he led the conversation round to old ladies with mushroom-shaped hats and young ones with auburn hair and brown eyes, we came out of the dark little shop as wise as we went in.



The two women were clinging helplessly to an upturned boat.

Captain Herrick hardly said a word the whole way back to Blairinch, and when we met the butler in the hall and heard Uncle Jack had visitors, we were just making tracks for the gunroom when we heard the sound of a girl's low laugh.

Captain Herrick stopped a moment as if he'd been shot, and then marched straight into the drawing-room.

I followed and was just in time to hear Uncle Jack say:

"Miss Seaton, may I introduce my friend, Captain Herrick, Lord Craigdorn, I think you have already met."

To see the cool way Captain Herrick shook hands with the girl, and then explained to her father that he had already had the pleasure of meeting his daughter, you would have thought that he'd known all along who the girl was.

I must say clothes do make a difference even to a pretty girl as you would jolly well have said if you'd seen Miss Seaton in the ripping white frock she wore that afternoon.

Lord Craigdorn was a handsome old Johnnie, too, and a very decent sort if he hadn't jawed away about Captain Her-

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rick's and my heroism in saving his sister's and his only daughter's life.

I asked how the old lady was just by way of putting a stopper on, and he said she was pretty fit only suffering from a slight attack of rheumatism which prevented her leaving the house.

She hoped, however, to see us all at the Castle for a few days if Uncle Jack would arrange it.

As a matter of fact Uncle Jack couldn't—at least, not for himself—he'd got a lot more chaps coming up for the shooting.

So it ended by Captain Herrick and I going to Craigdorn Castle by ourselves, and, by George! we did have a ripping time with the trout!

At least, I did. Captain Herrick might have caught no end only he was busy teaching Mary Seaton a new cast with a special kind of fly. At least, that is what they said they'd been doing when they came in late for tea two afternoons running. All I can say is that when I came across them on the third day, they didn't look like fishing one bit.

Mary Seaton had on her white frock with a rose in her belt, and Captain Herrick was putting in all he knew to get hold of the rose.

When I came back a couple of hours later I'm jiggered if they weren't in exactly the same place. Captain Herrick was sitting with his back against a tree and Mary Seaton—well, so far as I could make out, she was pretty comfortable leaning against his arm. She held a crumpled card in her hand, and as I passed I heard her say:

"And do you mean to say that it would have made no difference even if I had been the Craigdorn milliner, Rupert?" looking up into his face as she spoke.

"Not a scrap, my darling," he said; "you would have still been the dearest, prettiest and sweetest little girl in the whole world."

I thought of Lady Herrick and smiled.

The girl smiled too as she lifted her head from Captain Herrick's shoulder.

"Rupert," she said, "you are a dear, and I believe I should have fallen in love with you even if——"

She didn't finish the sentence, but that I am bound to say was Captain Herrick's fault.

Morris Coleborn.

"I WONDER what old General X. can see in that odiously made-up Miss W.?" "The old war-horse likes the smell of powder, I fancy."

ADA: "No; Priscilla will never marry unless she finds her ideal." Ida: "What sort of a man is her ideal?" Ada: "A man who will propose."

ETHEL (shuddering): "How the trees moan and sigh to-night!" Bobby (speaking whereof he knows): "Well, I guess you'd moan and sigh, if you were as full of green apples as they are."

HE: "The artists say that five feet four inches is the divine height for woman." His Darling (crossly): "You know I am five feet eight." He (quickly): "You are more than divine, my dear."

FATHER: "I hear, my boy, that you have lately told your mother several falsehoods. This grieves me to the heart. Always tell the truth, even though it may bring suffering upon you. Will you promise me?" Boy: "Yes, father." Father: "Verywell. Now go and see who's knocking at the door. If it's the rate collector, say I'm not at home."

MRS. FIZZLETOP has been making an earnest effort to have her son Johnny taught to play the piano. A few days ago Mrs. Fizzletop called upstairs: "Why aren't you practising your piece, Johnny?" "I am." "You are not. You haven't touched the piano in the last half-hour." "I've been practising all the same. Those are pauses in this march, and I am practising them over and over until I know them."

TEN MORE GRAMOPHONES FOR READERS OF "SHORT STORIES."

In order that those of our readers who have not yet managed to secure one of these splendid instruments may still have an opportunity of doing so, we offer ten more of our famous Gramophones this week.

These prizes, as every successful competitor will tell you, are well worth trying for. They reproduce splendidly both the human voice and musical instruments. With each instrument is presented two records, and as a Christmas party entertainer they are hardly to be equalled.

What you have to do to Win a Gramophone.

Construct a sentence the initial letters of each word of which, in their proper order, shall make up the two words ALBERT GATE, the scene of the mystery of which Mr. Louis Tracy tells us in our next number.

Write your sentence in ink in the coupon below, using the initial letters given as the first letters of your words.

A.....	**T**.....
L.....	**G**.....
B.....	**A**.....
E.....	**T**.....
R.....	**E**.....

Name.....

Address .....

Then fill in your name and address, cut out your coupon, and send it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope in the top left-hand corner "Albert Gate."

All attempts must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday morning, December 9th.

Result of the "Chaperon Sentence" Competition.

A handsome Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following in the above competition:

Mrs. E. Manning, 85 Beechdale Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.
S. Pavey, 58 West Street, Sittingbourne.
J. G. Bennett, 8 Sidney Street, Grantham
W. May, Harbour Constable, Folkestone Harbour
J. Peake Jnr., The Tannery, Liskeard
J. Brand, 27 Balfern Street, Battersea, S.W.
C. W. Lea, 196 Stockwell Road, S.W.
J. Darke, 16 South View Terrace, Plymouth
H. Baverstock, The Beeches, Bettemoor Road, Shirley, Southampton
T. F. Ingles, Westbury Stores, Westbury Avenue, Wood Green, N.

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THE PRICE OF SILENCE.

The Story of a Man's Love, a Woman's Deception, and a Friend's Devotion.

***

Mr. Chris. Gerrard paid the cabman and ran in almost juvenile fashion up the steps of the hotel without listening to the "Thank you, sir!" of the surprised Jehu. Had Sir Allen Joyce arrived? No? That was a small piece of good fortune, Gerrard thought; he was afraid that he would not be in time to welcome his old friend on his return with his bride.

"I suppose it wasn't extraordinary for him not to say by which route he was coming," mused Gerrard, as he wended his way to the smoking-room. "He was never a man to worry about details, otherwise he would have managed his investments and certain other affairs himself since settling down. As nearly as I can gather from what he does say, he ought to have been here by now. Train late, probably!"

Gerrard sat down in a corner and lighted a cigar. His mind was full of his friend just then. They had been at school together, and had done a good deal of roughing it in the Colonies afterwards. Gerrard had been obliged to give up that life about six years previously, owing to a partial breakdown in health, but Allen Royce had continued the roving career, and, two years ago, had struck a good thing and made money. It is probable, however, that he would have continued his mode of living had he not unexpectedly come into the title and a goodly income.

Gerrard himself had not been fortunate, and for the few years during which he had been separated from his chum he had had some difficulty in making both ends meet. He never allowed Royce to know this, as he did not wish his friend to think that he was "sponging." It was an excess of independence, but Gerrard conceived that it was the proper course.

"And now he is married!" reflected Gerrard. "Who would have thought it, at his age—forty-five! Met his wife, and fell so desperately in love with her that he proposed and was married quietly by special license during a stay in the lake district up North. I am curious to see the woman. Met her near Windermere."

The smoke curled about Gerrard's thoughtful, bronzed face as he puffed slowly and deliberately at his cigar, keeping time with his meditations as it seemed.

"He would be a model husband, he would lavish every care, every attention, on his wife. If the woman actually didn't love him before marriage—which, of course, is an utter impossibility—she would be forced to do so by the manifestations of his love for her. I know Royce's character."

A hand touched his shoulder and he sprang to his feet with—

"Hallo, Allen, old fel—Oh!" he ejaculated, as his eyes fell on the figure confronting him. "It's you, Braxton? I thought it was Sir Allen Royce. I'm waiting for him."

"So am I!" rejoined the other laconically, taking a seat. "Sit down, Gerrard, I've something to say."

"Does Sir Allen expect you?" inquired Gerrard, puzzled

He looked down at Braxton without responding to the invitation to resume his seat.

"No, he doesn't!" was the retort. "And I can't say that he will be pleased to see me, but that is not *my* business. Sit down, man, and listen; you may be able to spare Sir Allen Royce the—well, let us be polite, and say the pleasure of seeing me!"

A cruel, cynical smile played about the lips of Braxton. Gerrard, more perplexed than ever, sat down and waited for the other to speak.

"People would tell you," began Braxton calmly, "that I am one of those individuals who earn their living by the exercise of their wits. In the course of that process I pick up certain bits of information which may, and often do, come handy. In plain language, they put money into my pocket, because the parties interested are willing to pay for the suppression of certain unpleasant facts, which I should consider it my bounden duty to make public if they didn't open their purse strings!"

"You're a blackmailer!" declared Gerrard hotly. He was the soul of integrity himself, and this man's brazen talk was almost intolerable. "What has all that to do with the Baronet?"

"It has to do with his new bride chiefly," observed Braxton entirely unmoved. "Naturally, what affects her, interests him, and he ought to be willing to pay for silence."

"Speak plainly!" demanded Gerrard sternly. "What does it all mean?"

"Sir Allen's wife is a criminal," said Braxton, with a trace of spitefulness in his voice. "She is really the woman who, in various guises and disguises, has been committing those robberies from grand houses, and she is guilty of other offences. She is a beautiful and singularly attractive woman, she ingratiates herself with men and women of position, receives invitations, and jewels and all that sort of thing disappear. As a rule she is not suspected."

It took Gerrard fully two minutes to recover himself sufficiently to make a remark.

"You mean to insinuate that Lady Allen Royce is this adventuress?" he asked with a gasp.

"I don't insinuate anything; I say straight out that she is that woman!" declared Braxton triumphantly. "I have indisputable proof! And I'll tell you more. She is preparing to gather up all the jewels and get all the money—in notes or cash—which she can wheedle out of her present husband, and then"—he lighted a match and blew it out—"she will disappear like that!"

"Supposing your statement to be correct, what is it to do with you?"

"As a matter of justice," returned Braxton evilly, "I have come here to point her out to the police as the woman they want for a case up in Scotland. Unless," he added slowly and significantly, "you will undertake to talk to the Baronet, and persuade him to buy the evidence from me in order to spare a scandal!"

"Never!" cried Gerrard vehemently.

"Then you are no friend, and I must try him myself! I would rather have you do it, because you are supposed to be such chums, but it doesn't matter to me. I expect Sir Allen is here by this time, so I will inquire for him! Good afternoon, Gerrard!"

"Stop!" commanded the latter. "Wait a little; give me time to think! How much do you want?"

"It's worth two thousand pounds!", said Braxton. "Make up your mind quickly, for I'm not going to lose my chances to please you! I'll give you five minutes."

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Gerrard revolved this terrible matter swiftly in his mind. There was more in it than appeared on the surface; it was not merely a question of paying two thousand pounds—that would not be much for Sir Allen—but it was the effect it would have on him to find that the wife of whom he was so fond and so proud, was guilty of many crimes. If anything were done in the way of keeping the affair secret, it must be done without Royce's knowledge, or the blow would be almost as terrible. And Gerrard had not got that sum; he was congratulating himself on a stroke of great good fortune, having realised a profit of one thousand on a transaction which had extended over two years, but that was not enough to satisfy this man. Then, again, the idea of being mixed up in anything wrong went entirely against the conscientious nature of Gerrard; if he bought this man off, it would be equal to becoming an accomplice of Braxton and of the woman herself, assuming that the charges against her were well founded.

Poor Gerrard was torn this way and that, between his desire to help his chum, and his qualms of conscience. He had been overjoyed, on reaching the hotel, at the fact that he would be able to tell Sir Allen that he had made three thousand pounds for him in one deal. Now he could easily say that it was two thousand, and so make up the missing money, and he would willingly give up his own profit in order to save the friend who had more than once risked his own life for Gerrard. The money difficulty could be overcome, but conscience——?

"Time's up!" said Braxton irritably. "Going to do it?"

At that moment the door of the smoking-room was opened by a boy who looked in to see if a certain guest were there. Gerrard, looking through the open door over the boy's head, started as he saw Sir Allen's form pass the opening. By his side was a woman of thirty, tall and graceful, who turned her head slightly towards the open door as she passed. The vision of that face touched Gerrard and he answered Braxton's question with an emphatic "No!"

"That settles it!" said Braxton decisively. He had not seen Sir Allen and his wife go by the door. "I'll go and find the happy pair, and it will also interest Sir Allen to learn that Lady Royce has a husband still living!"

He was gone with that parting shot. As soon as he could collect himself, Gerrard made his way to the room indicated as Sir Allen's. He met Braxton in the corridor. They reached the door almost at the same moment.

"I forbid you to go in!" shouted Gerrard, forgetting himself.

"I shall!" asserted Braxton.

He made as if to rap at the door, but Gerrard intervened, and in an instant the two men were engaged in a tussle outside the room door. In the struggle, they fell against the door, which, a few seconds later was opened by Sir Allen Royce.

"For Heaven's sake!" he cried hoarsely. "Fetch a doctor! My wife is ill and I fear her heart is weak."

He was unmindful of the fact that the men he addressed were struggling together; his own trouble absorbed him. Gerrard and Braxton loosed their grasp on one another and hurriedly followed Sir Allen through the room into the next apartment, where Lady Royce lay on the floor, with an upturned face that told its own story to Gerrard.

The doctor was summoned, but he could simply confirm the opinion already formed by Gerrard. Lady Royce was dead, having succumbed to a heart seizure.

The grief of the bereaved husband was terrible to witness; he flung himself on his knees by the side of the bed on which they had laid the body and kissed the cold hand again and again.

"It is not true! It cannot be!" he moaned. "Come back to me, my darling! Do not leave me alone, without the love of a fellow-creature. I cannot live without you, my wife!" His voice shook with sobs and his whole body appeared to be racked with pain.

The sight was too much for Gerrard; he could not endure to behold the grief of his only friend. He could do nothing to help him, so he withdrew and left Sir Allen alone in his sorrow.

In the hall downstairs he encountered Braxton. It was almost with an air of triumph that he spoke to the blackmailer.

"Braxton, you are a big scoundrel, and it refreshes me to tell you so! But you have missed your game this time!"

"How is that?" sneered Braxton.

"The woman is dead, so you can do nothing, and you must find another victim for the exercise of your wits!" cried Gerrard.

"Come in here!" said Braxton quietly, leading the way into a small waiting room, which was empty. "Now, what does it matter if the woman is dead? The information is true, so it remains good all the same. If the facts become known it will be a terrible scandal, very nearly as bad—aye, perhaps even worse—for Royce. Remember him as we saw him just now. Don't you think he would pay two thousand pounds willingly in order that the truth should not be made known?"

"You brute!" cried Gerrard, amazed at the callous villainy of the man.

"Come, hard words won't mend matters. I want two thousand pounds, and for that I will hand over to you, or anyone else, the proofs I have here and will undertake to say nothing more about the previous history of Lady Royce." He watched Gerrard's face and could divine what was going on in his mind. "Well, is it a bargain? Will you complete this transaction on your own account, for the sake of your friend?"

"Yes, I'll do it!" said Gerrard after a pause. "Come with me and I will arrange it."

They left the hotel for Gerrard's lodgings. He had resolved to sacrifice his money and his sense of truth in order to save his friend. The revelation of the facts would crush Royce; the blow was hard enough for him to bear as it was, but to learn all the truth would probably kill him. The transaction was completed; Gerrard handed over the one thousand belonging to himself, and one thousand of the money he held for Sir Allen, and he received the proofs, which he at once destroyed.

As Gerrard sat alone in his small sitting-room that night he turned it all over in his mind, and found the best explanation for the tragically sudden death of Lady Royce. She had originally intended to dupe Sir Allen and leave him, after having obtained possession of everything of value which it was possible for her to get into her possession. But his great love for her made the execution of the plot almost impossible. She learnt to love him and she yearned to stay with him, but she dreaded discovery. Thus, torn by conflicting sentiments, she had lived through the last few days in a state of the greatest mental anxiety; every day she was preparing to fly with her booty and every day she was wavering and putting off the moment of flight. Gerrard heard from Sir Allen that his wife had become strangely excited after passing through the hall of the hotel, and had concluded that she had recognised Braxton, whom she must have known as the possessor of her secret.

Yes, the inward fight and the fear that she was about to be denounced had so affected a naturally weak heart that syncope had ensued.

When all was over, and Sir Allen was able to think of business, Gerrard handed him the profit made on the investment. Sir Allen did not suspect that it was one thousand pounds short of the actual profit; he was satisfied that the result was fairly good. It was a month later that he discovered that Gerrard had lost his own money "by an unfortunate piece of rash speculation." His generous heart prompted him to offer the sum in gratitude to Gerrard for his kindness during the terrible days of which neither cared to say much, but Gerrard firmly refused. It was part of his own punishment for participating in a lie, as he put it to himself.

Once a year, Sir Allen and Gerrard make a pilgrimage together to a certain grave and when Gerrard sees how great and enduring is the love of Sir Allen for his erring wife, he feels that he is justified in having kept the truth from him.

G. E. Linger.

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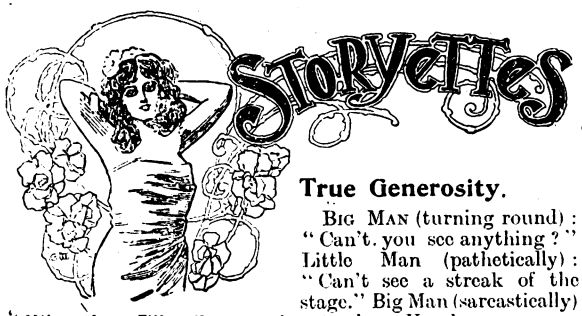

True Generosity.

Big Man (turning round): "Can't you see anything?" Little Man (pathetically): "Can't see a streak of the stage." Big Man (sarcastically) "Why, then, I'll tell you what to do. You keep your eye on me and laugh when I do."

The Wife's Paradise.

Mr. Flim: "What is there about these long-haired musicians that attracts you women?" Mrs. Grim: "Just think how easy a long-haired man is to manage."

Her Disappointments.

Miss Sentiment: "Were you ever disappointed in love?" Eligible Widower: "Two and a half times." Miss Sentiment: "Two and a half times?" Eligible Widower: "Yes, twice married and once rejected."

He Expected Too Much.

Harry: "And, dearest, do you think of me all day long?" Dearest: "I did, Harry; but the days are getting longer now, and of course—well, you know that that must make some difference."

Might Have Spared Him That.

"No, George," she muttered, as the miserable youth knelt in a passionate frenzy at her feet, "I can never be yours." "Well, Clara," he answered bitterly, as he rose quickly, "you might at least have told me so before, and saved me from bagging these trousers."

A Stitch in Time.

Sweet Child: "Are you going to be my new papa?" Accepted Suitor: "Yes, my dear child." "Have you got your wig yet?" "Wig? Why, no. I don't need a wig. Why do you ask?" "My other papa always said he was thankful his hair wasn't fastened to him."

Made Himself Eligible.

"Papa," said Miss Blooblood, "you remember you forbade Mr. Trivvet to call upon me because he worked for a living?" "Yes, I remember." "Well, papa, that objection is now removed. May he call?" "What's happened? Has someone left him a fortune?" "No, papa. He can't find any work to do."

Why He Mourned.

Smith: "What is the matter with you? I never knew you to have the blues so badly." Jones: "I am grieving over the death of my brother." Smith: "I didn't know you loved him so much as all that." Jones: "I didn't either, but the fact is after I had him locked up in an insane asylum he made his will and left me all his property, and now I've got to prove that he wasn't crazy, or his property will go to somebody else."

How Expenses Count Up.

Mr. Downton: "We've got to economise, and that's all there is about it." Mrs. Downton: "Well, you have two men and a boy in your office. A boy should be enough." Mr. Downton: "That shows all you know about business. I can't possibly get along without the boy, can I?" Mrs. Downton: "Certainly not." Mr. Downton: "Of course not. Everybody knows that. Must have a boy to sweep the office, run errands, and do all sorts of odd jobs." Mrs. Downton: "Very true. But the men?" Mr. Downton: "I've got to have the men to watch the boy."

Connected by Marriage.

She: "He is connected with you in some way by marriage, isn't he?" He: "Yes. He married my *fiancée*."

Before and After.

She: "Before we were married you used to call me an angel." He: "And now I wish you were one. Same thing."

A Peculiar Soil.

"I've noticed one thing about widows' weeds," said his reverence. "What's that?" "They rarely interfere with the growth of orange blossoms on the same soil."

A Good Name Lost.

Steele: "Marie Arlington has lost her good name." Sapsmith (hungrily): "Good gracious! What are the particulars?" Steele: "She has married a man by the name of Snooksby."

What Jennie Would Do.

"Jennie," said a young lady, turning away from the mirror, and addressing a companion, "what would you do if you had a moustache on your lip?" "If I liked him, I would keep quiet," was the demure reply.

Out of the Mouth of Babes.

Teacher: "I find only one mistake in your exercise. You have parsed phonograph as a noun of feminine gender. Why did you do that?" "'Cause I thought it was one of the machines that repeats everything you say."

He was Sorry.

Curate: "I hear you broke a chair over your wife's back during a quarrel you had last night." Parishioner: "Yes, sir." Curate: "And aren't you very sorry for what you've done?" Parishioner: "Yes, sir, the chair was as good as new."

Why He Turned Pale.

Wife (with determined air): "I want to see that letter." Husband: "What letter?" "That one you just opened. I know by the handwriting that it is from a woman, and you turned pale when you read it. I will see it! Give it to me, sir." "Here it is. It's your milliner's bill."

Willing to do Either.

An old Black-country collier, whose wife was dead, was very busy at the funeral assisting the eldest son in all the arrangements, and as in those days the corpse was carried by bearers from the house to the grave, the old gentleman, when all was ready to start, sang out to his son: "What bin I to do? Bin I to cry or carry?"

Sarah's Aunt.

"Sarah, this going out incessantly I cannot have; next Sunday you must stay at home." "But, ma'am, I have promised my aunt to spend the afternoon with her." Little Girl (interceding): "Do let her go, mamma. Her aunt has been made a sergeant, and has got a new coat with stripes on it, and a great, long sword."

An Undecided Adornment.

"Angelina," said Edwin, "there is a little question that I have long been wishing to ask you." "Yes?" she said, opening her eyes very wide, and pretending complete ignorance, although confident that she was fully aware of its purport. "I wanted to ask you whether I ought to let my moustache grow or not?" Gulping down her disappointment, she said: "I would let it grow, if it will grow, but I'm afraid it is like you—undecided what to do."

Half the Truth.

Jones had married the prettiest woman in town, and Brown had married the plainest, and thought she was beautiful. One evening they were talking about their respective better halves, and Brown remarked: "I say, Jones, I think you and I married the two prettiest women in town." Jones looked at him in surprise a moment, but he saw he was serious. "Well, he replied cautiously, and with pride, "I suppose you are about half right, old fellow." Brown didn't see the point until he told his wife.

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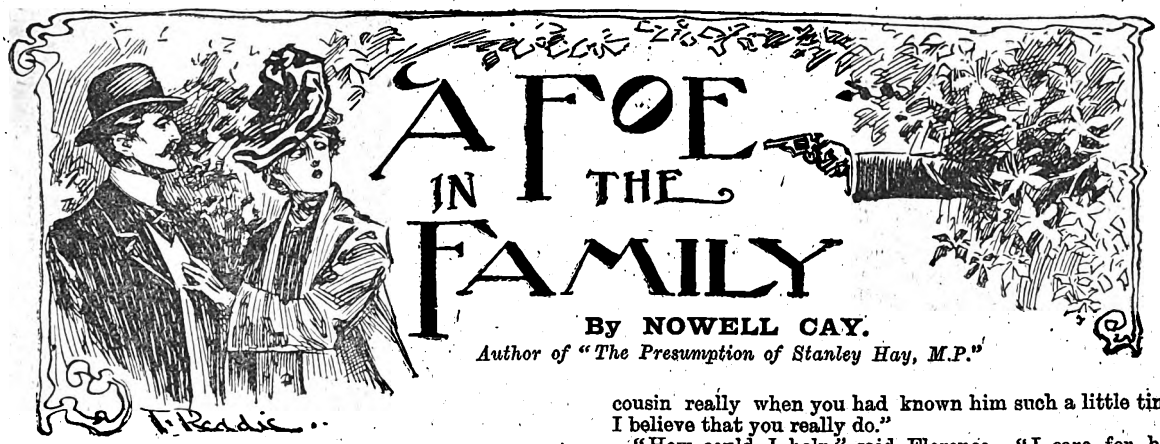

A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Reconciliation

FLORENCE, faint and weary, had been unable to restrain her tears as the train started on the long journey. She could not tell how many more weary hours of loneliness and suspense lay before her, with the prospect still that at the end she might find George too late. The world, brightened for a moment by the kindness of his cousin, had become dark again, and, as soon as she found herself alone in the train, tears had come to her relief, and flowed unrestrainedly.

But they arrested themselves, and fear took the place of her dull despair when she saw the door of her compartment flung suddenly open to admit the figure of her enemy, the girl who had tried to detain her at Pennybrook Hall.

Catherine, for her part, had found her heart completely melted, and her suspicion finally conquered, by the sight of her tears.

"I am afraid that I have made a mistake and been horribly unkind to you, Lady Ilden," she blurted out, breathlessly, as the door was slammed behind her. "But where are you going? This is the wrong train for Ilden Market."

The big, pathetic eyes meeting hers were still full of fear and suspicion, although her apology sounded so genuine. Florence hesitated before replying.

"I am going to Scotland, to Lord Ilden."

"Scotland? But he is not there. He is at the Castle, and you are travelling away from him. Did Percival tell you that he had gone to Scotland?"

"No, Mr. Grant Ilden," said Florence. "I have not spoken to his brother."

"But it was Percival who took you to the station," cried Catherine. "And he told you that he was his brother? Then Cousin George was right, and it must be Percival who is in league with the people who are trying to take his life. And my foolishness almost allowed him to succeed in his plan for keeping you and your husband apart. I wonder whether you can ever forgive me."

The unmistakable evidence of his purpose was all that was needed to make her repentance complete. Percival could not have sent an ally off on a wild good chase to Scotland, and she was full of repentance for the part she had played herself.

It was a fitting punishment that the girl she had treated so unkindly should have difficulty in believing her sudden change genuine. But the fact that they would soon be at another station when she must persuade her companion to leave the train and abandon her useless journey made her bend all her powers to the task.

"You will wonder why I could have been so horrid," she blurted out impulsively, but I was prejudiced when I heard of the marriage. I did not think you could care for my cousin really when you had known him such a little time. I believe that you really do."

"How could I help," said Florence. "I care for him with all my heart, and you will tell me where he is, will you not? You will not deceive me. Forgive me, I feel as though you will not, but I am bewildered. Why should his cousin try to send me away from him?"

"That is what we shall all want to know," said Cathie, "and I think it will help us to solve this horrible mystery that seems hanging over cousin George. But I cannot think how I kept on being prejudiced when I saw you. You were not a bit like the girl I had imagined you. And now you will never like me or trust me."

"I think I do," said Florence, and for answer Cathie put her arms round her neck and kissed her, as she had been longing to do from the moment that she found her in tears.

"And now that we are friends," she said, "I wish you would tell me all that you know about this man Despard. Do you know why he wants to kill your husband?"

Florence's face, which had been aglow with the happiness of feeling that she had really found a friend, clouded suddenly.

While her husband's life was in danger she had no thought to spare for the possible tragedy that would come to her life when she had found him safe. Now it all came back with the question, and she remained silent.

"Cousin George himself thinks that he must have been paid by somebody who wants to clear the way to the title and estates," said Catherine. "Do you think that is so? Is Mr. Despard only the agent of somebody else?"

Florence shook her head.

"No, there is nobody else. It is only that Guy thinks Lord Ilden has injured him."

"Then I am sure that he is wrong," cried Cathie. "I am quite sure that George had never seen this Despard until he began to pursue him. I am sure that he knew nothing whatever about him. And besides, my cousin has never injured anybody. He is the kindest and best man that I know."

"I know that he is," said Florence. "But my friend, Daisy Despard, who has never deceived me, told me as she was dying that Lord Ilden married and deserted her, and would not allow her to tell her brother that they were married even when Guy had to believe that he had done her a greater injury still. I think that it turned her brother's brain. He cared for nobody in the world but his sister."

Catherine was staring incredulously.

"Your friend told you this, and still you are trying to save him from her brother's vengeance?"

"I love him," said Florence simply.

"And besides it is not true, and you know that it cannot be," cried Cathie. "Why, when was this marriage supposed to take place?"

"Early in the summer."

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"Abroad?"

"No, in Yorkshire, at a village called 'Lallerton,' where she lived."

"Then it cannot be true by any possibility, for Lord Ilden has been abroad for a couple of years, and it is barely three months yet since he returned."

The strained look on Lady Ilden's face relaxed a little.

"I knew that it must be a mistake," she said, "although I am sure that poor Daisy Despard did not consciously deceive me. Is it possible that there are two Lord Ildens?"

"No," said Catherine, with a sudden enlightening suspicion; "but there may be somebody who had an object in assuming cousin George's title while he was abroad. But that is for George to inquire into when we have told him all we know. We must lose no time in getting to the Castle, in case Mr. Despard has managed to follow him there. It would be more than ever terrible if he were killed all through a mistake, and for another man's villainy."

She regretted the speech when she saw her companion's face. It was thus that it would end, Florence was saying to herself. Happiness like that which had been given back to her was too great to be enjoyed. She had found her husband all she believed him, only to lose him, and the expression of suffering hopelessness came back to her white, strained face.

Lady Ilden Visits the Castle.

The disappearance of Catherine had passed unnoticed at the Hall in the disturbance of the funeral arrangements.

The body of Rupert Ilden was to be taken to Mordenhale by road for interment on the morrow. His sons, together with Sir Charles Barton, and Jasper Ilden were travelling down later by train.

It was just after the departure of the hearse and an hour or so before the mourners were intending to leave the Hall that a message was brought up to the house from Catherine.

In passing through the station on her way to Ilden Market with Florence she had sent up word to Lady Mary that she was going to the Castle, but hoped to return before night. If she did not, her mother was not to be anxious.

Remembering that Percival would still be at the Hall, Catherine had thought it impolitic to give any further information, and even the easy-going Lady Mary, who had long resigned herself to a considerable amount of independence and unconventionality on her daughter's part, was not a little disturbed by this latest vagary.

"It is not as though Ermyntrude were there," she complained to Mrs. Jasper, as they discussed the message. For the widowed Marchioness of Dalmenay, who had ruled at the Castle during her nephew's absence abroad, had abandoned her post abruptly on hearing of his marriage, and was treating him with a dignified silence of which he was unconscious, from the neighbourhood of Nice.

"Perhaps George is there," suggested Mrs. Jasper, and Lady Mary looked alarmed.

"That would only make her conduct more remarkable. His wife, Percival tells me, has gone back to Sydenham, where they have been staying, it seems, since the marriage. I should wire to her to return at once if Catherine were not so impatient of anything like control, and I suppose she has some purpose in view."

Grant listened to all, but said nothing. He could not understand how Lady Mary could take the news so calmly. But then she had not been a witness of the scene between her daughter and Lady Ilden.

If Catherine could allow her jealousy of the woman who had won Ilden's heart to drive her into an open quarrel, as she appeared to have done, there was no knowing to what lengths her infatuation for her cousin would carry her.

Why should Catherine have gone to the Castle, except to see him, and what would she say when she saw him? If she was in the mood in which she had received his wife, Grant could understand her doing or saying anything; and her mother complacently imagined that she could be left to herself to do as she pleased.

He wandered over the house, tortured by jealous uneasiness. Somebody ought to save Catherine from herself.

The thought became unbearable at last, and he went in search of his brother.

"I shall not be coming down with you," he said. "I shall get down home a little later."

Percival glanced at him furtively, with the suspicion of a man who knows that he has injured another.

"I suppose you are running over to see Murgatroyd, and try to 'pump' him about the will before to-morrow," he said.

Murgatroyd was the family lawyer, and Grant drew himself up.

"No; I can trust the Governor to have acted fairly," he said; but the suggestion left an unpleasant suspicion in his mind, when he had hurried down to the station to catch the next train to Ilden Market.

It had been an understood thing that his mother's small fortune would come to him on his father's death. Before Ilden's return to the Hall he had been wondering whether its possession would justify him in asking the hand even of a rich woman without stigmatising himself as a fortune-hunter.

Percival's suggestion had made him ask himself whether his brother had intrigued to rob him even of that modest competence, but it seemed to him now that it could matter very little whether he found himself able to marry or not, and the question faded out of his mind for want of interest. Money could make no difference to him now that Catherine's infatuation for Ilden had shown itself unaffected by his marriage. Infatuation for such a man too. Despard's attitude had left Grant at least with a complete theory to account for the man's resentment, a theory by which his cousin's character suffered severely. And this was the man whom Catherine was making a hero. She was not worthy of the place he himself had given her in his thoughts.

He had managed to persuade himself that he despised her completely by the time that his tedious railway journey was over, and he found himself approaching the fine old building which the accident of birth had given to Ilden instead of himself. His cousin had everything, he said to himself bitterly. And without effort he had obtained even that which he did not desire. Life was indeed ironical, and the sarcastic lines round the poet's finely-modelled mouth deepened.

The Castle had a forlorn air to-day with all its blinds drawn, and the flag on its tower flying half-mast high.

The open door showed him a hall desolate with white wrappings that covered over furniture and armour as a sign that the family were away.

It was thus that it had given a melancholy welcome to its new mistress an hour earlier, when the two girls had arrived only to be met by the message that killed hope.

Lord Ilden had not reached the Castle nor had any message been received from him.

For Catherine, even more conclusively than for Florence, the fact seemed to prove that George had met with foul play, for Catherine had seen her cousin off on his journey to Ilden Market. She remembered how determined he had shown himself not to give any clue to his wife's whereabouts by joining her.

The two had stared at each other with wild eyes in which each had read in the other's eyes a dread that neither would express.

They had entered the house then to talk hopelessly over what was to be done when each felt that nothing was possible. It was a strange home-coming for the Castle's mistress.

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She seemed strangely dazed, as if stunned by this new disappointment and the cruel lengthening of suspense. It was Catherine who acted, and she was feeling the need of a masculine mind to direct and assist her when she was startled to see through the window the figure of Grant Ilden approaching the house. It seemed an almost miraculous answer to an unexpressed wish, and she hastened out of the room to meet him, her face showing how welcome his arrival was.

The fact that Grant himself was looking anything but amiable did not even reach her consciousness.

"Oh! I am so glad that you have come," she said. "You will tell us what is to be done. I was wishing that you were here. But you have not news of cousin George?"

His solemnity had suddenly suggested a tragic explanation of his visit, and her voice was full of anxious eagerness.

"News of Ilden—no. I imagined that he was here," said Grant, and Cathie's dread that he had come with news of his cousin's death was put to rest.

"I thought he would be," she said, still distracted. "He told me most definitely that he would remain here until the funeral, and he has never come. It is terrible. But you will make inquiries along the line? You will find out what has happened—I feel so helpless?"

Grant was looking bewildered.

"I do not understand," he said coldly. "Did Ilden agree to meet you here."

"No, I should not have come if I had not met his wife," she cried impatiently. And the admission made him furious.

"And is it not enough for you to know that he has a wife?" he asked. And the anger in his voice reached her at last. She drew back staring.

"What do you mean, Grant?"

His indignation burst forth uncontrolled at the question.

"I mean that you are driving me frantic," he said impetuously, "by this mad infatuation for a man who has shown you by his marriage that he does not want your love. Why should everything be laid at his feet while I have nothing? Not that I have ever grudged him any of his advantages. He has wealth, title, and position. I have nothing. But I have never envied him until you made me by giving to him when he did not want it, all that I have so longed for in vain. His marriage has made no difference. Your only thought is of him, and you welcome me only because you think I can bring you together. Never a thought for me when I would have given my life for one kind one. Heaven knows that I would never have spoken if Ilden had wanted your love, but he has chosen another woman and you hate her for it, and are blinded enough to show your hate openly. If Ilden needs protection why did you not let his wife give it to him? Where have you sent her?"

(*Ilden begins to see through the plot in next Tuesday's instalment.*)

A woman passed down Piccadilly the other day dressed in colours so badly blended as to excite at once the astonishment and the ridicule of the passers-by. "That woman," cried a street urchin, "has been and gone and taken a bath in a rainbow!"

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HOW TO CHOOSE A HUSBAND

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Your Editor Chats.

Next week the first instalment of the serial story, "The Albert Gate Mystery," will appear in *Short Stories*. As I have already told you, the tale is from the pen of Mr. Louis Tracy, whose works are so well-known to old readers of this paper.

Let me tell you that you have a great treat in store, and that you may safely look forward to a pleasant hour reading the opening chapters.

BEST WISHES TO MADGE MORRIS!

To-day is Miss Madge Morris' wedding-day, and I am sure that all readers will wish her every happiness. She has done good work for this little paper during the six months that she has controlled the "In Confidence" page. I am sure that a number of readers will miss her, but I have found a capable successor in Miss Cynthia Hamilton, who will take up the work which circumstances have compelled Miss Morris to abandon.

Miss Hamilton's experiences in affairs of the heart have been very wide, and, as her judgment is in every way sound, I am sure that those readers who wish for advice of this kind may rely implicitly on what she has to say. There are a number of replies to inquiries answered by Miss Morris before she left, which are already in type, but which have been held over for want of space. These, of course, will appear when there is room.

In the "In Confidence" page this week you will find a few words of farewell from Miss Morris herself upon the occasion of her relinquishing her favourite task of giving help to those in need of it.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

In a fortnight's time the Christmas Double Number of *Short Stories* will be in your hands. It will be full of seasonable fiction, every line of which you will thoroughly enjoy. The number will be a double one, and the price will be 2d.

FOR NEXT WEEK.

For my next issue I have had prepared a number of clever little sketches of pretty girls of nearly all nationalities, and these will be used throughout the paper as headings for the stories. They will make a dainty and agreeable variation from the usual headings, and I trust you will like them.

Your Editor.

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LORD MERVYN:

or, "NOT IN THE PEERAGE."

A Wrong Scent.

LAST autumn I was jilted. In the preceding summer I had narrowly escaped bankruptcy, and in the antecedent spring I had been the victim of a gross piece of injustice on the part of a near relation whom I thought would have known better.

The late Mr. Sirius Saturn, F.R.S., the eminent astronomer, was my uncle, and on the death of my father, his younger brother, being childless and a widower, he adopted me, promising my mother, who died shortly afterwards, that I should inherit two-thirds of his large fortune.

The remainder was bequeathed to his sister, then a Mrs. Vernford; and subsequently to her daughter, Beryl Vernford, my cousin, both of whom I had never seen till last year.

My uncle was by nature a very eccentric and irascible man. He was a staunch old Tory, very proud of his name and pedigree, and therefore when he heard that his sister, who had been left in reduced circumstances by Colonel Vernford, had contracted an alliance with a Mr. Eli Scubbs, a wealthy tallow merchant doing a considerable business in the Levant trade, no one was surprised that he made a codicil depriving her and her daughter of every shilling he had previously left them.

A year before his death he had determined to make one more grand effort to demonstrate the truth of his remarkable opinion respecting the brighter "faculæ" on the sun's disc, and with that view he requested me one morning to prepare his large telescope for observation.

I did so. Elated at the idea of yet convulsing the scientific world by his great and ingenious discovery, the unfortunate man approached the powerful instrument and, receiving my assurance that all was in readiness, applied his eye to the eye-piece.

Alas! he never saw with it again. In the most careless and culpable manner I had omitted to put on the coloured glasses, and the piercing streak of light that met his glance as he gazed through the telescope blinded him for ever.

To describe the old gentleman's rage when his oculist informed him that his right organ of sight was irreparably destroyed would be as painful as it is superfluous.

Suffice it to say that when his will was opened it was discovered that he had fully maintained his character for eccentricity to the last, having added another codicil by which he declared that I was not to inherit his fortune unless I married my cousin Beryl Vernford within a year of the day of his death. Should this condition not be complied with, the estates were to be sold and the proceeds devoted to founding a Hospital for the Relief of Indigent Astronomers.

What was to be done?

Of course the marriage by which I and my cousin were to inherit a fortune was out of the question.

In the first place, Miss Vernford had informed Professor Copernicus, one of the executors, and the only real friend I possessed, that "no consideration should induce her to even see her cousin under such conditions"; whilst her mother added that, "although regretting the flagrant injustice displayed towards her daughter, by which she had been deprived of her rights, she could not wish her to so far forget what was due to her as to consent to such a marriage."

Thus things looked hopeless enough, but it was absolutely necessary that something should be effected, for my position was rapidly becoming altogether untenable.

With the exception of a miserable pittance of eighty pounds a year, I, who had been brought up as heir-apparent to an estate worth five thousand pounds per annum, had no means whatever to live upon.

Being fond of the drama, I determined to try the stage, and for a brief season did the leading business at the "Theatre Royal, Grandborough," where I was known, according to the handbills, as "the great tragedian, Mr. Mervyn Lord."

Ere long, however, I quarrelled with the principal lady, an elderly person with a passionate nature, who complained that I did not really kiss her in the love-scenes, and the result was that I left the establishment. Afterwards I became a tutor, but found that still more unpalatable; and at last I went boldly to the Professor.

"Professor," I said, "what am I to do? This marriage, this iniquitous marriage is not to be thought of. Sooner would I take the oath of celibacy, and, joining some monastic institution, live a life of penance, than enter into the married state on such ignominious terms."

The Professor, who was waggishly inclined, had nothing to suggest except that perhaps I might ultimately be employed as Secretary to the proposed Hospital for the Relief of Indigent Astronomers.

Two months had passed in idleness. Eight trying weeks of impecuniosity and discomfort. I had dragged on a miserable existence in a Bayswater lodging. My former creditors, too, had sought me out, and threatened immediate proceedings.

My position was intolerable. I resolved to call once more on the Professor, and solicit his kind intervention on my behalf. We talked the matter over, and my old friend informed me that my aunt and her daughter were to leave England very shortly to join Mr. Scubbs, who was likely to be detained abroad for some time on business. He strongly urged me to pay them a visit before their departure, and endeavour, if possible, to remove their prejudices.

To this I at first vehemently demurred. Then the Professor drew a harrowing picture of my desperate condition. Then he represented an attractive one of my cousin Beryl. Then I half relented. Then the Professor alluded again to the spectral Hospital for the Relief of Indigent Astronomers, and finally I determined to make one tremendous effort to win a wife and fortune.

My aunt and cousin were stopping for a short time at the quiet seaside town of Beacham; and one fine afternoon in July found me knocking at their door, and feeling very contemptible and cross.

"Mrs. Scubbs in?" I inquired of the landlord, an unfortunate victim of epilepsy, who could scarcely speak.

"Un—no," he replied in a sort of squeak. "She and her daughter, Miss Vernford, have gone to London for a week."

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"Just my luck," I thought, and hurried abruptly from the house, irritated and disappointed.

The attractions of Beacham, where I remained during the week, were limited. Outside the town and on the sea-beach were the remains of an old ruined castle. A notice-board intimated that beyond that point the young idea of Beacham might learn to shoot (with catapults), but that any one found doing so on the town side of it would be prosecuted. Here I used to spend the mornings, filling up the ocean with pebbles and meditating in what variety of nothing I should pass the afternoon.

On one rather windy morning, when I was still quite undecided as to whether I should sleep away the rest of the day on the sofa in the parlour or on the spring mattress in the bedroom, I was considerably surprised and greatly hurt by receiving a violent blow on the ankle from a stone.

"Those horrible catapults again!" I exclaimed, writhing with agony, and looking towards the castle. But, strange to say, in that direction there was no one to be seen. "The young rascal is hiding," I thought; "but I'll be even with him yet."

At this moment there was smothered laughter in my immediate neighbourhood, and, turning sharply round, I beheld a young lady sitting about ten yards off, and almost concealed by a large, brown silk umbrella.

Could it have been she who had committed this unprovoked assault, and was now enjoying the fun behind the shelter of a monster parasol?

I was just about to request that she would select some other target for her practice when the umbrella was partially lifted, and to my intense satisfaction there peeped forth from beneath it the most lovely pair of laughing dark-blue eyes imaginable.

"A pretty girl, by Jove! I wonder if she would care to have a shot at the other ankle," I thought to myself. And now she put down the umbrella altogether, thus displaying her rare beauty more fully. A profusion of dark golden hair, that waved wantonly in the wind, lent all the attraction of a vivid contrast to the spotless health of her fair complexion.

Her delicate neck swathed in down, the small chiselled nose, the short upper lip, all betokened refined origin; whilst the firm, rounded contour of her form, in all the promise of its ante-maturity, claimed attention in spite of the loose, pretty gown she wore.

She glanced at my ankle with a look of quasi-piteous sympathy, and then, with an expression of pseudo-humility, raised her large, long-lashed, good-tempered eyes to mine. One look was sufficient. I was in love with her.

But, nevertheless, my ankle began to pain me considerably, and upon trying to get up I found that I limped awkwardly.

At this moment my fair neighbour again raised her umbrella but no sooner had she done so than I heard a slight scream, and caught sight of the sunshade rolling rapidly down the beach and into the sea.

My first impulse was to rush forward and save it; but my foot was now in that state of incipient inflammation that I scarcely dared to stand up. She was, however, now standing at the waterside, and, stamping her shapely little, high-heeled boot petulantly on the ground, looked round at me with the most pitiable and imploring glance.

I could resist no longer. Martyr-like, I hobbled down as fast as I could, and arrived beside her just as an unusually large breaker burst at our feet. She had time to escape; but I, suffering agony in my ankle, whilst attempting to jump back, fell down in the surf, and was thoroughly immersed.

The umbrella, in the meantime, had receded still farther from the shore, and to my indignation, when I turned round I perceived my young lady sitting calmly on the stones, and apparently convulsed with merriment.

Filled with mortification and dripping all over, I limped out of the water, and expressed my regret that the umbrella was beyond my reach; in return for which remark she gave me what very much resembled a satirical bow, and thanked me for my exertions, expressing a hope that nothing had bitten me in the sea.

This last thrust filled up the cup of my misery. I took my departure, and when upon the parade I turned round in a weak manner to take a farewell look at her, she was in the water herself, and a minute after regained the truant sunshade.

As Beacham in general offered so little in the way of novels to occupy the attention, I naturally pondered much during that long summer afternoon over my adventure in the morning.

In the present instance I found great difficulty in consistently accounting for the conduct of this girl. Most people would have agreed with me in at once pronouncing her a flirt. The throwing of the stone, the prearranged accident with the umbrella, the laughter with which she had greeted my unfortunate performance in the water, though in her service, showed that, and to all appearance sufficiently.

But to me it was not conclusive. Would such an extremely pretty girl find it requisite, even if she desired a flirtation, to have recourse to such commonplace tricks? At any rate, if she was a flirt, pure and simple, she had acted the part to the life. And yet facts are stubborn things, and the fact undoubtedly remained, that she had derived considerable amusement from the success which had attended her effort to attract my attention, and to play off upon me a wilfully reckless practical joke.

The next day, about the same time, I wended my way once more towards the old castle. I had, as I had anticipated, been forestalled; she was there already. Slightly inclining her glorious head, she hoped I was none the worse for my immersion of yesterday. I was so pleased at meeting her again so soon, and finding the opportunity ready to my hand of solving the problem as to her real disposition, that I was at first a little off my guard, and by way of saying something observed:

"My misfortune carried its own recompense. It occurred in your service."

To my surprise she only slightly bowed, taking no other notice of the compliment, but asked casually if I was staying long at Beacham. This was hardly the procedure of a flirt, and I was more at sea than ever as to what she really was.

We chatted on general subjects till one o'clock, and at parting she told me her name—Clara Vesey—and asked mine. Cautious I have always been, and I though it best for the present to give my late theatrical designation, Mervyn Lord.

In the evening I met her again. I had now resolved upon a definite course to pursue in my examination of her nature. I intended to try my utmost to detect in her any indications of the propensity she had displayed on the occasion of our first acquaintance. With that view it would be necessary to get up a little flirtation of the so-called non-Platonic kind, and the evening was the fittest period to commence.

"Don't you find this place very dull?" she said, as we sat together on the parade.

"In your society it is little short of Paradise."

Again she ignored my overture. I was determined she should show her real colours.

"You are silent."

"Yes," she replied. "I was thinking how pleasant it was to you to save my poor sunshade yesterday."

I would not be put off in that manner.

"The blow on my ankle——" I began.

"Was too much for your gallantry?"

"Not so. In your service it was welcome."

"THE ALBERT CATE MYSTERY" STARTS NEXT WEEK.

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More fair words. She took no notice of them, though.

"It was indeed," I persisted.

A frown passed over her face.

"You are very complimentary," she said at length, a little wearily.

"I detest compliments. What I say I mean. The only danger of labour in your service would be its inevitable enchantment."

I looked at her as I said this; but she did not return my glance. She was gazing rather vacantly at the sea. Of course, with all the beauty, she had ere now tasted the sweets of flattery. I would surprise her with mine. It should be carefully expressed, earnest, artistic. It should be like tribute warm from the heart.

"Such enchantment, I fear, would be short-lived," she said, a little absently, and still gazing seawards.

"The labour also, then."

She was again silent; but the vacant expression was gone. Her eyes had regained their normal look of merriment and mischief.

"Don't you believe, then, in life-long attachments?" I asked.

"Do you?"

"Most certainly."

"Of what description?"

"I believe in an affection which may almost be called adoration, which is as warm in old age as in youth."

She smiled. "That would indeed be glorious. Nor, of course, in such affection would there be any monotony."

At last I thought I was beginning to gain ground; nor did I then notice the satirical tone in which she was speaking, though it afterwards came to my recollection. I thought then she was in earnest, and I replied:

"Exactly. Monotony implies satiety, which adoration knows not."

"Such a love, the same throughout, must of necessity be so pure, so delightfully refined, so exquisitely temperate."

I congratulated myself on the progress I had made that morning, and the more I knew the girl the more I liked her. All my affairs seemed to suddenly grow rose-coloured. I entirely forgot my aunt, my cousin, and the pressing object of my presence in the place. All I began to think of was Clara Vesey. All I cared for was to be continually in her society, and every morning and evening found us together. I did not, however, yet understand her.

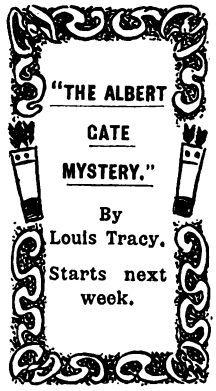
Although a remarkable unanimity of opinion had somewhat unaccountably sprung up between us on most points, I sometimes fancied that she was too easily pleased; but afterwards I accounted for this by her natural vivacity, which was ever to me one of her chief charms. We took long walks together along the shore, and arranged that if by any mischance either of us should be prevented keeping our appointment, we would, if possible, leave a note of explanation behind a certain loose stone in the old castle.

Four days had passed since my arrival, and two more must elapse before I need call at my aunt's house; if, indeed, I could bring myself to do so at all now, which, considering the altered state of my feelings, was beginning to be very improbable indeed.

On the morning of the fifth day she was not on the beach. I went into the castle, and in the appointed spot was a neatly-folded slip of paper. It contained these words:

"Dear Mr. Lord,—*I am so very sorry I cannot meet you to-day. I will be on the beach to-morrow at the usual time.—Yours sincerely,* C. V."

It was not until that morning that I was aware how deeply I loved her. It passed wearily and slowly. I could not walk. I tried vainly to sleep. I could only lie upon the beach and read and re-read her letter. The temptation was too strong for me. I determined to make an avowal to her of my sincere passion, if she gave me only the scantiest encouragement. I would ask her hand in marriage, tell her my circumstances, suggest a cottage, and, of course, furnish it with love.



When I met her she was in unusually high spirits. If possible, a brighter fire burnt in her deep blue eyes, a more mischievous smile dimpled her velvet cheek, and displayed the even rows of pearly enamel which lay behind her crescent lips. I clasped her hand with fervour.

"Oh! I am so glad to see you," I said. "I have been, really, so lonely!"

We sat down. There was silence.

"Do you find no pleasures in solitude?" she said presently, in a perfectly unconcerned manner.

This was but slight encouragement, and apparently she felt it was rather a disdainful reply to my exuberant salutation, for, though with an effort as if she suddenly remembered something, she turned towards me, and added earnestly:

"I mean—do you not prefer living alone, as a rule?"

"No!" I exclaimed, astonished. "What can have caused you to think so?"

"The mere fact of you doing so."

"But surely circumstances——"

"Are very much of our own making. Very often they are only a test of moral courage."

"What do you mean?"

"Break through them."

"But how?"

"Oh, if necessary by a leap in the dark."

"Your advice sounds desperate," I said.

"Circumstances are so, too, very often. But, seriously, why don't you try it?"

"Try what?"

"Marriage! Why shouldn't you? You're young, hate solitude. Surely the notion of a wife does not frighten you."

My satisfaction was intense at discovering what I imagined was her whimsically veiled confession of reciprocal passion. How little, I thought, did she imagine how prepared I was to avail myself of her advice, and to take a leap in the dark! I looked at her as anxious love will gaze, in hope.

"Oh! if you only knew what frightens me," I said.

"How can I know unless you tell me?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, please, by all means. This cuff is so tight. Will you unfasten it?"

She gave me her hand—firm little, bold little hand—and its touch sent a thrill through both of mine; and by a natural sympathy, the effect was communicated to my head, and made it the blind slave of my infatuated heart. The solitaire would not be disengaged. Her hand remained in mine. Another ineffectual attempt, and I succeeded. The cuff was undone, and, raising her hand to my lips, I took my reward—a playful box on the ear.

"Too quick, gallant knight. What were you going to tell me?"

"How much I adore you. Darling Clara! hear me while I declare the heartfelt love I bear you. Will you be my wife?"

At first she was not in the slightest moved, and even at the close of my address she only faintly blushed. It was the first time I had seen her do so. It was a favourable symptom. Alas! little did I then realise what was the motive of that blush.

But she did not answer me. Why? I looked at her again anxiously, hopefully expecting that the faint flush of modesty must have deepened into scarlet. Fool that I was! She was unmoved. The crimson had again subsided into the usual roseate hue of health. Her eyes followed the laughing waves, and smiled almost as saucily. I trembled. Could I have been mistaken?

"Do you love me, adore me, worship me?" she said, with radiant eyes.

"My whole soul is yours, angelic Clara—yours entirely!" I exclaimed, quite innocently.

"Have you ever cared for another?"

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"Never! Never!"

She revelled in her victory. I fancied, when I afterwards reflected on her manner, that she had purposely prolonged the scene, desiring that I should taste fully of the intoxicating draught before she dashed it from my lips.

"And your love will always be the same?"

"Always! If I were torn from you this moment, and cruel fate forbade us ever to meet again, your presence would haunt me, your memory be enshrined in my heart as long as existence were mine."

It was finished. She rose, her usual gay, vivacious demeanour unruffled.

"Come to-night at seven," she said.

I kissed her hand. She was gone.

* * * * *

The evening arrived. The clock of St. Peter's Church was striking seven as I slowly wandered down to the castle. It was not a pleasant evening. The sea was covered with a dense vapour. The air was sultry. There was an oppressive stillness. I was there first. How familiar was the scene—the castle, the old notice-board, the wave-worn rocks! A quarter to eight. Strange she is not here, I thought. As the distant clocks chimed the hour of eight, I entered the ruins, and removed the stone. There was a letter. It was this:

"*If you were in earnest this morning, please think no more of me. It should have been evident that we are quite unsuited to each other. When you receive this, I shall have left Beacham for good. Farewell.*—C. V."

Treasure Trove.

Professor Copernicus received me very kindly. He sympathised with me in my misfortunes, and invited me to pay him a visit.

Nevertheless, he censured me strongly for omitting to call a second time at my aunt's house, and observed that he supposed experience alone would avail to put young men on their guard against promiscuous flirtations at the seaside. From my description of her conduct, he considered that the jade was evidently a thoroughly heartless and contemptible coquette. He would advise me to banish her for ever from my thoughts, feeling well assured that she was an innately cruel, reckless woman, utterly devoid of conscience, and a mere type of hundreds of others.

This was doubtless very sensible counsel, but somehow, it did not operate as the Professor wished.

I did not banish her from my thoughts, because I could not; so I moped and fretted, was silent and uncompanionable, lost my appetite, grew a beard, and expressed disbelief in everything, more especially in astronomy.

At this the Professor seemed to really grow alarmed. I required change, he said—change of scene and society. He had an idea to propose to me. It was this—that I should take a voyage to Turkey for the double purpose of benefiting my health, and making observations for him during the approaching egress of Venus retarded by parallax. The idea was welcome. The change of scene would be agreeable. I consented; and before many days had elapsed, I was on board the Mediterranean steamship *Sultan*, bound for the ancient and beautiful city of Mosquehat.

The important city of Mosquehat is most beautifully situated. It was this busy and opulent place we were now rapidly approaching. For some hours glittering pinnacles and gilded crescents had been visible from afar, and about six o'clock in the evening we put off steam just outside the harbour, where, much to our annoyance, we were informed that, owing to an insufficiency of water on the bar, we should have to remain till the morning. The post-office officials, however, came on board and took off the mails in a small boat and the company's agent, who left by the same opportunity, carried with him a list of the passengers for insertion in the *Mosquehat Herald*, an English newspaper published that evening.

The scene was very beautiful, and I remained on deck all night.

There I sat and thought, and whilst I was thinking sleep closed my eyes and I dreamt of what I had been thinking.

A figure of a girl—a well-remembered form—seemed to rise from the blue water, and, coming near me, laid its hand on my shoulder, and said: "I am not what I seemed. You will never comprehend if you don't know human nature. Not cruel, not false." And as she descended again into the waves, echo repeated, "Not cruel!—not false!" And then there was a long stillness, and when I awoke the beautiful scene was gone.

It was daylight. I descended to the saloon. Towards seven o'clock we entered the harbour and anchored about a quarter of a mile from the shore.

Through my cabin window I could see commissionaires of the various hotels crowding forward up the ship's ladder to secure as many of the new arrivals as possible for their respective establishments. Shortly afterwards there was a gentle knock at my door, and a dark-complexioned face, with little black, beady eyes, looked in, saying: "Pardon, monseigneur! I am the representative of the Hotel d'Angleterre! Grand hotel! Superb! Char——"; but at this stage of his oration I firmly closed the door, slipping the bolt into its socket. In the meanwhile the rapping on the door and panels of my cabin recommenced, whilst through the ventilators various cards, lists of criticisms, and approving notices were dexterously inserted in great profusion.

The clamour was tremendous; so, having completed my preparations, I took my modest hand-bag and rug, and, opening the door suddenly, was almost seized in the arms of a magnificent individual in a scarlet coat profusely adorned with gold lace; whilst round his cap, in letters of white on a gold ground, was the impressive inscription, "Grand Seraglio Hotel." I tried to extricate myself from his clutch and made a frantic plunge forward to the staircase, but in vain. He clasped me firmly round the waist, whispering the while all sorts of seductive observations anent the Grand Seraglio and its attractions, with a view to pacifying me.

And now all control over the crowd seemed to be over. As their respective chances of securing esteemed patronage diminished they grew utterly reckless, one struggling violently for my bag, while another would claw hold of my rugs, and a third conceive a violent affection for my umbrella. At the same time a continuous howling was going on, and cries of "Hotel de Mosquehat!" "Grand Hotel de France!" "Hotel Royal!" "Tres-bon!" "Charmant!" were dinned into my ears till deafness nearly supervened.

Resigning myself to the scarlet-coated one, I suggested to him that we should make one more desperate attempt to gain the deck. He graciously assented, and this time we met with more success.

Leaning on the great man's arm, preceded and followed by a mob of chattering stewards, I gradually mounted the companion, and made a kind of triumphal entry on deck. Hurried gently forward past the other passengers by my conductor, I descended the ship's side, the captain politely taking off his cap to me, whilst many of the passengers looked over the bulwarks to see me rowed off in triumph, lounging luxuriously in the special launch of the Grand Seraglio.

At the landing-place a tall, smart man in black, with patent leather shoes, and shiny black hat, which he respectfully lifted as he helped me on shore, was in waiting, and handed me to a carriage and pair, in which I drove off from the midst of a small but admiring crowd to the hotel.

There was clearly some mistake.

As we ascended the grand staircase I noticed that there were many of the visitors in the hotel looking over the marble parapets with, apparently, nothing to do but to gaze at me

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I determined to put things on their proper footing at once: so, having duly surveyed the gorgeous gold-and-white apartments to which I had been conducted, I turned to my sable-clad attendant and inquired the price of the accommodation; but the man, having ushered me in, had closed the door and retired, leaving me alone to muse over my strange reception at Mosquehat.

What could it all mean? Had they mistaken me for somebody else? I took up a newspaper that was lying on the table by the window. It was the *Mosquehat Herald* of the previous evening. I glanced over it, and found the answer to the enigma in the list of passengers by the s.s. *Sultan*. Captain J. W. Arthur, Scotland; Mrs. Mary Baker, London; M. Jules Chatrain, Paris; Baron Diedermann, Frankfort; Lord Mervyn, England; &c., &c.

So they were really under the impression that I was a peer of the United Kingdom. Excellent!

By a ridiculous blunder on the part of a printer, I had received my title and its concomitant advantages. What would the smart man in black say when he heard that Lord Mervyn was, after all, only plain Mr. Mervyn—lord of theatrical celebrity?—for I may here observe that, for certain pressing reasons of a pecuniary nature, the urgency of which had become sufficiently obvious on the eve of my departure from England, I had thought fit for the present to retain my theatrical *nom de guerre*.

It was requisite, however, that the erroneous impression as to my exalted rank should be immediately removed, for, otherwise, it was impossible to say to what perfection in the art of self-development I might not find my hotel bill progressing in the course of my sojourn at the Grand Seraglio.

"The Albert Gate Mystery,"
Our Splendid New Serial, Commences Next Week.

At it was, I entertained but very little doubt that the expenses attendant on my princely disembarkation would show in the "note" a close approximation to the cost of the whole passage from London. I started, therefore, for the "Bureau" with a view to clearly explaining matters, when, as I was descending the grand staircase, the head waiter, meeting me, observed in a loud voice, "Your lordship's breakfast will be served in five minutes." Exactly at the same moment a young lady dressed in black passed by. I could scarcely believe my vision. It was—Clara Vesey!

I did not pay my intended visit to the Bureau. The apparition, as if by magic, of the very being whose memory and image had been for a whole month past stamped upon my mind, so startled my nerves that I thought no more for the time of my errand or its object.

I retraced my steps to my room, and pondered over the unexpected occurrence. The whole of the bitter past came crowding back upon my recollection. Each satirical look that her fair face had worn, each ironical remark she had uttered, were engraven in my memory, and returned to plague and humiliate me now.

Above all, I remembered with indignation the expressions of abject devotion I had used to a woman whose encouragement of them had been prompted by a rooted contempt for the infatuated speaker. And now I was near her again! She passed me by like a stranger. She would have none of me. I had afforded her amusement, and she had finished with me. Oh, that I could retaliate! Was the Professor, then, right? Was she indeed "devoid of conscience?" Would that I could yet let her experience such bitter self-abasement as she had inflicted on me.

At last the confusion in my brain began to subside; ideas again became arranged, and a scheme of mingled revenge and discovery suggested itself to me.

The truth was, that, notwithstanding the past, I still had a yearning affection for her, which, weak as it may seem, I would fain have found justified and reciprocated. As may well be inferred, I had thought deeply of her of late; and being of a philosophical and inquiring disposition, I had often tried to explain to myself some of the many inconsistencies in her behaviour during our brief acquaintance, which my close examination of it had revealed to me.

The result of these efforts on my part was to induce me to consider that there might possibly be in the disposition of this girl some intense idiosyncracy prompting her actions towards me, entirely distinct from a tendency to flirtation or reckless trifling. Sentiment, I fancied, floridly or passionately given utterance to, must seem to her nothing short of bathos wilfully misrepresented as pathos. In the formation of this idea, I had been partly influenced by the recollection of many of her looks, actions, and tones of voice—trivial evidence by themselves, but, looked at as a whole and in conjunction with her words, an indispensable element in the correct estimation of her character.

It was after breakfast, as I was strolling through the hotel grounds towards a small grove of cypresses that edged a cliff overhanging the harbour, that I met her again.

She had a book in her hand, and as she passed she raised her eyes to mine and smiled. It was the same ironical, amused expression that had so misled me at Beacham.

She was evidently undecided how to act, for I saw at once that if I had given her the slightest encouragement she would have immediately renewed the acquaintance, but I did not. Beyond a formal bow I made no response to her advances, continuing my walk towards the cypresses. But what was I to think now? What inference did that smile carry with it? I had little difficulty in deciding. It was a tribute paid to my supposed title. Clara Vesey could evidently meditate an alliance with Lord Mervyn, though her nature was utterly "unsuited" to that of Mr. Mervyn Lord.

I lighted a cigar, and ensconced myself in a secluded arbour off the main path.

My design was soon formed. Nobody knew me here, nor was I called upon to disclaim the distinguished rank with which I had been involuntarily credited, until it was directly and openly imputed to me. My plan was, then, to renew the intimacy between myself and Miss Vesey, maintaining, for a few hours, the assumption as to my peerage, and in that character to once more offer her marriage. If she were to accept me without further explanation, I should be satisfied as to her baseness, and revealing who I was, would release her from the compact, and see her no more.

Presently the silence that reigned around was broken by a footfall in the main path close by. It was light, slow, measured. How my heart beat! 'Twas she!

As she hurried along, shutting up the book she had been reading, I saw that she was closely pursued by a tall, stout Italian, about five yards behind her, who, as she was passing the spot where I was concealed, quickened his pace, and was just on the point of clasping her round the waist, when I emerged from the bushes, and offered her my arm.

The clear, deep blue eyes, just a little frightened, looked up so thankfully, and the little hand held so fast to my arm, that I was very much inclined to relinquish all my schemes for testing her character there and then. But, fortunately, I did not, and whilst the obnoxious individual who had been following her slunk off again between the trees, by design on my part and tacit consent on hers, we turned into the bypath leading to the secluded arbour at the edge of the cliff.

"Who was that man?" I asked.

"I don't know. A great stupid who is always making grimaces at me."

"He seemed very anxious to gain your acquaintance."

"Only that he might make a greater idiot of himself."

She looked very pretty. Dressed in black, her costume assisted her beauty by its striking simplicity. She wore a white straw hat, turned back at the edges and bound with a broad black ribbon. The book in her hand was a volume of Swift.

I was not slow in availing myself of the opportunity thus

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afforded me of commencing the application of the design I had so recently formed concerning her.

"I scarcely expected to meet you again so soon," I began.

"We prefer, that is, mamma prefers, the hotel to a private house."

"Excuse me. I did not suppose that I should have found you in either. What I meant was, that I scarcely expected to meet you in Turkey."

"Didn't you know we were here?" she said surprised.

"Certainly not. I am here on business; our meeting is, therefore, quite accidental."

She did not reply, but looked at me as if some sudden discovery had flashed upon her, then turned her eyes towards the harbour with the same look of abstraction which I had often noticed before, fixing them finally on the blue waves. Afterwards her manner was different.

"Do you like this place?" I asked.

"No, I hate this horrid big hotel! Everything is so formal. It is better, though, than May in London."

"Where should you like to live?"

"In Paris or Italy, in the midst of art and brightness. Shall you stay here long?"

"That depends entirely on circumstances," I replied.

"We leave to-morrow for Corfu."

"A pleasant place. You will prefer it to this."

"I suppose you know a good many people here?" she said.

"Not a soul but yourself."

"You will find it very dull, then."

"No," I replied, "like you, I begin to like solitude occasionally."

"You said you hated it at Beacham."

"I said a great many things there which I never meant."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. When we have an object to gain, as I had then, we often say things in our eagerness to obtain it, which, upon reflection, we must at least admit the stupidity of."

She was silent.

"You have done so also at times," I went on, boldly hazarding the accusation.

"I suppose I have," she said.

"I am sure of it, and, therefore, you can scarcely be surprised that I imitated you."

"But I had no object to gain," she retorted.

"Then you were so much the more to blame, since I had one."

She appeared a little disconcerted at this. It was evidently a new aspect of the matter to her.

"What was your object?" she asked, a little saucily; and I could just discern a slight reappearance of the old sarcastic look in her eyes, which she kept fixed on the water. However, I was now on my guard, and she did not find it so easy as before to enjoy an exhibition of sentimental imbecility at my expense.

"My object you are aware of," I said quietly, "as well as the method I employed to accomplish it."

"Did you, then, employ any very extraordinary method?"

"For me, a very extraordinary one,"

She was very interested. I had touched a responsive chord now.

"Is it possible," she was thinking, "that I have mistaken this man?"

I saw her stealing a side-glance at me, though my eyes were fixed straight in front, but I took no notice. Presently she said:

"Pray may I ask why you employed such a method?"

"Because I thought that, with you, it would be most efficacious."

"But you did not know me."

"Precisely. I was mistaken; I judged by appearances."

"What made you think I was sentimental?"

"I did not think you really so."

"What, then?"

"I thought—how erroneously I now know—that you wanted to get up a flirtation. I mean the sort of flirtation

(*Continued on next page.*)

INDIGESTION

Mrs. Annie Spiers, 104 Arley Road, Saltley, Birmingham, interviewed by a "Birmingham Telegram" reporter, said: "I am forty-two, and for a number of years I suffered from indigestion and biliousness. I had little appetite, and eating was followed by severe pain. As time went on, my complaints got worse; fearful pains tormented me, and I felt helpless and lifeless. I suffered much agony from pains in the shoulder blades. I went to several doctors, and obtained medicine from the Dispensary, and was also for three months under treatment at Queen's Hospital, but all to no purpose. About this time my son persuaded me to take some Bile Beans. My appetite soon returned and my spirits brightened, and after undergoing a proper course I was completely cured." Bile Beans cure Headache, Constipation, Influenza, Colds, Liver Chills, Rheumatism, Indigestion, Anæmia, and all female ailments. Of all Chemists, 1/1½ and 2/9 per box. Sample Box free on receipt of penny stamp, address as below.

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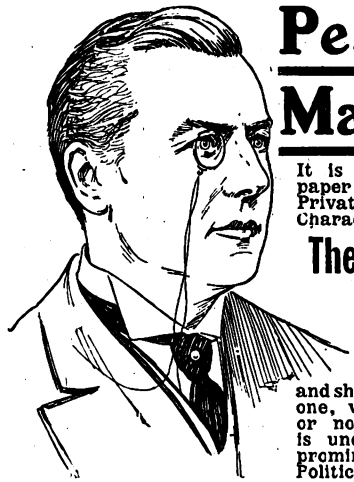

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which consists of unlimited flattery, with a touch of romance, a good sprinkling of wild sentiment, and a dash of honesty, the whole served up by a devoted slave, whose common sense should be nil."

She smiled at this, and the ironical expression and tone of voice entirely vanished. Her real and inner nature was gradually unfolding, slowly proving the accuracy of the hypothesis.

"Why did you fancy I wanted a flirtation?"

"Because you threw that stone at my ankle."

At this remark she fairly laughed, saying, "I never threw it."

"What?"

"It was a boy, with a catapult, in the castle."

This was rather a check for me; but, to gain time, I said, "At all events, it seemed to amuse you very much."

"It did; and it would have done so much more if I had known that you were my Lord Mervyn."

"Why?"

"Because you were sitting there in such a dignified manner, as if the whole world belonged to you. And the absurdity of a little street boy putting all your magnificence to flight would have been so much increased."

She was just now perfectly genuine—enjoying the rare indulgence of airing her favourite ideas; too innocent to perceive that I had detected and was making use of them—only luxuriating in escaping for a time from the necessity of satire and of conforming to conventional opinions.

I determined on a bold step. I wanted to see the effect of a sudden piece of sentiment. In the most tender and languishing manner I could command I said, "I dreamt of you last night."

The genuine look vanished instantly. The soft, natural, happy expression changed immediately to one of cautious amusement. She felt she was back again in a world that was not hers—a world which, for the time, she must pretend to be of, nevertheless, for form's sake.

The outward expression of all this was a desperate attempt to compel her wayward, disobedient eyes to assume a look which they, poor servants of an unreasonable mistress, were utterly unable and unaccustomed to wear. A look, as at Beacham, of deep, soul-subduing passion, which was just about to terminate in the usual merry laugh, when I said, "Such an absurd, fantastic dream!"

Its effect was as if she had suddenly been checkmated.

"Do tell it me!" she said.

"I was on board the steamer, and, the night being beautiful, and the saloon crowded, I slept on deck. Of course there were all the usual accompaniments of the most approved sentimental and romantic pattern: the inevitable floods of pale moonlight——"

"The requisite harmony of the surrounding scene," she put in.

"The undying memory of the fair absentee."

The blue eyes brightened up, and a little ecstatic laugh showed the reality of the amusement which the description gave her.

"Presently," I continued, "instead of sweet sleep encircling me with her taper arm, I——"

"Yes!"

"—I fell into a sound doze. From the depths of ultramarine there rose——"

"To the sound of a fairy chorus, or a German band?" she asked.

"To the first, of course. There rose your form on my enchanted view."

"Was I a pale, transparent shade?"

"You were."

"So that you could see right through me?"

"I could"

"And what did you see?"

"The figures of Romance and Sentiment doing their utmost to encourage you."

"Did I obey them?"

"Of course you did. You forget that I was dreaming."

"Oh, yes! What did I say?"

"You said—let me see, what were the exact words? These ridiculous things soon fade from recollection: 'I am not what I seemed. You will ever comprehend, if you don't know human nature. Not cruel—not false!'"

"Cruel! False! You never thought me that?" she said anxiously.

"You don't seem to remember that all this was a nonsensical dream."

"Yes—I know! But—you dreamt it."

"Of you. That is, it was a distorted image of the mistaken character I had invested you with at Beacham."

"I do not quite understand."

"The explanation is simple. At Beacham I misread you. I had no suspicion that your nature was so allied to mine as it is. I mistook the burlesque for the original, so delicate was your treatment of the character you were playing. In my dream, however, you appeared to me as I had known you then, not as I know you now."

She was satisfied. No other query came from her lips. The intensity of her astonishment at hearing me give utterance to the opinions I had expressed within the last hour—so diametrically opposed to her previous conception of my character—held her in thrall. At the distant sound of a gong announcing one o'clock she rose to go.

"Shall you come out this afternoon?" I asked.

"Yes."

We parted.

I felt now that she was certainly a woman I cared to win, not merely for my own sake, but for hers; because I saw clearly that her nature was of such an uncommon type that few would ever properly understand her.

Now, though it differed in many respects from mine, it yet attracted me immensely, in this, that it seemed more at variance with others. It was a strange combination, and illustrated forcibly the effect which a mistaken system of education—one, at all events, unfitted to her—had exercised upon nature. It was reserved for some close student of human nature to discover beneath the coating of society varnish the precious material of originality. I had discovered it by a strange and bitter experience; though, in rescuing it from the clouds of formality with which it had been so carefully enveloped, I found a task difficult indeed.

I felt, however, inclined to persevere, rejoicing more and more at every new indication of the freshness and innocence which I was convinced lay behind. When I met her in the afternoon, mine was a part hard to play. This, I knew, was to be the crisis of our acquaintance. We were both bent on probing each other's character to the core. One false step on the part of either would be fatal.

I could scarcely resist expressing the most honest admiration of her wondrous beauty. I had to do it, nevertheless. The nature I had to deal with is little sympathised wit. The expression of feeling on such a subject had been, moreover, so satiated with flattery, though the reception of it was so unwelcome, that its greatest comfort was to meet with one who would utterly ignore for the time the physical perfection which contained it.

"What used you to do at Beacham after I left?"

She said this so frankly that I could not help looking at her in astonishment. She was decidedly in earnest, evidently quite unconscious that her words might appear heartless or extraordinary. If I had, then, misinterpreted her meaning and had chanced to give the conversation a wrong turn,

(*Continued on page 735.*)

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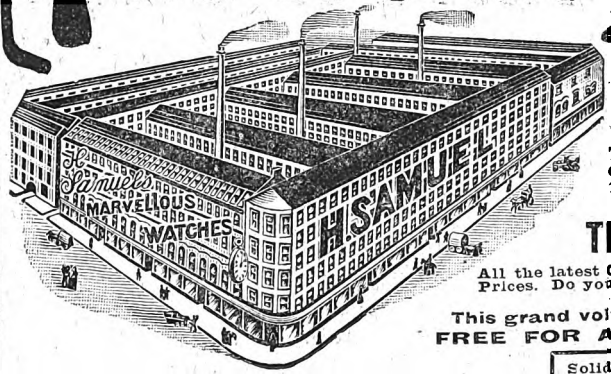

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there would have been another misunderstanding. As it was, I said :

"I used to amuse myself by watching a ridiculously romantic couple making love in the old castle."

"Really ?" she said.

"Most certainly. The lady was tall, dark-eyed, and thirty."

"The gentleman short, red-haired, and twenty, in all probability."

"Near enough. They passed their time in a variety of ways. On one occasion I noticed that they kissed each other deliberately seventeen times in a quarter of an hour."

She laughed a little silvery laugh ; and at this moment a page brought her a telegram.

"No answer," she said, dismissing the boy. "From mamma. We do not leave till Monday. I am so glad."

"Indeed ! I thought you did not like this place ?"

"Nor do I ; but I like to meet a sympathiser whose society is congenial."

"And have I the privilege of being that sympathiser ?"

"I have mistaken you very much," she said.

"But that is all over. I also was in error, but stand corrected. Why should we lose each other's society ? Will you marry me ?"

"Yes."

There was no romance about it of the ordinary and approved kind. I knew she was true ; that she liked me for myself, and I wished heartily that I had not to confess that I was not what I seemed.

Suddenly she said :

"How glad I am you are not a lord !"

"How do you know ?" I exclaimed.

"There is no 'Lord Mervyn.' I looked in the Peerage this morning. I am not angry with you for doubting me. I also have deceived you."

"You ! In what way ?"

"As to my name. It is not Clara Vesey, but Beryl Vernford."

"Beryl Vernford !"

"Yes ! Have you heard it before ?"

"Many times. Know, fair cousin, that Mervyn Lord is a *nom de guerre*. I am no other than——"

"Cousin Geoffrey ?" she cried, amazed.

"Cousin Geoffrey," I replied.

* * * * *

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GERTRUDE (the big sister) : "Maud, I do wish you'd stop your chattering to that dog. Can't you see I'm talking to Mr. Lovedale ?" Maud (aggrieved) : "Well, I've got a right to talk to my puppy too."

"WHAT are your hopes for the future ?" asked the solemn man. "I have none at present," replied the youth. "To-morrow is my girl's birthday, and I am worrying about the present."

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"I THOUGHT you said you were going to bring Mr. Browne home to dinner with you," said Mrs. Jones. "He couldn't come," replied Mr. Jones, as he sat down with great satisfaction to the first good dinner he had had a chance to attack for a long time.

MRS. JOHN COX (irritably) : "Here I'm dressed and waiting, with a dress on that cost you nearly £5, and a hat that cost £2 ! I should think you would be anxious to get out and let people see how well your wife is dressed instead of dillydallying in this way. What are you doing ?" Mr. Cox (meekly) : "One moment, dear, I'm trimming my cuffs."

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By Madge Morris.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must in future be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

My Good-bye.

Although you will be reading these lines on my wedding-day, the process of producing *Short Stories* makes it necessary for me to write them ten days before they appear. To-night is a Thursday, and to-morrow I leave the offices of this little paper, alas! for ever. The thought makes me feel just a trifle sad; and if the tears will force themselves into my eyes, they are, at least, not tears of unhappiness—just tears of regret at leaving the good friends I have made during the past year.

A few readers out of the thousands who have written to me during the time I have controlled this page have questioned the manliness of a man who will allow his sweetheart to work and save money to furnish their new home. I have refrained from touching on this subject up to the present, for it is naturally a very delicate one. But, before I say good-bye to you, I would like to tell those who think hardly of the man who will soon be my husband, that I am one of those girls who prefer to make money and get married to shirking work and remaining single. Jack had some scruples at first about the arrangement I suggested, but he is broad-minded enough to see the folly of objecting on sensitive grounds.

And now let me, for the last time, thank you all very kindly for having made it possible for me to gain my ambition. Remember, if it hadn't been for *you*, personally and collectively, I could not have done what I have done, for if you hadn't been readers of *Short Stories*, I couldn't have controlled the "In Confidence" page, could I? So, you see, with your penny every week, you have helped to make me the happiest girl in the world.

The Editor tells me that I have been of great assistance to hundreds of young men and girls in their love troubles, and that I have smoothed out many tangled heart-knots. If so, I am sincerely glad—I can't say more.

Anyway, my heartfelt wish is that the dear little paper you hold in your hand may continue to flourish and grow in popularity. And that *you* and the rest of its readers may always be as happy as I am.

I understand that Miss Cynthia Hamilton is going to conduct this feature in future, and I am sure that she is more capable of the work than I am. We have spent some hours together to-day—I have been putting the reins into her hands, as it were—and I can assure you she is a great authority on affairs of the heart. She has seen more of life than I have, poor little girl, and her experience has been dearly bought. But she is a brave girl, and I heartily wish her success.

And now, dear friends, good-bye, and let me once more thank you a thousand times for your very great kindness to me—a girl whom you have never met.

Madge Morris.

TO MY READERS.

By CYNTHIA.

Miss Morris is, as you already know, leaving this office to get married. The Editor has asked me to take up the control of this page, and I have accepted the offer. I am not entirely a stranger to the majority of readers, and I hope soon to be on still more friendly terms with them.

A few letters have been held over to make room for Miss Morris' good-bye, but they will appear next week.

I am sure that you will all join me in wishing Miss Morris every happiness in her married life—happiness that both she and her husband fully deserve. Cynthia Hamilton.

THIS WEEK'S REPLIES.

Another Case of Deformity.

Nonsense, "H. L." You are quite wrong in supposing it to be your duty to give up your sweetheart, because of your loss of a finger. You have done all your duty in offering to set her free, and as she has definitely replied that she is as much devoted to you as ever, and more so, there is no reason whatever for you to cut yourself off from her. It would be a dreadful state of affairs if the fingers and not the heart governed one's affections. You are a very lucky fellow to have such a staunch sweetheart. Stick to her, and make the best of your little accident. Evidently it is not very serious, seeing what a good hand-writing you manage to secure from a deformed hand.

Should Cousins Marry?

So, "Relative," you are enamoured of your first cousin, but both your parents naturally object to such a match. They are, however, wrong in saying it would not be legal. There is no restriction to the marriage of cousins. But, as you must know, such matches are very undesirable indeed, for many reasons. If you are really so fond of your cousin as you say, no counsel will, of course, be of much use. But as a piece of cold advice, I think it would be very much better if you remained simply on terms of intimate friendship with her and dismissed the thought of marriage.

Bachelors and Christmas Cards.

Thank you, "Cusack," for your congratulations. It is not usual for an unmarried man living with his family to send out Christmas cards. These are nearly always worded as from "Mr. and Mrs. —— and family," in which you would be included. In the case of your own personal friends, there is nothing to prevent your sending out whatever you may like. In the case of the two sisters of your acquaintance living together, to whom you wish to send greeting, if they are living at home I should send the card to the parents, including the girls. If they are not living at home, send the card to both the girls. Of course, you could send a telegram if you think it necessary. There is no law against young men doing so. But it is rather the resource of the lazy and extravagant man, and does not really impress anybody.

How to Deal with Shyness.

"Laly" is very fond of Bert, but Bert is shy, and shows no signs of returning her affection. She believes he is fond of someone else. Well, "Laly," there is no reason why you should not hint to Bert that you are very fond of him. Perhaps he really likes you, but is afraid to make advances, for fear they should not be returned. There are a lot of men who are too shy to make a start in love-making. Send Bert a nice Christmas card, by way of a start, and give him a few more hints of the same kind. If he is not fond of you he will probably not alter in his manner, in which case you must conclude that he does not return your affection.

Printed by Horace Cox, Brem's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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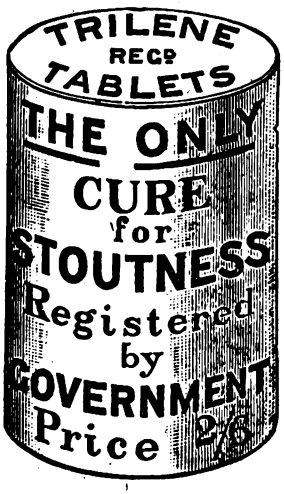
ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be CURED by taking

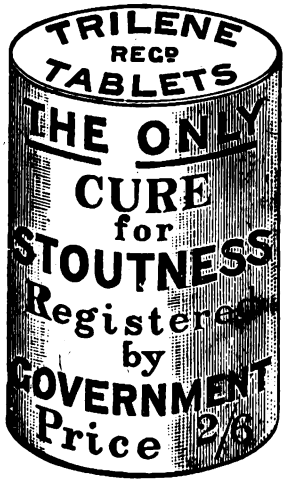
TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

Send **2s. 6d.** to **THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION**, **66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.**



SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

Mrs. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 16lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 2lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 26 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. BOLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets.

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

TO BE FIRST

is to occupy an enviable position. Many aspire for first place, but few attain it. To acquire the lead, aspiration and push alone are not sufficient—merit is required. This is exactly why

BEECHAM'S PILLS

stand foremost among medicines—they possess real merit, and have proved themselves worthy of a permanent position in the family medicine-chest. Trial purchasers become regular users, because they find nothing to equal **BEECHAM'S PILLS** for dispelling

Bilious and Nervous Disorders,

Indigestion, Sick Headache, Languor,

and other such troubles which arise from a Disordered Stomach.

They regulate and tone up the entire system. The genuine worth of **BEECHAM'S PILLS** has obtained for them the unique position of having the Largest Sale of any Patent Medicine in the World.

Sold Everywhere in Boxes, price 1s. 1½d. (56 Pills) and 2s. 9d. (168 Pills).

Short Stories.

No. 728. Week ending December 13th, 1902. Price One Penny.

"STAND BACK!" CRIED THE SANDWICHMAN. "THIS LADY IS MY PROMISED WIFE!"

(An Incident from our Complete Story, "A WOMAN'S TROTH." See Inside.)

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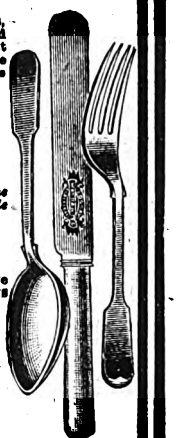
THE "ENTERPRISE" . PARCEL . 25/-

Household Cutlery & Plate.

Containing: 6 Table Knives and 6 Dessert Knives, made of reliable Sheffield Steel and fitted with polished white "Ivorette" Handles. "Ivorette" is the best substitute for genuine African Ivory. The Plate consists of 6 Table Forks, 6 Dessert Forks, 6 Table Spoons, 6 Dessert Spoons, 6 Tea Spoons, 6 Egg Spoons, 2 Mustard Spoons, 2 Salt Spoons, 1 Pair of Sugar Tongs, 1 Moist Sugar Spoon and 1 Pickle Fork.

The Spoons and Forks are made of 'Columbian' Silver, a hard white metal. It is the finest substitute for Sterling Silver known, will wear white throughout, and is unaffected by acids or exposure.

J. G. Graves is the only Manufacturer who supplies the Public direct, and the whole of the above Goods are made in the Firm's own factory in Sheffield.



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Send 5s. with order and complete purchase in five more monthly payments of 4s.; or HANDSOME BONUS PRESENT for full cash payment.

All orders are executed under Positive Agreement to refund the full amount of the deposit if the Goods are not perfectly satisfactory in every respect.

Send for No. 1 Catalogue of Watches, Clocks, Jewellery Cutlery and Plate, Fancy Goods, etc., Post free.

GOOD AGENTS WANTED in spare time. Persons in regular employment should write for terms and particulars. No. Risk Good Pay.

J. G. GRAVES, 69 Division St., SHEFFIELD.

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BUNTER'S NERVINE

Prevents Decay, Saves Extraction. Sleepless Nights Prevented.

Neuralgic Headaches and all Nerve Pains removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d.

"As a specific for Toothache it has no equal. I have used it successfully for years."—Prof. W. WILSON, M.D.

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KAYE'S WORSDELL'S PILLS

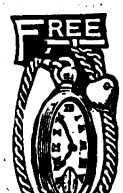
Are a certain Cure for Indigestion, Biliousness, Headache, Dyspepsia, Constipation, Liver and Kidney Complaints, etc. For Ladies of all ages they are invaluable.

Of all Chemists, 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., and 4s. 6d. per box.

A CELEBRATED

NELSON WATCH & CHAIN

FREE FOR ONE DAY'S WORK.



We send this Genuine 30-Hour Nickel-Plated WATCH, Warranted an ACCURATE TIME-KEEPER, with Chain and Pendant, for Selling Seven Beautiful Articles at 1/- each. Sterling Value. Send your full Name and Address (Post-card will do) by Return of Post, and we will at once forward the box of Handsome Goods, Post Paid, and a large Premium List. No Money Required. WE TRUST YOU. We send the Goods at our own risk. Send us the money that you get for them, and we send you the Watch, Chain and Pendant by Registered Post.

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ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently by taking TRILENE TABLETS (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: *"Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."*

Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE CO., Sole Proprietor, 66 Finsbury Pavement, London.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1¼ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 28lb., and I am cured." Countess Furstenberg, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

Headaches Cured Free—Try ZOX.

Sure Relief from NEURALGIA, TOOTHACHE, HEADACHE, and all NERVE PAINS.

ZOX IS FREE TO EVERY READER OF "SHORT STORIES."

The Proprietors of ZOX have such belief in its efficacy that they offer any reader of *Short Stories*, who will send a stamped envelope, two Free Sample Powders. They will be quite satisfied to abide this test.

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NEURALGIA is a Disease of the Nerves, and most commonly attacks the nerves of the face. The annexed cut presents in the prominent lines the nerves of the fifth branch which are most liable to the attacks of Neuralgia. All who suffer will be glad to know of ZOX, a Simple and Sure Remedy, certified free from injurious substance by Dr. A. B. Griffiths. The Proprietors of the Remedy offer to send two free sample ZOX powders to any reader of "Short Stories" who will send them a stamped addressed envelope.

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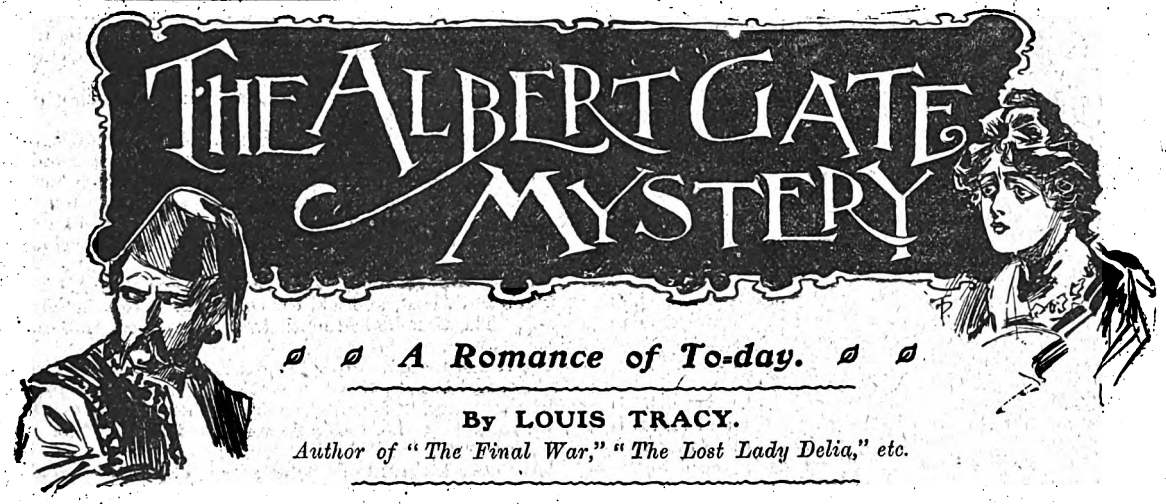
Short Stories.

No. 728. For the Week Ending December 13th, 1902. One Penny.

OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.



By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

FIRST INSTALMENT.

A Mysterious Crime.

Reginald Brett, barrister-at-law and amateur detective, had seldom been more at peace with the world and his own conscience than when he entered the dining-room of his cosy flat this bright October morning.

Since the famous affair of Lady Delia Lyle's disappearance and death, he had not been busy, and the joy of healthy idleness is only known to the hard worker. Again, while dressing, he had received a letter inviting him to a quiet shoot at a delightful place in the country.

All these things blended with happy inconsequence to render Brett contented in mind and affable in manner.

"It's a fine morning, Smith," he said cheerily, as he settled himself at the table where his "man" was already pouring out the coffee.

"Bee-utiful, sir," said Smith.

"Smith!"

"Yessir."

"Not even the best English autumn weather can stand being called bee-utiful. Don't do it. You will open the flood-gates of Heaven."

Smith laughed decorously. He had not the slightest idea what his master meant, but if it pleased Mr. Brett to be jocose, it was the duty of a servant who knew his place, to be responsive.

The barrister fully understood Smith's delicate appreciation—and its limits. He instantly noticed that the morning paper, instead of reposing next to his folded napkin, was placed out of reach on a sideboard, and that the eggs and bacon made their appearance half-a-minute too soon.

As an expert swordsman delights to execute a pass *en tierce* with an umbrella, so did the cleverest analytical detective of the age, resolve to amaze his servitor.

"Smith," he said suddenly, composing his features to their most severe cross-examination aspect, "I think the arrangement is an excellent one."

"What arrangement, sir?"

"That Mrs. Smith and yourself should have a few days' holiday, while Mrs. Smith's brother takes your place during my forthcoming visit to Lord Northallerton's—why, man what is the matter? Is it too hot?"—for the cover Smith had lifted off the bacon and eggs clattered violently on to the table.

"'Ot, sir. 'Ot isn't the word. You're a fair licker, that's wot you are."

Smith invariably dropped his h's when he became excited.

"Smith, I insist that you shall not call me names. Pass the paper."

"But, sir——"

"Pass the paper. Utter another word and I refuse to accept Mrs. Smith's brother as your *locum tenens*."

Smith was silenced by the last terrible epithet. Yet he was so manifestly nervous that Brett resolved to enlighten him before plunging into the day's news.

"For the last time, Smith," he said, "I will explain to you why it is hopeless for you to think of concealing tradesmen's commissions from me."

The shot went home, but the enemy was acquainted with this method of attack, and did not wince.

"You knew that Lord Northallerton had recently invited me to his October pheasant-shooting. During the last few days a youth who grotesquely reproduces Mrs. Smith's most prominent features, has mysteriously tenanted the kitchen, ill-cleaned my boots, and bungled over the studs in my shirts. This morning a letter came with a crest and the Northallerton postmark. Really, Smith, considering that you have now breathed the same air as myself for eight long years, I did not expect to be called upon for an explanation. Besides, you have destroyed a masterpiece."

"Sir—" began Smith.

"Oh, I understand, there is nothing broken but your reputation. Don't you see that the mere placing of the newspaper at a distance, so that you might have a chance to speak before I opened it, was a subtle stroke, worthy of Lecocq. Yet you demand feeble words. What a pity! Know, Smith, that true genius is dumb. Speech may be silver but silence is surely gold."

The barrister solemnly unfolded the paper, and Smith faded from the room. On a page usually devoted to important

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announcements, the following paragraphs stood forth in the boldness of leaded type.—

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE IN THE WEST END.

An affair of some magnitude—perhaps a remarkable crime—has taken place in an Albert Gate Mansion.

Owing to the reticence of the authorities, it is at present impossible to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the nature or extent of the incident, but it is quite certain that public interest will be much excited when details are forthcoming. All sorts of rumours attain credence in the locality, the murder of several prominent persons being not the least persistent of these. Without, however, giving currency to idle speculation, several authentic statements may be grouped into a connected form.

Four weeks ago a party of Turkish gentlemen of high rank in Constantinople, arrived in London and took up their abode in the house in question, after some structural alterations pointing at great security within and without, had been planned and executed.

Attending these Turkish gentlemen, or officials, was a numerous suite of Moslem guards and servants, whilst, immediately following their arrival, came from Amsterdam, some dozen noted experts in the diamond-cutting industry. These were lodged in a neighbouring private hotel, where they were extremely uncommunicative as to their business in London. They were employed during the day at the Albert Gate house. The presence in the mansion, both day and night, of a strong force of Metropolitan police, tended to excite local curiosity to an intense degree, but no clear conception of the business of the occupants was allowed to reach the public.

Whatever it was that took place, the full particulars were not only well-known to the authorities—the presence of the police hints even at Governmental sanction—but matters proceeded on normal lines until yesterday morning.

Then it became clear that a remarkable development must have occurred during the preceding night, as the whole of the Dutch workmen and the Turkish attendants were taken off in cabs by the police, not to Morton Street Police Station, but to Scotland Yard, this in itself being a most unusual course to adopt. They are unquestionably detained in custody, but they have not yet been charged before a magistrate.

The police, later in the day, carried off some of these men's personal belongings, from both hotel and mansion.

A sinister aspect was given to the foregoing mysterious proceedings by the presence at Albert Gate, early in the day, of two police surgeons, who were followed, about twelve o'clock, by Dr. Tennyson Coke, the greatest living authority on toxicology.

Dr. Coke and the other medical gentlemen subsequently refused to impart the slightest information as to the reasons that led the police to seek their services, and the Scotland Yard authorities are adamant in the matter.

The representative of a news agency was threatened with arrest for trespass when he endeavoured to gain admission to the Albert Gate house, and it is quite evident that the police are determined to prevent the facts from leaking out at present—if they can by any means accomplish their wishes.

Brett read this interesting statement twice slowly. It fascinated him. Its very vagueness, its admissions of inability to tell what had really happened, its adroit use of such phrases as "Turkish gentlemen of high rank," "noted experts in the diamond-cutting industry," "the greatest living authority on toxicology," betrayed the hand of the disappointed journalistic artist.

"Excellent," he murmured aloud. "It is the breath of battle to my nostrils. I ought to tip Smith for my breakfast. Had I read this earlier, I would not have eaten a morsel."

He carefully examined the page at the back. It contained matter of no consequence—a London County Council debate—so he took a pair of scissors from his pocket and cut out the complete item, placing the slip as a votive offering in front of a finely executed bust of Edgar Allen Poe, that stood on a bookcase behind him.

Within three minutes the scissors were again employed. The new cutting ran—

> There is trouble at Yildiz Kiosk. A Reuter's telegram from Constantinople states that a near relative of the Sultan has fled to France. The Porte have asked the French Government to apprehend him, but the French Ambassador has informed Riaz Pasha that this course is impracticable in the absence of any criminal charge.

"These two are one," said the barrister, as he turned towards Poe's bust, and laid the slip by the side of its predecessor. This time he had mutilated a critique of an Ibsenite drama.

The rest of the newspaper's contents had no special interest for him, and he soon threw down the journal in order to rise, light a cigarette, and muster sufficient energy to write a telegram accepting Lord Northallerton's invitation for the following day.

He was on the point of reaching for a telegraph form when Smith entered with a card. It bore the name and address—

"The Earl of Fairholme, Stanhope Gate."

"Curious," thought Brett. Where is his lordship?" he said aloud. "At the door, or in the street?"

His flat was on the second floor.

"In a kab, sir."

"Bring his lordship up."

Talbot's Disappearance.

A rapid glance at "Debrett" revealed that the Earl of Fairholme was thirty, unmarried, the fourteenth of his line, and the possessor of country seats at Fairholme, Warwickshire and Glen Spey, Inverness.

The Earl entered, an athletic, well-groomed man, one whose lines were usually cast in pleasant places, but who now was in an unwonted state of flurry and annoyance.

Each man was favourably impressed with the other in the first moment. His lordship produced an introductory card, and Brett was astonished to find that it bore the name of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

"I have come——" commenced his lordship hesitatingly.

But the barrister broke in. "You have had a bad night, Lord Fairholme. You wish for a long and comfortable chat. Now, won't you start with a whisky and soda, light a cigar, and draw an easy chair up to the fire?"

"'Pon my honour, Mr. Brett, you begin well. You give me confidence. Those are the first cheerful words I have heard for twenty-four hours."

The earl was easily manœuvred into a strong light. Then he made a fresh start.

"You have doubtless heard of this Albert Gate affair, Mr. Brett?"

"You mean this?" said the other, rising and handing to his visitor the longer paragraph of the two he had selected from the newspaper.

"That is very curious," said the earl, momentarily startled.

But he was too pre-occupied by his thoughts to pay much heed to the incident. He merely glanced at the cutting and went on:

"Yes, that is it. Well, Edith—Miss Talbot, I mean—vows that she won't marry me until this beastly business

is cleared up. Of course, we all know that Jack didn't slope with the diamonds. He's tied up or dead, for sure. But—no matter what may have become of him—why the dickens that should stop Edith from marrying me is more than I can fathom. Just look at some of the women in Society. They don't leave it to their relatives to be mixed up in a scandal, I can tell you. Still, there you are. Edith is jolly clever and awfully determined, so you've got to find him, Mr. Brett. Dead or alive, he must be found, and cleared."

"He shall," said Brett, gazing into the fire.

The quiet, self-reliant voice steadied the young peer. He checked an imminent flow of words, picked up the newspaper slip again and this time read it.

Then he blushed.

"You must think me very stupid, Mr. Brett, to burst out in such a manner when you probably have never heard of the people I am talking about."

"You will tell me, Lord Fairholme, if you get quietly to work and try to speak, so far as you find it possible, in chronological sequence."

His lordship knitted his brows and smoked in silence. At last he found utterance.

"That's a good idea of yours. It makes things easier. Well, first of all, Edith and I became engaged. Edith is the daughter of the late Admiral Talbot. She and Jack, her brother, live with their uncle, General Sir Hubert Fitzjames, at 118, Ulster Gardens. Jack is in the Foreign Office; he is just like Edith, awfully clever and that sort of thing, an assistant secretary, I think they call him. Now we're getting on, aren't we?"

"Splendidly."

"That's all right. About a month ago a chap turns up from Constantinople, a kind of special envoy from the Sultan, and he explains to the Foreign Office that he has in his possession a lot of uncut diamonds of terrific value, including one as big as a duck's egg, to which no figures would give a price. Do you follow me?"

"Each word."

"Good. Well—I can't tell you why, because I don't know, and I could not understand it if I did—there was some political importance attached to these gems, and the Sultan roped our Foreign Office into it. So the Foreign Office placed Jack in charge of the business. He fixed up the envoy in the house at Albert Gate, got a lot of diamond cutters and machinery for him, gave him into the charge of all the smart policemen in London, and what do you think is the upshot?"

"What?"

"The envoy, his two secretaries, and a confidential servant were murdered the night before last, the diamonds were stolen, and Jack has vanished—absolutely gone clean into space, not a sign of him to be found anywhere. Yesterday Edith sends for me, cries for half-an-hour, tells me I'm the best fellow that ever lived, and then I'm jiggered if she didn't wind up by saying that she couldn't marry me."

The Earl of Fairholme was now worked up to fever heat He would not calm down for an appreciable period, so Brett resolved to try the effect of curiosity.

He wrote a telegram to Lord Northallerton:—

"Very sorry, but I cannot leave town at present. Please ask me later. Will explain reason for postponement when we meet."

He had touched the dominant note in mankind.

"Surely!" cried the earl, "you have not already decided upon a course of action?"

"Not exactly. I am wiring to postpone a shooting fixture."

"What a beastly shame!" exclaimed the other, in whom the sporting instinct was at once aroused. "I'm awfully sorry my affairs should interfere with your arrangements in this way."

"You mean this?!" cried Brett, rising and handing the Earl a newspaper cutting.

"Not a bit," cried Brett. "I make it a sacred rule of life to put pleasure before business. I mean," he explained, as a look of bewilderment crossed his hearer's face, "that this quest of ours promises to be the most remarkable affair I have ever been engaged in. That pleases me. Pheasant-shooting is a serious business, governed by the calendar and arranged by the headkeeper."

An electric bell summoned Smith. The barrister handed him the telegram and a sovereign.

"Read that message," he said. "Ponder over it. Send it, and give the change of the sovereign to Mrs. Smith's brother, with my compliments and regrets."

Then he turned to Lord Fairholme.

"Just one question," he said, "before I send you off to bed. No, you must not protest. I want you to meet me here this evening at seven, with your brain clear and your nerves restored by a good, sound sleep. We will dine, here or elsewhere, and act subsequently. But at this moment I want to know the name of the person most readily accessible who can tell me all about Mr. Talbot's connection with the Sultan's agent."

"His sister, undoubtedly."

"Where can I find her?"

"At Ulster Gardens. I will drive you there."

The barrister smiled. "You are going to bed, I tell you. Give me a few lines of introduction to Miss Talbot."

The earl's face had brightened at the prospect of meeting his *fiancée* under the favourable conditions of Brett's presence. But he yielded with good grace, and promptly sat down to write a brief note explanatory of the barrister's identity and position in the inquiry.

The two parted at the door, and a hansom rapidly brought Brett to the residence of Sir Hubert Fitz-james.

A stately footman took Reggie's card and its accompanying letter, placed them on a salver with a graceful turn of his

wrist, which oddly suggested a similar turn in his nose, and said:

"Miss Talbot is not at home, sir."

"Yes, she is," answered Brett, paying the driver of the hansom.

The footman deigned to exhibit astonishment. Here was a gentleman—one obviously accustomed to the manners of Society—who declined to accept the courteous disclaimer of an unexpected visit.

"Miss Talbot is not receiving visitors," he explained.

"Exactly. Take that card and the letter to Miss Talbot and bring me the answer."

Jeames was no match for his antagonist. He silently showed the way into a reception room and disappeared. A minute later he announced, with much deference, that Miss Talbot would see Mr. Brett in the library, and he conducted this mysterious visitor upstairs.

On rejoining Buttons in the hall he solemnly observed: "That's a swell cop who is with the missus—shining topper, button-hole, buckskin gloves, patent leathers, all complete. Footmen ain't in it with the force, nowadays."

Jeames expanded his magnificent waistcoat with a heavy sigh over this philosophical dictum, the poignancy of which was enhanced by his knowledge that the upper housemaid had taken to conversing with a mounted policeman in the Park during her afternoon off.

The apartment in which Brett found himself gave ready indications of the character of its tenants. Tod's "Rajasthan" jostled a volume of the Badminton Library on the bookshelves, a copy of the Allahabad *Pioneer* lay alongside the *Field* and the *Times* on the table, and many varieties of horns made trophies with quaint weapons on the walls.

A complete edition of Ruskin, and some exquisite prints of Rossetti's best known works, supplied a different set of emblems, whilst the room generally showed signs of daily occupation.

"Anglo-Indian uncle, artistic niece," was the barrister's rapid comment, but further analysis was prevented by the entrance of Miss Edith Talbot.

The surprise of the pair was mutual.

Brett expected to see a young, pretty and clever girl, vain enough to believe she had brains, and sufficiently well endowed with that rare commodity to be able to twist the good-natured Earl of Fairholme round her little finger.

Young, not more than twenty—unquestionably beautiful, with the graceful contour and delicately-balanced features of a portrait by Romney—Edith Talbot bore few of the marks that pass current as the outward and visible signs of a modern woman of Society. That she should be self-possessed and dressed in perfect taste were as obvious adjuncts of her character as that each phase of her clear thought should reflect itself in a singularly mobile face.

To such a woman pretence was impossible, the polite fictions of fashionable life impossible. Brett readily understood why the Earl of Fairholme had fallen in love with this fair creature. The honourable, typical, British peer had simply bent in worship before a goddess of his own creed.

To the girl Brett was equally a revelation.

Fairholme's introductory note described the barrister as "the smartest criminal lawyer in London—one whose aid would be invaluable." She expected to meet a sharp-featured, wizened, elderly man, with gold-rimmed eye-glasses, a queer voice, and a nasty habit of asking unexpected questions.

In place of this commonplace personality, she encountered a handsome, well-groomed gentleman—one who won confidence by his intellectual face, and retained it by invisibly establishing a social equality. Fortunately, there is yet in Britain an aristocracy wherein good birth is synonymous with good breeding—a freemasonry whose pass-words cannot be simulated, nor its membership bought.

Brett read the wonder in the girl's eyes, and hastened to explain.

Mehemet Ali's Note.

"The Earl of Fairholme," said Brett, "thought I might be of some service in the matter of your brother's strange disappearance, Miss Talbot. I am not a professional detective, but my friends are good enough to believe that I am very successful in unravelling mysteries that are beyond the ken of Scotland Yard. I have heard something of the facts in this present affair. Will you trust me so far as to tell me all that is known to you personally?"

"My uncle, General Fitzjames has just gone to Scotland Yard," she began, timidly.

"Quite so. Perhaps you would prefer to await his return?"

"Oh, no, I do not mean that. But it is so hard to know how best to act. Uncle expects the police to accomplish impossibilities. He says that they should long since have found out what has become of Jack. Perhaps they might resent my interference."

"My interference, to be exact," said Reggie, with the pleasant smile that had fascinated so many women. Even Edith Talbot was not wholly proof against its magic.

"I, personally, have little faith in them," she confessed.

"I have none."

"Well, I will do as you advise."

"Then I recommend you to take me into your confidence. I know Scotland Yard and its methods. We do not follow the same path."

"I believe in you and trust you," said the girl.

So ingenuous was the look from the large, deep eyes which accompanied this declaration of confidence, that many men would have pronounced Miss Talbot to be an experienced flirt.

Brett knew better. He simply bowed his acknowledgments.

"What is it that you want to know?" she continued. "We ourselves are no better informed than the newspapers as to what has actually happened, save that four men have been killed as the result of a carefully-planned robbery. As for my brother——"

She paused and strove hard to force back her tears.

"Your brother has simply vanished, Miss Talbot. If the criminals did not scruple to leave four dead men behind, they would not draw the line at a fifth. The clear inference is that your brother is alive but under restraint."

"I can see that it is possible he was alive until some time after the tragedy at Albert Gate. But—but—what connection can Jack have with the theft of diamonds worth millions? These people used him as their tool in some manner. Why should they spare him when success had crowned their efforts?"

"We are conversing in riddles. Will you explain?"

"You know that my brother is an assistant Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office?"

"Yes."

"Well, early in September, his chief placed him in charge of a special undertaking. The Sultan had decided to have a large number of rough diamonds cut and polished by the best European experts. They were all magnificent gems, exceedingly valuable it seems, being rare both in size and purity; but one of them was larger than any known diamond. Jack told me it was quite as big as a good-sized hen's egg. Both it and the others, he said, had the appearance of lumps of alum, but experts said that the smaller stones were worth more than a million sterling, whilst the price of the large one could not be fixed. No one but an Emperor or Sultan would buy it. His Excellency, Mehemet Ali Pasha, was the especial envoy charged with this mission, and he brought credentials to the Foreign Office asking for facilities to be given for its execution. He and the two secretaries who accompanied him have been killed."

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"Yes?" said Brett, whose eyes were fixed intently upon the hearthrug.

"Jack was given the special duty of looking after Mehemet Ali and his companions during their residence in London. It was his business to afford them every assistance in his power, to procure them police protection, obtain for them the best advice attainable in the diamond trade, and generally place at their disposal all the resources which the British Government itself could command if it undertook such a curious task. He had been with them about a month—not hourly engaged, you understand, as once the preliminary arrangements were made, he had little further trouble—but he used to call there every morning and afternoon to see if he could render any assistance. Matters had progressed so favourably until the day before yesterday, that in another month he hoped to see the last of them. He was always saying that he would be glad when the business was ended, as he did not like to be officially connected with the fate of a few little bits of stone that happened to be so immensely valuable."

"Did your brother call there as usual on Monday afternoon?" said Brett.

"Yes; he came straight here from Albert Gate, and had tea with uncle and myself. He sat in the very chair and in the very position you now occupy. I can remember him saying: 'By Jove! the Hen's Egg'—that is what he used to call the big diamond—'is turning out in fine style.' He even discussed the possibility of bringing us to see the collection when it was finished and before it left this country."

"Did your brother say why the diamonds were brought to this country in the first instance?"

"Yes; the Sultan and his advisers seemed to think the work of cutting them could be performed more safely and expeditiously here than anywhere else. Even the Turk has a high regard for the manner in which law and order are maintained in Britain. Yet the sequel has shown that the diamonds and their guardians were perhaps in greater danger here than they would have been in Constantinople."

"Was that the only reason?" said Brett, who had apparently made up his mind with reference to the pattern of the carpet, and was now gazing into the bright fire which danced merrily in the grate, for the day though fine was chilly.

The girl wrinkled her brows in thought before she answered: "I think I do remember Jack saying that he believed there was some State business mixed up in the affair, but I am quite sure he did not know the exact facts himself."

"Can you recollect any of the special precautions taken to protect the gems? Your brother may have mentioned some details in conversation, you know."

"Oh, I think I know all about them. In the first instance, the house at Albert Gate had previously been tenanted by a rich banker, and it was well defended by all ordinary means against the attacks of ordinary burglars. But, in addition to this, before the diamonds left their safe at the Bank of England, the building was practically torn to pieces inside by workmen acting under the direction of the Commissioner of Police. It was absolutely impossible for anyone to enter except through the front door, unless they flew out of the second storey window. Servants and workmen, like everybody else, had to use this door alone, as the windows and doors in the basement had all been bricked up. Inside the entrance-hall there were always twelve policemen, and an inspector in charge.

"Everyone who left the house was searched by the inspector on duty, and Jack used to say that he was very glad he invariably insisted upon this examination, although the police were at first disinclined to meet his wishes in the matter, he being, so to speak, their direct superior for the time. Beneath the entrance-hall were several Turkish and other servants. Mehemet Ali himself, in the presence of his secretaries, used to open the door leading to the suite of apartments in which the diamond cutters worked, and two of the Turkish gentlemen would remain there all day until the men left in the evening. The envoy and both secretaries used to meet Jack when he visited the place, and for the last three weeks he had nothing to do but see the diamonds, count them, drink an excellent cup of coffee, and smoke a wonderful cigarette, made of some special Turkish tobacco, cultivated and prepared only for the Imperial household."

"Ah!" sighed Brett, with a note of almost unconscious envy in his voice. He knew exactly what that coffee and those cigarettes would be like. "I beg your pardon," he went on, perceiving that Miss Talbot did not understand his exclamation. "Will you tell me as nearly as you can the occurrences of Monday evening?"

"They were simple enough," said the girl. "My brother dined at home. We had one or two guests, and were all in the drawing-room about 10.15, when a note came for him from Mehemet Ali. I know exactly what was in it, as I looked over his shoulder whilst he read it. The words were: 'I wish to see you to-night on important business. Come, if possible, at once.' I have to tell you that it was in French, but this is an exact translation."

"Your brother was quite sure that it was from Mehemet Ali himself?" said Brett.

"Quite sure," was the reply. "He knew his handwriting well, having had several communications from him during the progress of the business."

"Did your brother leave the house immediately?" asked Brett.

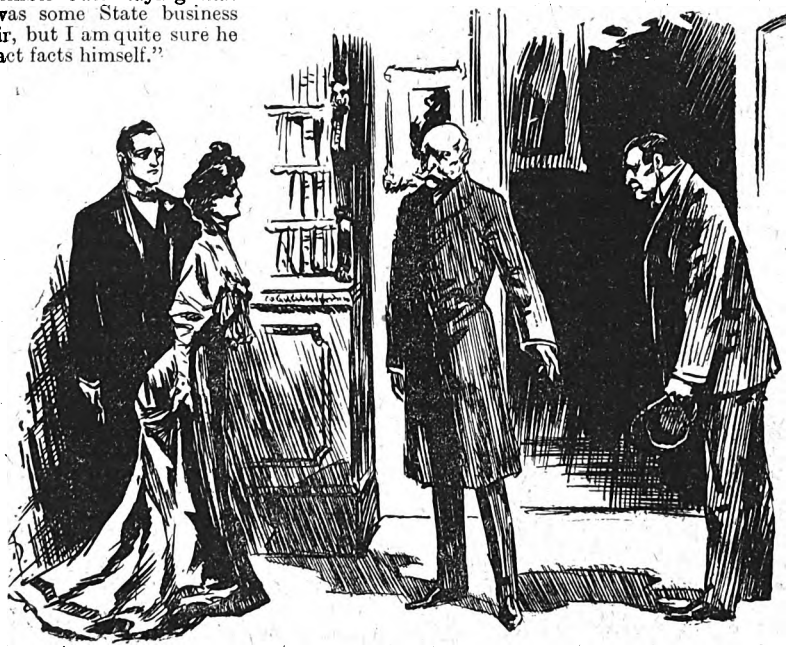
"That instant. He went downstairs, put on his overcoat and hat, and got into a cab with the messenger who brought the note."

"Do you know who this messenger was?"

"One of the policemen on duty in the house itself."

A slight pause ensued, and Brett was about to take his departure, having no further questions to ask at the moment, when someone was heard hastily ascending the stairs, talking to a companion as he advanced.

"This is my uncle," exclaimed



"This, my dear, is Mr. Winter, of Scotland Yard."

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Miss Talbot, rising to go to the door. Before she could reach it an elderly gentleman entered, bearing upon him all those distinguished tokens that stamp a man as a retired major-general.

He exclaimed impetuously:

"I have brought a gentleman from Scotland Yard, my dear." Then he caught sight of Brett, and said: "Who is this?"

Edith was about to explain when another man entered, a strongly-built, bullet-headed man, with keen eyes and firm mouth, and a curious suggestion in his appearance of having combined pugilism with process-serving as a professional means of existence. His face extended into a smile when his eyes fell upon the barrister.

"Ah! Mr. Brett," he cried. "Now we have something to do that is up to your mark. You are on the spot first, as usual, but this time I can honestly say that I am glad to see you."

Sir Hubert Fitzjames glanced in astonishment from his niece to the barrister, but could find nothing better to say than:

"This, my dear, is Mr. Winter, of Scotland Yard."

Where the Crime was Done.

Brett promptly cleared up the situation by explaining to Sir Hubert, in a few brief words, the reason for his unexpected presence, and when the Major-General learnt the name of the distinguished personage who had sent Lord Fairholme to the barrister he expressed a ready acquiescence in the desire to utilise his services. Nor was the effect of such a notable introduction lost on Mr. Winter, whose earlier knowledge of the barrister's remarkable achievements in unravelling the tangled skein of criminal investigation was now supplemented by a certain amount of awe for a man who commanded the confidence of His Majesty's Government.

"Well," said Sir Hubert Fitzjames, with the brisk animation of one accustomed to utter commands that must be instantly obeyed, "we will now proceed to business."

For the moment no one spoke. The Scotland Yard detective evidently wished his distinguished colleague to take the lead, and no sooner did Brett perceive this fact than he rose, bowed politely to Miss Talbot and her uncle, and said:

"The first thing to do is to trace the whereabouts of Mr. Talbot, and this should be a comparatively easy task. The other features of this strange occurrence impress me as highly complex, but it is far too early a stage in the investigation to permit any definite opinion being expressed at this moment."

Every one seemed to be surprised at Brett's evident resolve to take his departure.

"Where are you going to, sir?" said Mr. Winter.

"That depends largely upon you," was the smiling reply. "If you come with me we will go direct to Albert Gate, but if you decide upon prosecuting further inquiries here, I will await your arrival at my flat."

"That is as much as saying that there are no facts worth inquiring into to be learnt here?"

"Exactly so," replied the barrister. "Miss Talbot has told me all that is material to our purpose. Her brother was unexpectedly sent for after dinner on Monday night and left the house hurriedly, without affording any clue as to his subsequent movements beyond that contained in a brief note sent to him by Mehemet Ali Pasha. Indeed, it was impossible for him to afford any explanation, as he himself was quite unprepared for the summons. Meanwhile, every moment that we lose in the endeavour to follow up his actions is precious time wasted."

The barrister's manner, no less than his words, impressed Mr. Winter so forcibly that he also rose from the seat which he had occupied with the intention of conducting a long and careful examination of each member of the household.

"Then I will come with you at once," he said.

"Oh," cried the Major-General, "I understood you to say as we came here that there were many questions which required immediate inquiry in this house, on the principle that the movements of the missing man should be minutely traced from the very commencement."

Mr. Winter looked somewhat confused, but Edith Talbot broke in:

"I think, uncle dear, it would be well to defer to Mr. Brett's judgment.

"Do you really believe," she said, turning to the barrister, "that you will soon be able to find my brother?"

"I am quite sure of it," he replied, and the conviction in his tone astonished the professional detective, whilst it carried a message of hope to the others. Even Sir Hubert, for some reason which he could not explain, suddenly experienced a strong sense of confidence in this reserved, distinguished-looking man. He stepped forward eagerly and held out his hand, saying:

"Then we will not detain you, Mr. Brett. Act as you think fit in all things, but do let us have all possible information at the earliest moment. The suspense and uncertainty of the present position of affairs are terribly trying to my niece and myself." The old soldier spoke with dignity and composure, but an involuntary quiver of his lips, as he uttered the concluding words, betrayed his anguish.

Brett and Mr. Winter then quitted the house; they hailed a hansom, and were soon driving rapidly towards Albert Gate.

"Do you know," said the man from Scotland Yard, breaking a silence of some moments' duration, "you surprised me by what you said just now, Mr. Brett."

"I thought you were too old a hand to be surprised at anything," was the reply.

"But, come now, you know well enough what I mean. You said you thought it would be a comparatively simple matter to find Mr. Talbot, whilst the other features of the crime are very complex. Now the affair, thus far, impresses me as being the exact opposite to that statement. The crime is simple enough. A clever gang of thieves get into the place by working some particularly cool and daring confidence game. They don't hesitate at murder to cover up their tracks, and they make away with the plunder under the very noses of the police. All this may be smart and up-to-date in its methods, but it is not unusual. The difficult question to my mind is, what have they done with Mr. Talbot, and how did they succeed in fooling him so completely as to make him what one might almost call a party to the transaction?"

The barrister pulled out a cigar-case.

"Try one of these, Winter," he said. "You will find them soothing."

"I never smoke whilst on business," was the testy reply.

"I invariably do," and he proceeded to light a cigar, and smoke with keen zest.

"I do not know how it is," went on Mr. Winter, "but whenever I happen to meet you, Mr. Brett, in the course of an inquiry, I always start by being very angry with you."

"Why?" There was an amused twinkle in Brett's eyes, which might have warned the other of a possible pitfall.

"Because you treat me as if I were a precocious youth. You listen to my theories with a sort of pitying indulgence, yet I have the reputation of being one of the best men in Scotland Yard, or I should not have been put on to this job. And I am older than you too."

"I may surely pity you," said Brett, "even if I don't indulge you too much."

"There you are again," snapped the detective. "Now, what is there silly about my theory of the crime, I should like to know?"

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"You shall know, and before you are much older. Bear with me for a little while, I beg of you. You may be right, and I may be quite wrong, but I think there is much beneath the surface in the investigations we are now pursuing. My advice to you is to drop all preconceived theories, but to note every circumstance, however remote it may appear in its bearing upon events, and in any case not to act precipitately. Whatever you do, don't arrest anybody."

"But," said the other, somewhat mollified by Brett's earnestness, "half-a-dozen people may be arrested at any moment."

"Pray tell me how?"

"Well, you know, descriptions of the stolen diamonds and of the suspected persons are in every police office in Great Britain and in most Continental centres by this time. Passengers by all steamers are most carefully scrutinised. Every pawnbroker or diamond merchant in the country is on the look-out, and, generally speaking, it will be odd if somebody does not drop into the net before many hours have passed."

"It will, indeed," murmured Brett; "and no doubt the somebody in question will experience a certain amount of inconvenience before he proves to you that he had nothing whatever to do with the matter. Now, don't answer me, Winter, but ponder seriously over this question: Do you really think that the intelligence which planned and successfully carried through an operation of such magnitude will be trapped by plain-clothes constables watching the gangways of steamships, or by any pawnbroker who has ever lent half the value of a pledge?"

Almost impatiently the barrister waved the subject out of the hansom, and the detective had sense enough to leave him alone during the few remaining minutes before the vehicle pulled up near the Albert Gate mansion.

Brett stopped the driver some little distance short of the house itself, as he did not wish to attract the attention of a knot of curious sightseers in the street. He asked Winter to go on in front and make known the fact that he was coming, so that there would be no delay at the door. This the detective readily agreed to, and Brett rapidly took in the main external features of the house which had become the scene of such a remarkable tragedy.

It was a palatial structure, built on the sombre lines of the Early Victorian period. Miss Talbot's brief description of the measures taken to protect its occupants from interference was fully borne out by its aspect. There was no access to the basement; the main entrance was situated at the side; all the ground-floor and first-storey windows facing on the street were fitted with immovable wooden venetians. Presumably those on the Park side were similarly secured, whilst the back wall abutted on to that of another mansion, equally large and strongly built, tenanted by a well-known peer.

Truly, it required a genius almost unrivalled in the annals of crime, to murder four people and steal diamonds worth millions in such a place whilst guarded by twelve London policemen and under the special protection of the Home Office.

What the Police Saw.

The appearance of Winter at the door caused the gaping idlers in the street to endeavour to draw nearer to the mysterious portals. Thereupon three policemen on duty outside hustled the mob back, and Brett took advantage of the confusion thus created to slip to the doorway almost unperceived. One of the police-constables turned round to make a grab at him, but a signal from a *confrère* inside prevented this, and Brett quickly found himself within a spacious entrance-hall with the door closed and bolted behind him.

Winter was talking to two uniformed inspectors, to whom he had explained the barrister's mission and credentials.

"We have here, Mr. Brett," he said, "Inspector Walters, who was on duty until ten o'clock on Monday night, and Inspector Sharpe, who relieved him. They will both tell you exactly what took place."

"Thank you," said the barrister; "but it will expedite matters if you gentlemen will first accompany me over the scene of the crime. I will then be able to understand more accurately what happened. Suppose we start here. I presume that this is where the police guard was stationed?"

Inspector Walters assumed the *role* of guide.

"I was in charge of the first guard established here a month ago," he said, "and the arrangements I then made have been adhered to without deviation night and day ever since."

He then led the way. But the internal construction of the house will be better comprehended if the inspector's verbal description be dispensed with.

From the outer door a short passage of a few feet led up half-a-dozen steps into the spacious central hall, the entrance to which was closed by a light double-door, half glass. On both sides of the first short passage were two small rooms, such as are often used in London mansions for the purposes of cloak-rooms during a reception or ball. The doors from these rooms opened into the inner hall. A large dining-room was situated on the left or Park side, and on the right was a breakfast or morning-room. At the back of the entrance-hall a handsome staircase led from left to right to the upper floors, whilst a doorway in the extreme right of the hall, and beneath the staircase, showed the way down to the kitchens and basement offices.

"Here," said the inspector, pointing to the foot of the staircase, "two police-constables were constantly stationed. Another stood there," indicating the passage to the kitchen, "and a fourth at the glass door. As the outer basement entrance was not only securely fastened by bolts and bars, but actually bricked up inside, it was absolutely impossible for any person to enter or leave the house save by the front door, nor could any one go from the kitchen to the upper part of the house without passing under the observation of all four constables. I arranged my guards in military fashion, having three men for each post, with one hour on duty and two hours off, but the same men were never on guard together at definite hours, as they were relieved at varying times. You will understand that I considered it a very responsible task to safeguard these premises, and thought it best to render it impossible for any section of the force at my command to take part in a conspiracy, even though such a thing was in itself most improbable."

They then ascended the staircase and found themselves on the first floor, where were situated the chief reception-rooms.

There were six spacious apartments on this storey, and all of them had originally opened out on to the landing. The special precautions taken to guard the diamonds of the Turkish mission, however, had altered all that. Five doorways had been bricked up, the result being that admission to the whole set of rooms could only be obtained through the first door that faced the top of the staircase.

This apartment was luxuriously furnished, and Inspector Walters explained that the Turkish Envoy and his suite passed the working hours of each day there, after they had personally thrown open the other apartments to the diamond polishers, and unlocked the safes in which the gems had been stored when work ceased on the previous day.

"His Excellency," said the inspector, "kept the keys of this room and the others, together with those of the safes, in his own possession night and day. He slept upstairs, and so did the other two gentlemen. No one was allowed even to come to this floor except the confidential servant, named Hussein, who used to bring coffee, cigars, and newspapers or other things the gentlemen might require, together

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with their lunch in the middle of the day. The workmen used to bring their lunch with them, so that they came in and out once a day only."

"Where did this confidential servant sleep?" said Brett.

"I believe he used to lie curled up on the rug outside his Excellency's door."

"And the other servants?"

"They all slept in the basement."

"What were they, Turks or Christians?"

"Well, sir," said the inspector with a smile, "two of them were Turks in costume, whilst three were Christians in appearance. That is the best I can say for them, as they were Frenchmen, though certainly the cook was a first-rate *chef*. Of course, we all got our meals here whilst on duty."

"Did his Excellency and the other members of the mission eat food prepared in the ordinary way?"

"Oh, yes; they appreciated French dishes as keenly as anybody might do."

"It was in this room, then," continued Brett, "that the murders took place?"

"Yes; I suppose that must be so," said the inspector. "But my friend here," pointing to Inspector Sharpe, "can tell that part of the story better than I can."

They passed into the inner rooms, which were quite silent and deserted, and presented a strange appearance considering the character of the house and its locality. Although the ceilings were decorated with beautiful paintings and fringed with superbly emblazoned mouldings; although the walls were papered with material that cost as much per yard as good silk, each apartment was occupied with workmen's benches and curious devices for cutting and polishing diamonds.

In the first room were two small safes, one of which was intended to receive the gems under treatment at the close of each day's work; the other held certain valuable materials required in the diamond-cutters' operations. Three of the rooms were on the Park side, and it was here that the small colony of skilled artisans had been installed.

The other two rooms were not used, nor had any communicating doors been broken through the walls in order to gain access to them.

The windows of the three apartments occupied by the workmen were not only guarded by strong iron bars, but possessed the additional security of external wire blinds of comparatively small mesh. Each window admitted plenty of light, and could be raised to allow a free circulation of air, but it was seemingly quite impossible for any active communication to take place with the outside. The three rooms looked on to a small inclosed lawn, which was separated from the Park by a brick wall surmounted by iron railings. All the fireplaces had been closed with bricks and mortar.

"You will see, sir," said the inspector, when he had called Brett's attention to these details, "that, mysterious though the murders were, they were as nothing compared with the disappearance of the diamonds. Every person who came downstairs was most carefully and methodically searched each time he passed the constable on duty at the bottom. It may be admitted that a few small stones could be so secreted as to escape observation, but some of these stones were so large that such a notion is not to be thought of, whilst the size of the great diamond which Mr. Talbot christened the 'Hen's Egg' rendered its transference past the searchers beneath absolutely impossible. There was no humbug about the search, you will understand, Mr. Brett. People had to take their boots off, open their mouths, and hand over their hats, coats, sticks, or umbrellas for inspection. Every part of their clothing was scrutinised, and the contents of their pockets, money, watches, keys, and the rest, thoroughly examined. These were our orders, and they were strictly obeyed, Mr. Talbot himself being the first to insist that the regulation should be carried out rigidly, so far as he was concerned. Why, one day a Cabinet Minister came here to see the diamonds. He was elderly and stout, and did not at all like having to take off his boots, I can assure you. And in spite of all this the diamonds have gone!"

(A further long instalment will be published next Tuesday.)

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

December 9.—Those whose birthdays fall to-day will do well to attend closely to business during the next twelve months, or trouble may come.

Girls born near seven p.m. will have friction and discord in love affairs.

The day is evil for travel and speculating; favourable for dealing with landlords.

A child born here will be active, stubborn, and hot-tempered.

December 10.—A good birthday; business and domestic affairs prosper. Those in employ will be promoted.

Girls should make new friends; if engaged they marry.

The day is favourable for most things; buy, sell, visit, engage servants, and marry.

A child born to-day will be affectionate, cheerful, generous, brave, and will rise in life.

December 11.—Many unexpected events are indicated for those whose birthdays come to-day; attend to the health, and keep the affairs well in hand.

Young girls will need much care and prudence in love matters; attentions from married men.

The day is one on which to go quietly; let others make the first move.

A child born this day will be moody, cautious, and cunning. It will be fond of pleasure and the opposite sex.

December 12.—An unsettled year; danger of heavy losses; much anxiety.

Girls meet with disappointment through opposite sex; they should place little faith in any promises.

The day is not good for pleasure, marriage, buying, selling, or changing residence.

A child born here will be improvident and dislike work. If a girl she will be unhappy in marriage.

December 13.—A favourable year for business; much activity and movement. Beware of law and quarrels.

Rather a dull time for girls; they need care with letters and in speech.

The day is good for doing business with farmers, builders, and elderly people. Be careful in signing papers and agreements.

A child born to-day will be active, thoughtful, and clever. Will be fond of travel, of science, and figures. The wit will be keen and sarcastic.

December 14.—Rather a fortunate year for health and business; avoid new enterprises and promising things.

Girls will find love matters quiet, but should be cautious where they place confidence.

A child born here will be rather fortunate in life, but be subject to many ups and downs. Will be fond of travel and change.

December 15.—This is a bad birthday, and promises much anxiety over business, money, domestic affairs, and health. Go quietly and use great caution. Insure against fire and accident.

Girls meet with obstacles and crosses in love affairs; engagements are broken; much care and prudence will be needed with opposite sex.

The day is evil for most matters. Beware of quarrels and mishap.

A child born to-day will be restless, crafty, improvident, and a wanderer. Will need constant care and firm handling.

Asturel.

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The Human Way.

A Little Tale for the Discontented.

"I WONDER," muttered young Mrs. Perry, jerking a hat-pin from the cushion, "if I'll ever in this life possess suitable and seasonable things to wear?"

She thrust a hat-pin rather viciously through the dainty summer creation that crowned her head.

"One would suppose I didn't know," she indignantly told her reflected image, "that a trim tailor-made dress and walking hat are the correct dress for autumn. One would suppose I didn't realise how shabby and out of taste is this absurd combination of summer hat, winter skirt and odd spring jacket. But what use to know these things, when one has no money?"

She sighed despairingly and rummaged in a box for her oft-cleaned tan gloves. The sight of them lying beside a small pile of newly washed neck ribbons provoked a fresh burst of scorn.

"Oh, the littleness of it!" she cried bitterly. "To spend one's God-given energies in cleaning and mending and turning and dyeing—all because of a miserable, soul-pinching lack of money."

Catching up gloves and pocket-book she passed into the sitting-room of the little flat.

"Be sure to take good care of Freddie while I'm gone, Dora," she adjured her cousin, who bent above her school book, the two-year-old youngster playing at her feet."

"I'll try," was the rather weary answer. "He's always getting into mischief, though, no matter how I watch him."

The mother sighed impatiently. "I suppose," she said aggrievedly, "that I ought really to stay with him. But it does seem as if I might have some recreation once in a while even if it's no more than going to do a little shopping. But then, I'm always made to feel guilty whenever I demand any release from the daily grind."

She kissed the child hastily. "Good-bye, Freddie—mamma's coming back soon. Gracious! how dirty that dress is, and I just put it on an hour ago. I must make him some new things this week. Oh! the hundreds of things crying to be done. Shall I ever, ever have any leisure?"

"It isn't right," she protested, as she hurried along the street, "that any human being should be obliged to waste precious powers on miserly economies and paltry strivings. There should be time for something else than getting meals and making beds and keeping clothes in order. There should be leisure! Time to think and study and develop the higher regions of one's being. Time to appreciate the beauties of the finer things of life. Oh, there's something wrong with the system of things!"

The sight of gorgeous shop windows only accentuated her bitter mood. Mrs. Perry did not possess the philosophy that enables one to enjoy beauty regardless of possession. The display of exquisite garments only filled her with wretchedness.

"It is cruel!" she persisted. "Cruel to be deprived of these things, when one has the taste and the artistic ability to appreciate them so keenly."

It was half an hour later, as she stood at a counter making modest purchases that the sound of a woman's voice near by arrested her attention. There was something exceedingly familiar in the well-modulated tones.

Glancing up, she saw that her surmise was correct. The perfectly appareled woman who stood looking at silks was no other than a friend of her girlhood.

The recognition was mutual. The friends moved towards each other with outstretched hands and glowing eyes.

"Why, Clara! Is this you?"

"And you, Margaret?"

Then followed the rush of questions and comments most natural under the circumstances.

"Come with me," said Clara Eberly, drawing Mrs. Perry from the counter; "we'll go to my hotel, where we can talk over old times to our hearts' content. Shopping can wait for a day or two."

She was so sweet, so cordial, so like the Clara of former days, that Mrs. Perry forgot for the moment that her dress showed a disheartening contrast to the exquisitely fitting gown of grey.

Once in the street, however, the realisation smote her. A hansom was waiting for Clara. The two women got into it, and again the questions and comments ran on.

It was but a few minutes' ride to the hotel. Mrs. Perry followed her friend into the handsome entrance, trying very hard not to be envious.

"And now," cried Mrs. Eberly as they reached her room, "we can have a cosy afternoon all by ourselves."

She rang the bell and ordered refreshments.

"Do sit back and relax and forget if you can all about the duties waiting for you at home. I shan't listen to your going under two hours at the least. Dinner to get? Oh! well, can't you let it go for to-day? There! Perhaps it is thoughtless for me to talk so. You see, I have no responsibilities whatever. I've lived in hotels ever since I married. Howard is out of town so much, it really wouldn't be sensible to keep house. And then I travel with him most of the time."

Mrs. Perry leant forward impulsively. "What an ideal life!" she cried. "Just what I've always wanted. You have leisure—time to think and study and see the world and accomplish great things. Oh! Clara, you should be very thankful."

Mrs. Eberly laughed rather helplessly. "Accomplish great things!" she repeated. "Why, Margaret, I don't accomplish anything. If you ask me why, I am sure I cannot tell. All I know is that I am constantly on the go and yet I do nothing. My life is absolutely of no use to the world. Doesn't it sound dreadful? Especially when you think of my essays at school on the subject of higher living and all that. I'm sure you must be shocked——"

"I'm not shocked, but greatly astonished. I thought—I was sure—that having money and opportunities would make a difference. You don't have to spend your forces worrying about dress——"

"Dress! 'Tis the bane of my existence. That is just it. The tailor and the milliner and the modiste and all the rest of the terrible train take up so much of my existence that I sometimes long to cry out for release. Fashion makes greater demands upon women every year. Oh, it's a problem! I don't pretend to know the solution of it. But I sometimes yearn for a simple, quiet life—for a life utterly free from all this foolish frippery and nonsense. I would like a little home that I could care for myself. Oh! what joy I would take in making it sweet and attractive for my husband! And I would be willing to wear simple clothes and to have only a few of them—numerous clothes are such a burden—and I would be happy—oh, so happy!—for to me that would be living."

On her way homeward an hour later Mrs. Perry gazed musingly at the shop windows.

"Strange!" she sighed. "People always want what they do not possess. And somehow I really believe Clara meant what she said."

Angela Morgan.

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THE STORY OF THE WEEK.
SEE OUR COLOURED COVER.

A WOMAN'S TROTH.

A True Romance of the London Stage.

(The real names of the chief persons concerned are well known to you.)

Two Meet Strangely.

"You'll be wise to spare me a minute, Mr. Prout, you will, indeed! Take the word of a desperate man for it. 'Tisn't likely John Horrocks is going to do without so much as the price of a pint and see you swaggering round as if you was a lord, instead of a cheeky young actor as can't act, when all the time, if he only cared, he could ruin you—ruin you, you mean hound!"

A shrug of the shoulders was the only answer to the threat so savagely concluded, and its object, a tall, dark, rather slight figure in irreproachable frock-coat and glossy "silk," went on buttoning a glove indifferently. The other, a well-built but slouching personage of a superior working-class type, stepped up closer, so that his raised voice might not carry across the gloomy, flagged alley in which they stood, to a low, plain entrance hard by. A pane of the unlighted lamp above it bore, in red letters, the inscription, "Stage Door."

"Come," continued the speaker, roughly, "are you going to give me a pound or two, or are you not?"

"I am not!" he was informed. "You lost your situation here—a situation that I obtained for you—through your own drunken habits, henceforth I shall do nothing more for you, threats or no threats."

John Horrocks, late "property-master" at the Crescent Theatre, gnawed his large, drooping moustaches.

"So that's your tone, is it?" he said. "I've got to bring you to heel, Mr. Lewis Prout, have I? That's not difficult. Suppose I was to write a polite note to pretty Miss Audrey, eh?"

He pointed significantly in the direction of the stage-door behind them. On either side of it, in staring capitals, was billed a woman's name—that of "Miss Audrey Cowper."

"A polite note," pursued the ex-property master, "mentioning that I happen to know the whereabouts of poor Mr. Walsh?"

Lewis Prout started. "She could tell you that much herself," he retorted, "some wretched country gaol. I forget the place."

Horrocks grinned.

"Not much," Prout was assured, "his three months is up. He's out again, and in London, poor beggar. I saw him yesterday in a fourpenny doss, a common lodging-house, he didn't see me, but I made certain it was him. He's as much down on his luck as I am. And yet it'd not matter to her if she knew, I'll bet. She always swore he was innocent, ay, and believed it, too. Shall I drop her a line, Mr. Prout? She loved his little finger better than ever she'll do your whole body!"

Slowly, very slowly, Lewis Prout put a hand in his pocket and took out a couple of half-crowns. "There," he said, "that is for the last time. Dare to trouble me with another request for money and I will have you arrested as a persistent and objectionable mendicant."

He flung the coins into the ex-property master's palm, and turned away. A stride, and he had disappeared within the stage-entrance of the Crescent Theatre. John Horrocks slipped his booty into a shabby purse.

"The stingy bully!" muttered the ex-property-master. "Five bob instead of five quid, and he'll have me arrested, will he? And perhaps I shan't have something to say when I'm in Holloway, oh no, perhaps not!"

Thus grumbling to himself, Horrocks moved out of the narrow alley that led to a great West End thoroughfare. As he left the neighbourhood of the stage-door, Lewis Prout, watching him slyly from the shelter of that dingy portal, uttered an oath. John Horrocks had come face to face with a piquante little lady, whose rich furs, smart Paris hat, and costly jewellery seemed to lend a sudden brightness to the dull autumn day.

"Audrey!" murmured the actor, "he—he must not speak to her in his present mood. But no, he was merely trying to bluff me, he dare not, he dare not."

The phrase died on Lewis Prout's lips. John Horrocks had stepped in front of the new-comer.

"Miss Cowper," he was saying, hesitatingly. "Miss Cowper, may I be so bold?"

The little actress paused.

"Why, it's Horrocks!" she exclaimed. "Dear, dear, you know I'm so sorry about you, Horrocks, and your wife and children. But you've been forgiven so often that they won't hear of my interceding for you again. You really do get terribly drunk, Horrocks!"

"Yes, miss," admitted the ex-property-master, "I do, miss, and it's been my ruin in more ways than one." He leant towards her, so closely that she shrank, involuntarily, from his beery breath. "You've always been kind to me, miss," he added, confidentially, "do you know, I could tell you something—something you'd be rare glad to hear—something about——"

A hasty clasp was laid on Horrocks' arm, and he was violently displaced. His interrupter was Lewis Prout.

"Here!" observed the actor, and his voice had a curious gasp in it, as if of suppressed excitement, "We can't have you worrying Miss Cowper with your eternal troubles. If you're all that hard-up I'll see what can be done for you myself. Meanwhile, take that!"

He had a coin in his fingers—Horrocks perceived that it was a sovereign, and snatched at it greedily. Prout motioned him sharply to begone, and, with a doubtful air, and a thoughtful glance at Audrey Cowper, Horrocks pocketed the piece of gold and slouched off.

"I'm afraid Horrocks was beginning to be unpleasantly familiar," said Lewis Prout, as he stepped back towards the stage-door with the dainty, fur-clad figure at his side. A popular beauty, and the one real "star" of the Crescent company, Audrey Cowper was yet, and in full daylight, a young, sweet-faced and natural woman. Hers had been a rapid success; a year or two before she had been a struggling girl-actress on tour in the provinces.

"Yes," she answered, a shadow of disgust crossing her expressive features. "I was not sorry that you intervened at that particular moment."

Lewis Prout held open a swing-door for her to pass into the dusky recesses of the theatre. "I esteem myself fortunate," he observed, meaningly, "that for once my appearance was not disagreeable to you."

Audrey sighed, and quickened her own steps across the dark and draughty stage towards the stair which led to her dressing-room. The actor kept determinedly by her.

"Please, Mr. Prout, don't let us talk about that any more. I have told you that what you wish can never, never be. I

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cannot even deny that the sight of you will always cause me pain when I —when I think of poor Mr. Walsh."

Prout ground his teeth.

"You are obstinate in your self-deception," he snarled. "Stephen Walsh was guilty. If I prosecuted him it was to show him to you in his real colours."

The actor drew out a flat silver case and took a cigarette, closing the spring of the case with a snap. Audrey Cowper stopped, with her foot on the lowest stair.

"Mr. Prout," she responded, "you say you care for me, it is false. If you did you could not stoop to torture me in mean, unmanly ways. You are never tired of—of toying with that case—of reminding me that——"

"That Stephen Walsh, your lover and *protegée*," said Prout, bitterly, "went to gaol for three months for stealing it from me. The only decent bit of acting he ever did in his life was when he very nearly convinced those sleepy country magistrates that he was the victim of a plot. A plot—ha, ha! Why, the fellow was worth so little, even as 'general utility,' that he was always hard-up. He pawned the thing, as you know, for a few shillings."

The bright, womanly countenance, so familiar to London playgoers, looked steadily into the sullen visage of Lewis Prout.

"Let us end this once for all," she answered; "I have borne with you, Mr. Prout, because you are not the only person who, blinded by a horrible combination of circumstances, believes Mr. Walsh guilty, and also because your unfortunate passion helps to embitter you. But I will bear no more; speak to me again of Mr. Walsh or of your supposed affection for me, and I will see that either you or I leave the company. Judge for yourself if it is likely to be me."

She caught up her skirts and went proudly up the winding stairs to her room. It was still early in the afternoon, but she had some instructions to give to her dresser respecting the alteration of a costume. They served as an excuse for momentarily dismissing the woman. Left alone, Audrey sat down in a wicker chair and wiped away a tear or two.

"Poor Stephen!" she murmured. "Oh, why, why, didn't you write to me, why don't you let me know where you are?"

She opened a drawer and took out a photograph. It was that of a young and gallant face with kind, grave eyes, and sensitive, clean-shaven lips. Audrey kissed these last impulsively, then put away the portrait.

Four or five months previously, Stephen Walsh and she had been in the same touring company—it had been his first experience of "the profession." She had coached him in his parts, he had been her loyal, faithful cavalier—they had ended by falling in love.

Then there had happened a strange and terrible thing. Stephen had been accused by Prout of stealing a silver cigarette-case, the matter had been placed in the hands of the police, and, horror of horrors, Walsh had been identified by a local pawnbroker as the person who had pawned the case in question on the morning following its disappearance.

The case had been a cheap one—worth about a couple of guineas—and Stephen had been summarily sentenced by a country bench of magistrates to three months' imprisonment. These three months had brought her fame, and their end had blotted out her gladness in a bitter pang. Stephen had left his prison without communicating by word or sign with his betrothed, though she had written to him, in care of the governor of the gaol, sending him money, and telling him that she believed as passionately as ever in his innocence. Her duty at the theatre prevented her meeting him on his liberation, but she begged him to come direct to her in town. The request had received no answer, the money had been returned, the governor wrote, by Stephen's own desire. Audrey dried another and yet another tear as she vainly rebelled against that stern silence, which she understood all too well. He had refused to fasten upon her the stain that had fallen on his own life and reputation.

At length her dresser returned, and, with a sigh, Audrey rose, descended the stair, and passed out of the theatre. Someone followed her, she glanced round and saw Lewis Prout. He stepped abreast of her and commenced to mumble an apology.

"Miss Cowper—Audrey," he stammered. "I—I didn't mean to—to offend you, really. If I didn't love you so desperately I should be able to bridle my tongue. Say you forgive me, won't you?"

Audrey Cowper answered him coldly; she was walking so rapidly that he had to hasten to keep up with her. Already they had gained the more public streets—a turning brought them in sight of Piccadilly Circus.

"The only thing you can do to gratify me, Mr. Prout," she said, "is to relieve me henceforth of your company, except upon the stage. Surely you will not deny me the privilege of choosing my own friends!"

"That is to say," retorted the actor, angrily, "that you do not choose me for one?"

"Certainly not," said Audrey with spirit, "since you put it that way. And as I have some shopping to do in Regent Street, I cross here, so you can take the opportunity of saying good-afternoon."

She gave him a haughty little nod and stepped off into the roadway, to hasten across. Confused by the interview so abruptly terminated, she did not look carefully to her path, and, in an instant, found herself in a medley of vehicles. Avoiding a brougham, she darted before a motor-car, escaped it by a hair's-breadth, and plunged under the very noses of a bus-team. Her foot slipped on the greasy wood-paving, a second more, and the iron-shod hoofs would have been upon her.

All at once she felt herself seized by a powerful hand, that snatched her out of danger in a twinkling and steadied her gently upon her feet. The last of a line of sandwichmen, passing by with a highly-successful play advertised upon their boards, had darted forward and rescued her in the nick of time. Swinging round to protect her from the traffic, the horses of the 'bus came heavily against him—he recovered himself with difficulty.

A cry broke from Audrey as she saw his face. "Stephen! Stephen!" she said, and the two, oblivious of the world about them, gazed each at the other. Shabby, moustached, dejected as he was, she recognised in the sandwichman her lover, Stephen Walsh, and hung upon his arm.

"Allow me," intervened a harsh voice, "the lady is in my care."

At the sound the sandwichman turned, still limping from the shock of collision with the 'bus-team. Lewis Prout had crossed the road and approached them. The passers-by began to linger, a policeman drew near.

Stephen Walsh's eyes flashed fire as he looked at the speaker. "Is that so?" he demanded sternly. The question was addressed to Audrey and there was something in it that struck her to the heart.

"No, no, a thousand times no!" she murmured; "he has persecuted me ever since—oh, Stephen, Stephen!" she whispered, "my poor darling, why did you not take the money I sent you?"

Lewis Prout was hailing a cab. "Miss Cowper," he said, "you are shaken even if not hurt. Allow me to see you home."

The sandwichman was tottering curiously and he had grown very pale. But he drew himself up and answered fiercely. "Stand back," he exclaimed; "this lady is my promised wife and she confides herself to me!"

The actor stared, amazed at the cultivated speech and masterful tone. "You——" he began, then recoiled suddenly. "Great heavens!" he cried; "Stephen Walsh!—a gutter-bird and in this get-up."

SPLENDID CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT TUESDAY. 2d.

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"Yes," added Audrey, maintaining her hold upon the shabby shoulder; "and in it he has just saved my life."

There was a low moan from the sandwichman, and, without warning, he collapsed. Audrey flung herself on her knees beside him—he was in a dead faint, and a pool of blood was forming round his right foot. One of the iron hoofs from which he had snatched her had caught him, cutting the flesh of his ankle to the bone and severing an artery. Audrey wrung her hands.

"Is it a case for the hospital, ma'am," asked the policeman, coming up, "or only a faint?"

Before she could answer, someone stepped out of the fast-forming crowd, knelt down, and, with a dirty handkerchief, began to make a tourniquet for the injured man's limb, stopping the flow of crimson fluid. It was Horrocks, the ex-property master.

"Excuse my chipping in, constable," he said, "but this poor fellow is bleeding to death. Well, I'm blowed—Miss Cowper!—Then it was you as was nigh under the 'bus!"

Audrey gasped, staring incredulously from her unconscious lover to the ex-property master of the Crescent theatre.

Now that both were moustached, unkempt, and stamped with the dread hall-mark of poverty, the faces of Stephen Walsh and John Horrocks were almost counterparts.

A Question of Identity.

"Please, Mr. Walsh, do sit down for a few moments. Your foot cannot be really healed yet and Audrey will be so vexed when I tell her how disobedient you have been."

Stephen Walsh laughed and continued his restless striding up and down the small, cosy apartment. He was a very different figure from that which he had presented a week or so earlier, when he had plucked Audrey Cowper from under a London omnibus. Clean-shaven once more, well-groomed, and correctly-dressed, he looked his old professional self, the self that had gazed back at Audrey out of the photograph in her room at the theatre.

"It is a luxury to be able to walk about again, Mrs. Cowper," he answered, "and besides, it helps me to be patient."

His critic—a little, white-haired lady in a brown satin gown, sighed and went on plying her big bone knitting-needles. "Audrey said twelve o'clock," she responded, "and it is nearly that now, so you haven't long to wait. She will be back from the theatre herself soon—there was a new song to try over or something and she had to go."

Stephen Walsh stopped in his irritable progress and leant over the couch where the other sat.

"Mrs. Cowper," he said, "what if the test doesn't turn out right? It's a chance, you know, and if the result is adverse it may spoil everything. I have allowed Audrey to stake recklessly upon a fortunate issue. She has lent—that is to say, given—me money, helped to nurse me, treated me as if our engagement were still a binding reality. And all the time I am a convicted criminal, supposed to be in a public hospital. It is but hoping against hope to dream that I may be able to prove my innocence. Proof, that is what we want, confessions are useless, coincidences useless—proof, proof!"

The old lady placed her withered fingers on his arm. "Courage, Mr. Walsh," she told him, "and as for Audrey, you mustn't be too proud, you know—Audrey owes you her escape from terrible injury, possibly death. Then she knows you to be innocent, and it would break her heart to turn her back on you because you were in trouble. S-s-sh! that is her step, remember, she has forbidden us to talk of the subject."

"Still on your feet, oh, you bad, bad man!" said a gay voice, and Audrey, her cheeks glowing from the keen air of the crisp autumn day, hastened into the room. She put her hands on her lover's shoulders, pushed him into a chair, and kissed him gaily.

"Mummy doesn't mind, do you, mummy?" she laughed; "and now, dear, keep a stiff upper lip, and hope for the best. I've got Horrocks with me—regularly transmogrified—and the other gentlemen, I believe, are in the parlour."

"Yes," said her mother anxiously, "they arrived ten minutes ago, I suppose the detectives thought they would be in plenty of time."

Audrey threw off her furs and went to the brass bell-pull beside the fire-grate. She paused and returned to her lover.

"How handsome you look without your moustache," she observed, "you'll be back on the boards before long, winning a reputation for yourself." She stooped and gazed into his eyes. "Stephen," she whispered, "you know, whatever happens, it won't make any difference—to me!"

Stephen covered his face—he could not speak. Audrey started away with a great air of cheerfulness and rang the bell.

"Ask the gentleman who is waiting in the hall to step up," she told the maid who answered it. The girl disappeared and they heard her descend the stairs. A moment afterwards a tall, well-dressed man entered the room, carrying a smart Homburg hat in his fingers. It was Horrocks, the property-master, almost unrecognisable in his present attire. He was clean-shaven and his skin had been sponged over with something to give it the brown smooth look so characteristic of the actor.

He came forward awkwardly and an exclamation burst from Stephen's lips. He had glanced towards a mirror—the two faces reflected there were more marvellously alike than ever. In shabby clothes, with limp, dark moustache, Stephen Walsh had been like John Horrocks, now John Horrocks was like Stephen Walsh.

The ex-property master fumbled with his hat. "You see it all now, sir," he said; "it was a dirty trick and worthy of him as put me up to it and sent me to pawn his blessed cigarette-case at a pawnbroker's near your diggings. But I bore you no malice, sir, though I did let him bribe me, and I'm doing what I can to set it straight, for Miss Audrey's sake."

Audrey intervened. "There's no time for apologies," she exclaimed, "you made those once for all, Horrocks, when you came to us and confessed. Let us have in the detectives and that little Jew of a pawnbroker."

She brought a soft hat of the Homburg shape from a side table, gave it to Stephen, and touched the bell again. "We'll have up the people from the parlour," she said to the maid. The latter descended once more and the three in the sitting-room waited. Audrey's hand stole to her lover's and pressed it encouragingly. Then the door opened and a stout man entered, with quick, black eyes and greasy curls on his temples. Behind him were two others in heavy, plain garments and big boots. They saluted Audrey respectfully.

"Now then, Isaacs," said one of them, "here are the two gentlemen who are not unlike each other. Which is the person that pawned the case with you?"

The Jew studied thoughtfully the two well-dressed figures. Finally he shook his head.

"Let them speak," he remarked, turning to the detective who had questioned him; "let them ask me what I will give on it." The police-officer glanced at Stephen, who parted his dry lips with difficulty.

"What—what can you allow me on—on this cigarette-case?" he faltered. The Jew knitted his brows and looked at the other of the two persons confronting him. The ex-property master put out his hand, as if laying some small article on the counter.

"How much on that?" he demanded. The Jew struck his fat palms together.

"That is him!" he ejaculated, "the very man it is. I will swear to him in a million. And the other is the gentleman I swore to at the police-court. I made a mistake, I see it—that is the one, the one with the rough voice and the yellow teeth."

Stephen Walsh sat down suddenly on the couch from which he had so recently risen. Audrey sprang to him. The chief detective motioned to the pawnbroker.

"That will do," he said; "we've other fish to fry and you can be off, Isaacs, for the present."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders and went towards the door. As he did so a peal from the house-bell below reached their ears and Audrey started from her lover's side, Stephen Walsh was already recovering from his momentary faintness.

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"There is your man," she said sternly, "get behind the door, inspector, I told the maid when I came in that I expected him. She will show him right up. The fool!—he thinks he is to lunch with me. I wrote him that at last I saw Mr. Walsh in his true colours."

The detectives obeyed, drawing the Jew with them and pulling the ample portière to hide themselves.

"Mr. Lewis Prout," said the maid, appearing suddenly in the room, and stepping aside for the actor to pass. Audrey moved forward and Prout came to take her hand.

"I—I was more than delighted, Miss Cowper," he observed, "to receive the extremely kind little note you left at the theatre."

He stopped—a forefinger tapped him on the back. "Lewis Prout," he was informed, "I arrest you on a charge of committing wilful and corrupt perjury, at Lichbourne petty sessions in July last, during the hearing of a charge of theft against Mr. Stephen Walsh."

The actor faced about—his visage had blanched from brow to chin. His glance fell on the almost identical figures of John Horrocks and Stephen Walsh. Then he darted towards the former.

"Hang you!" he cried, "you blackguard, you've betrayed me."

"Yes, you mean cur," said the ex-property master, "and righted an innocent man."

Lewis Prout raised a clenched fist to strike him. But there was a sharp click and a pair of steel bracelets pinioned the actor's wrists.

* * * * *

The penalty for perjury is no light one, and only a day or two ago, at the assizes in an old county town, Lewis Prout was sent to prison for as many years as he had caused Stephen Walsh to spend months in gaol. Stephen was not vindictive but a prosecution for perjury was the one effective fashion of ridding his reputation from the stain Prout had placed upon it.

John Horrocks', confession and co-operation with the authorities of Scotland Yard secured him from proceedings of any sort and Audrey is to see that the ex-property master and his family have a new start in a British colony, where Horrocks may yet overcome his tendency to look upon the wine when it is red.

Puzzling as was the perjury case in question to the general reader of the newspapers, a section of the public knew all about the affair before it reached the publicity of a definite hearing. This may explain why Stephen Walsh, on returning to "the boards" in the new Crescent Theatre piece, in a very modest capacity, has had a most enthusiastic reception. Inspired thereby no doubt, and by the presence of Audrey—whom he had privately made his wife at a Strand registry office—Stephen achieved a genuine little success, and is, at present nightly adding to his laurels. There is even some talk of the librettist and composer doing for them a special "sandwich-board duet," which may yet take the town by storm.

It must however be confessed that Audrey is not Audrey Cowper at all, but Miss——, and Stephen is not Stephen Walsh but Mr.——. Nor do they play at the Crescent, but at the —— Theatre. And what they will think when they see all this in print had better not be asked.

R. Norman Silver.

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NEXT ❧ TUESDAY ❧ 2d.

Your Editor Chats.

By the time you turn to this page, you will doubtless have read the first instalment of our new serial story, "The Albert Gate Mystery." Well, how do you like it? Having read the whole of the story myself, I personally think that it is the strongest and best story which Mr. Louis Tracy has ever given to the reading public. But as in the case of our last serial, I am extremely desirous of knowing your own individual opinions in the matter and if you care to drop me a line I should very much like to hear how the opening instalments of the story impress you.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

Now, just a word as to our Christmas Number. As I told you last week, this is to be a Double Number, price twopence, and will be published next Tuesday. Experience has taught me that there is bound to be a large extra demand for this issue; I would therefore ask you in your own interests, as well as in mine, to *order* your copy from your local newsagent early. Then he will be prepared to supply you with your copy and we, in turn, shall be prepared to supply him.

LOVE PROBLEMS SOLVED.

In our Christmas Number I start a new series of which I told you some time ago. This is the Love Problem series. Instead of dealing with such problems by means of argumentative articles on such a subject as, let us say, "Should a husband keep a secret from his wife?" I have had several pretty little stories written which answer such questions in an interesting and far more convincing manner than any amount of argumentative chatter. Next Tuesday's problem will be: "Ought a Man to Give up all his Bachelor Pursuits upon Marriage?"

* * * * *

Those of my readers who sent letters of congratulation to Miss Madge Morris upon the occasion of her marriage, and are anxious to know whether their names are among the lucky hundred and one prize-winners, will be glad to know that their suspense will be allayed next Tuesday, when the list of successful competitors will be published.

Your Editor.

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Those Boots.

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The Tragic Love Story of Mr. Augustus Sniper.

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Mr. Augustus Sniper stood in his second-floor back bed-room surveying himself in a small looking-glass. He was arrayed for conquest and contemplated himself with a smile of complacency.

His necktie was most correct, his coat was a marvel of tailoring though somewhat aggressively new, as was also the rest of his attire down to his crimson socks, but here the newness suddenly ceased, for on his feet were a pair of the most disreputable old boots which have ever been worn since boots were invented.

That they had once been patent leather was apparent, but of their former elegance, their white stitching, and pristine brilliancy there was now no sign. They had been patched, sewn, blacked, inked, scratched, battered, trodden down at the heels, and kicked out at the toes to such a degree that a costermonger would have refused to convert them into a "flower for the dinner-table," even accompanied by a shilling, when they had reached half the state of dilapidation in which Mr. Sniper wore them.

And why did he wear them? Among his friends, his boots were a constant source of "envy, hatred, and malice;" his toes were the most pointed, his fit the most perfect, his leather the most shiny, and his fashion the newest. His lady friends talked of them and one of them had even been known to refuse a man because "his boots were not to be mentioned in the same breath with Mr. Sniper's, and she had once seen him wear one that was patched."

But then no one ever saw him in the boots he wore in the privacy of his bedroom. Such toes as he showed to an admiring world were not compatible with the broad foot he unquestionably possessed, and the agony they made him suffer was only to be allayed by wearing those comfortable old friends in his moments of retirement from the stage of suburban society where he played no unimportant part in his own estimation.

Having surveyed himself carefully, beginning at the top and only lamenting that the new fashion in ties precluded him from wearing a breast-pin, his glance at last rested on his crimson silk socks, and, the boots. As he eyed the latter he gave a chuckle and looked with pride towards a pair of irreproachable "patents" which stood on his chest of drawers in a state of immaculate brightness and glass-like hardness.

"It wouldn't do to forget to change them," he said with a grin; "by Jove, what would the dear Katie say? Why, my chance would be clean gone directly. It's only the other day I heard her say to Jack McDonald that she thought a man who did not wear patent leathers was not fit to be spoken to, and a patch was perfectly inadmissible in a lady's drawing-room. And if she was to see these! Oh, it makes me all of a flutter to think of it. Now I must be cool. What shall I do to calm myself? I know; I'll read that book she lent me, it will do to open the conversation with." So he sat down in his easiest chair and began to read.

The book, however, was very exciting, and he never noticed the time till the clock struck four, the hour he should have been at his adored one's house. So, with an exclamation which one couldn't exactly say to a Sunday school class without having difficulties with the superintendent, he hastily glanced at himself in the glass, picked up his carefully-brushed hat and hurriedly left the house. Fortunately his destination, the house of Dr. Gunn, was not far off, and in six minutes he was standing on the doorstep waiting for the door to be opened that he might be ushered into the presence of his Katie, to whom he meant that very afternoon to offer his hand, his heart, and—his boots.

He heard the welcome footsteps of the housemaid, and his heart was beating high with expectation when—looking downwards—he saw he had forgotten to change his boots.

There was no time to retreat, already the door was open, and, before he could collect his thoughts, he found himself in the drawing-room in the presence of his divinity and several other visitors of both sexes.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come, Mr. Sniper," said Katie, a pretty girl with sparkling dark eyes and a neat figure, as she hurried to meet him at the door. Then she lowered her voice to say: "Such a nuisance those people coming."

"Er—er—not at all—er—I assure you—I——" he stammered convulsively, too much unnerved by the discovery of the state of his feet to have the slightest idea of what she was saying, beyond a vague idea that she was apologising for something.

Katie gave him one look of contemptuous anger and turned away without another word. When a pretty girl tells a man she is glad to see him and in the same breath laments that anyone else should be present, and he answers as Augustus Sniper did, is it anything to be surprised at that she feels mortally offended?

So Augustus was left stranded by the door where he had entered, too much overcome by the paralysing fear that someone would look at him and discover those boots to heed Katie's anger or to be aware in what way he had offended her.

However, he dared not remain in the open space and, seeing an ottoman, he determined to reach it or perish in the attempt. Happily it was near Mrs. Gunn, which afforded him an excuse to go to it. Where he stood, he felt as though he was on the edge of a fearful precipice, any moment someone might look round, there was nothing for it but a rush. He rushed. Happily he was able to pull himself up in time and avoid tumbling over Mrs. Gunn.

"How do you do, my dear Mrs. Gunn?" he gasped, shaking hands with her violently, hoping thereby to draw her attention from the eccentric manner in which he had crossed the room.

"How do you do?" she answered coldly, adding to herself: "If it were not so early in the day, I should say that man had been drinking. I hope he has no vicious habits. He comes here very often. I must drop a hint to Katie."

Here the conversation languished. Augustus remained wrapt in his own thoughts, which were far from pleasant. At last he decided he would outstay every one, propose to Katie, and then, if accepted, he would be asked to dinner and would make his escape under cover of the night, and if refused, well, it would not much matter then whether she saw the boots or not. He was suddenly aroused from these reflections by hearing Mrs. Gunn say: "Won't you sit down, Mr. Sniper?"

And awakening to the fact that he had been standing all the time in silence, he seated himself on the ottoman. But he had put himself in the worst place in the room, *viz.*, next to the tea-table. Presently Mrs. Gunn again spoke. "Ah, here is the tea. May I trouble you, Mr. Sniper, to take this cup of tea to Miss Neville. She is at the other side of the room near the window."

There was nothing for it but to go, so with a cup in one hand and a plate of cake in the other, he started on his perilous journey. Behind the sofa, round a fat old lady, between a

lady and gentleman in the midst of a flirtation, occasionally darting in a zig-zag course from the edge of a curtain to a foot-stool and back again to the vast outlaying flanges of some old dowager, gingerly skirting the groups of laughing, chattering girls, he made his erratic way, taking advantage of every cover with the care of a Boer, and at last reached the farther end of the room where sat Miss Neville in the bow window.

"At last," he said to himself as he handed her the cake, "I've done it, but I wouldn't go through that again for £1,000." And he sat down beside Maggie Neville, determined nothing should move him from his haven.

"What a cosy place you've got over here, I thought so directly I came in, so I got Mrs. Gunn to let me bring you your tea and come over here for a talk."

"Did you? I watched you crossing the room, but I could not tell where you were going."

He turned hot at the bare idea of his being watched. Had she seen the boots?

"Did you—er—did you notice anything—er peculiar—about—me?" he stammered.

"No," she said wonderingly, "except perhaps, your manner of walking. You didn't look as if you were trying to get here."

"Oh, that's nothing—I often—er—do that. It's a way I've got."

"Indeed."

This was not encouraging, anything to turn the subject, he rushed on: "But I assure you, Miss Neville, now I am here, I could wish for no greater happiness than to remain here for ever. At least, that is to say, until you go away."

This was perfectly true.

"I'll leave a little margin for your politeness, Mr. Sniper, and won't consider you bound by that," she said with a laugh, and then added slyly, "what would the others—what would Katie say if you sat here all the afternoon?"

"I don't care what they say. My present position is the only one to give me happiness. I would not exchange it for a throne," he said with fervour.

He was getting desperate. Anything to keep her attention from his boots, and all these speeches which she took to mean a sudden desire to get up a flirtation, were no empty compliments, but terribly true expressions of his painful position.

Meanwhile Katie was watching him with great wrath. What did he mean by this behaviour? She was not going to stand such treatment. He had not once looked at her, and now to see him flirting with that minx Maggie Neville was more than flesh and blood could put up with.

"Here is your tea," said young McDonald at this moment, "can I fetch you anything to eat, Miss Gunn?"

"Yes, please; I should like some cake," she answered, fixing Augustus, who still held the plate of cake, with her eye.

"Where the dickens can it be gone to?" he muttered some minutes later, after hunting high and low. "Well, I'm blessed if there isn't Sniper hugging it on his knee, I'll go and interrupt him."

And he went in Sniper's direction. Poor Augustus saw him coming and moved a little closer to Miss Neville, hiding his feet under the edge of her gown, little thinking all this was perceived by Katie. "The wretch," she said to herself, and when Jack McDonald returned she flirted desperately with him, keeping one eye on Augustus, however. "Well, Mr. Sniper," said Miss Neville in answer to one of his pretty speeches; "since you say your pleasure is in serving me, will you be so kind as to fetch me another cup of tea."

Poor Augustus!

"Of course, my greatest pleasure is to serve you, Miss Neville, but—er—when that service—er—necessitates my leaving you—er—being deprived of your society, I cannot fly to accomplish your wish as I would otherwise do——" He had the cup in hand, and was balancing it idiotically and he stammeringly sought an excuse for remaining where he was.

Just at this critical moment a friend passed at about the distance of a yard and a half, here was his chance

"Thomson," he said, reaching over to touch him and nearly overbalancing as he did so, "Miss Neville says will you get her a cup of tea, please."

Thomson, who had long worshipped Maggie Neville, flew off with alacrity on this errand.

"Really, Mr. Sniper, this is going too far," said Miss Neville in an offended tone; "if you did not wish to get my tea I would not have you do it for worlds, but I think you need not put speeches into my mouth."

"My dear Miss Neville—not wish to get your tea? I assure you—I——" And then a happy idea struck him. "The thing was, I knew that fellow wanted to come and join us—and I—er—I—didn't want him. See."

Just then Thomson returned, carefully steering his way across the room with the desired cup of tea.

"Thank you, Mr. Thomson," she said with a gracious smile; "it is lucky you've come as Mr. Sniper has declared he can no longer keep away from Miss Gunn and I shall be left all alone."

Poor Augustus!

Thomson beamed, and there was nothing for it but for him to rise and give up his seat and make his way to Katie.

"Oh that I had skirts," he groaned, "why wasn't I born a woman?"

By this time many of the guests had departed and to cross the room was a matter of still greater difficulty than before. However, by making darts, when no one was looking, from cover to cover, he at length managed to place himself behind his beloved Katie's chair. She, however, took no notice of him but continued chatting gaily with Jack McDonald. So there he stood (sitting was out of the question) in silence, till the last guest had departed and when Katie returned from bidding them good-bye at the door, he advanced and said: "I am so glad all those bores are gone."

"You have the advantage of me there," she said haughtily.

He ignored this remark and continued:

"I've been waiting to speak to you all the afternoon, Miss Gunn, Katie, you know what I've come for—I want to tell you——"

"Please tell me nothing, Mr. Sniper, after your disgraceful behaviour this afternoon nothing you can say will have any interest for me."

"But, Katie, listen to me—you know I love you, have always loved you from the first time I saw you and I thought you did not dislike me."

"Sir, you force me to speak more plainly. In short, your language to me in the state you are in, after your outrageous flirtation, is nothing short of an insult. A gentleman does not come to ask a lady to be his wife and begin by flirting with someone else, nor does he expect to be received in respectable houses when he cannot even walk straight, nor does he," as her glance travelled downwards, "come to pay a visit in such boots."

Augustus fled. Poor Augustus! **L. Hughes.**

GUEST: "How is this? My bill this time is twelve shillings a day, and last December I had the same room and it was only ten shillings a day." Clerk: "Yes, I know; but the days are much longer now."

"I DON'T think Mr. Bunker is much of a conversationalist," observed Miss Elder. "Well, he came to me last night," replied Miss Young, as she carelessly twirled a new ring on the third finger of her left hand, "and I found his conversation quite engaging."

YOUNG Farmer Medders (at supper): "What in Heaven's name is the matter with the cake, Gloriosa?" Bride (a London girl): "Why, darling, there can surely be nothing the matter with it! I followed the recipe exactly. Maybe it was the fault of the eggs. I thought eggs were soft and yellow inside, but these were white and brittle all the way through, and I had to powder them with the flat-iron, and——" "Where did you find them?" "In the hen-house, darling. There was only one egg in each nest, and——" "Gloriosa, you have used my china nest-eggs!"

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ASTOUNDING SOCIETY REVELATIONS. BEGIN TO-DAY.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who visits Cairo.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. They manage to arouse the wrath of the fanatics, but are delivered by the dragoman, who turns out to be David Carr. Belinda signifies her gratitude by publicly hugging him.

The dragoman is dismissed, and back at the hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes Lady Peggy to task for the occurrence. Lady Peggy retorts that not long ago she saw the Duchess' own daughter Honoria in the arms of a real Egyptian. The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and after storming at her, is slapping her face when Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room. Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, we discover that Belinda has just prevented Honoria from poisoning herself.

The next evening, Lady Peggy discovers the Duke of Eastacres and a new comer, Stanley Forbes, about to fight a duel. Realising the possible disastrous consequences to her matrimonial plans for Belinda, Lady Peggy rushes forward and places herself between the two men.

Sending Eastacres off on some errand, she takes Forbes aside, and after telling him she knows that the quarrel is connected with a girl named Sheila Kenwyn, whose whereabouts Forbes wants to find out, promises to extract the address from Eastacres if Forbes will forego a scandal. Forbes consents.

Lady Peggy then finds Eastacres and refuses to allow his suit with Belinda till he gives her the address. Eastacres gives it.

Later on Lady Peggy is rewarded by discovering Belinda in the Duke's arms.

She is congratulating them both when Belinda breaks out in a torrent of rage with the Duke, whom she states she hates. Lady Peggy then tells her that her action in allowing the Duke to caress her in public will be taken by Society as tantamount to an engagement, otherwise she will be put down by Society for a forward and impossible girl. Belinda is then persuaded to agree to an engagement for a month, after which it is to be broken off. David Carr is told of the engagement but not of the length of its duration.

Everything is now being got ready for the Khedive's Ball. Belinda is to be presented, and Lady Peggy tells her that she must wear her necklace of pearls. Belinda replies that they are lost, and adds that Lady Peggy would be sorry to know who had taken them.

Full of this fresh trouble Lady Peggy goes to the Duchess' room, and is entering when she sees the Duchess, who is unconscious of Lady Peggy's presence, and Honoria in the middle of the room, and in the Duchess' hand Belinda's pearls.

The Khedive's Ball and Belinda's Triumph.

So overwhelming was my surprise that I was within a hair's breadth of betraying myself. So tense was the situation, so breathless my expectation as to what strange scene I might be about to witness, that I could barely command myself to silence.

How did the Duchess come to possess Belinda's pearls? I feared the explanation while on the tip-toe of desire to learn it.

The Duchess broke the silence.

"What do you want?" she asked her daughter sharply.

Honoria crept a little nearer, her mouth twitching, her whole frame expressive of terrified suspicion.

"Mother!" she laid a shaking hand upon the other's arm, "those are Belinda's pearls."

"Well?"

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"How did you—when did you—oh!"—the thin hand dropped from her mother's arm and clasped its fellow convulsively. "Belinda lost them," she gasped, "she said so, and when she told me she looked at me so strangely I felt uncomfortable. I—mother, give them to me, I'll take them back. Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do?"

The Duchess gazed at her in cool contempt.

"Stop behaving like an infant if you can," she replied. Then, with a sudden rush of indignation—"A pretty state of things when my daughter tells me to my face that she's been suspected of taking a person's property and doesn't even change colour! Had you any spirit you would have shown the girl her proper place. Look at you strangely, indeed, the daughter of the Duke of Eastacres! What next?"

Honoria showed no resentment at this unexpected turning of the tables. She only gazed the more intently at the pearls.

"Belinda—" she commenced again with timid insistence, "Belinda——"

"Belinda gave the pearls to me to take care of," her Grace snapped. "Pray, is there anything very remarkable in that?"

"Why did she tell me she'd lost them?" urged Honoria, with more courage than I had thought her capable of showing.

"For the same reason that other people tell you absurd things—because you've no sense. Don't argue with me; you've no sense, and that's the beginning and end of it all. Go back to bed at once, it's all you're fit for. To think," the Duchess glared fiercely at the girl, "to think I should have an idiot for a daughter."

Under this shower of words Honoria's strength succumbed. She was so accustomed to blame and to reproach that it had become second nature to her to bear them meekly. She retreated ignominiously to her bed-chamber, and the Duchess safely locked her in.

Having routed her opponent. Her Grace placed the pearls upon the table and gazed at them with an air of pride, not to say appropriation, that filled me with alarm. Supposing she refused to give them up, whatever could be done?

After a few minutes of ecstasy, however, the enjoyment appeared to pall. She walked away from the table towards the bed. Stooping with some amount of pain and difficulty, she drew from under the bedstead a small black trunk, evidently of considerable weight. Having placed the box in a position favourable to the examination of the contents, the Duchess drew up an armchair, seated herself, and produced from her capacious pocket a small bunch of keys. Selecting one, she fitted it into the lock, turned the bolt, raised the lid, threw it back upon its hinges, and slowly drew forth, one by one, the articles the box contained.

The next five minutes were amongst the strangest, most thrilling of my life!

From the box in front of her the Duchess drew forth one by one things of the most varied description, ranging from a gold bracelet to a shoe-horn, and including a pair of steel scissors and a diamond buckle! All sorts of unconsidered trifles were added to the rapidly increasing pile beside her, an ivory-backed hair brush, an oxydised waist-belt, a pair of *pince-nez*, a cigarette case, a pocket-knife, nut-crackers, a silver serviette ring, a writing-case—my mind could not keep pace with the pile. I gave up cataloguing in despair, and resigned myself to a feeling of intense bewilderment.

This condition of mind, however, was soon dissipated. Her Grace, nearly at the bottom of the box, selected a small tissue paper parcel for examination, and proceeded to unwrap the covering. I watched intently, and as the thin folds of the paper gradually revealed the thing inclosed, I was hard put to it not to call out.

In the Duchess' lap lay a fan, an exquisite, hand-painted trifle in white satin and ivory, *my* fan, the gift of Lord Lesborough when he was at the Embassy in Paris.

In a minute the mystery of the box and its contents was plain to me as daylight.

The Duchess, the Duchess of Eastacres was a kleptomaniac!

I remembered with a sudden flash of understanding, certain peculiarities of her Grace's. Now were made plain to me the uses of the capacious reticule she always carried. Attached by a stout chain to what was once her waist, the Duchess and her bag had furnished amusement to our set these many years.

To think how many of our pet belongings that respectable reticule had swallowed!

Really it was too much. She simply should *not* have my fan. So great was my indignation that to insure my self-control I was obliged to retire from the room. I couldn't look at her in silence any longer.

The cool air of the corridor brought me composure. It was necessary to act quickly, sharply, but with the greatest possible tact. The pearls—if possible, my fan—must be obtained from her Grace that night. The operation, however, would be a delicate one, and would require the nicest handling.

On one point, however, I was much relieved. From what Honoria had said it was evident that Belinda had suspected her of taking the pearls. Loyalty to her friend had prevented the girl telling me of their loss. This same loyalty would prevent her mentioning their return. It was a great mercy it was Honoria whom she suspected, not—anybody else.

I quickly settled my plan of campaign, and with a calm front walked smartly down the corridor, paused outside the Duchess's door, and tapped with emphasis upon the panels.

Immediately all was silence therein. The rustling of paper ceased as if by magic, there was no stir nor sound. A second later and the faint ray of light that streamed under the door disappeared—the Duchess had switched off the electric light.

I softly retraced my steps and waited some short distance off, in order to give the Duchess time to readjust the—well, the black trunk beneath her bed. After a suitable interval I again presented myself, and knocked as before.

No answer, still silent, still dark. At this I lost my patience, and rapped loud and long upon the door.

"It's I, Duchess, Lady Carstairs," I explained reassuringly.

"Whatever is the matter? I'm asleep, I can't see anyone to-night."

For answer I recommenced my rapping, and continued it until, in self-defence, her Grace appeared upon the threshold.

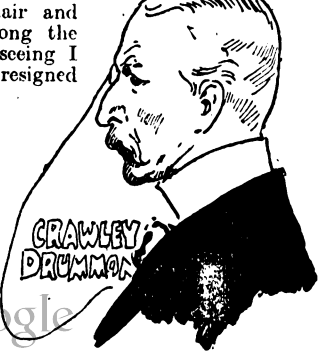
"*So* sorry, Duchess," I said sweetly, adroitly slipping past her substantial form. "I wouldn't have disturbed you for worlds if I'd known. I never thought you went to bed as early as this?"

"*Early*," said her Grace, with an unpleasant smile, "it's long past midnight."

"My *dear* Duchess," I glanced at the clock, "why, so it is! Dear me, my watch has stopped! I must apologise profusely. I came to see you about such a trifle, too; it could easily have waited till the morning. Pray forgive me, it's an atrocious thing to have done; I thought it was not yet eleven."

"As you are here," said her Grace, somewhat grimly, "what do you want?"

"May I stay a little while?" I said evasively. "That is very nice of you. Really, this fire is very pleasant, it's quite cold to-night." I drew up a chair and settled myself snugly among the cushions. The Duchess, seeing I was not to be put off, resigned herself to the inevitable, and took a seat opposite mine.



"I've just been trying on Belinda's dress," I remarked. "I had it specially made for the Khedive's ball. Worth designed it himself. She looks perfect—really, she's very lovely, Duchess!"

The Duchess nodded. I thought I discerned a faint

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pucker in her forehead at the mention of Belinda that bespoke a touch of anxiety. I hailed it with delight, I was going to give her Grace one of the worst quarters of an hour she'd yet experienced.

"She'll wear jasmine in her hair," I continued, "and, as for jewels, I don't think she can do better than decide upon her pearls." I gazed at the grim, set face before me, but the Duchess was too old, too brave a warrior to show that she was touched. She courteously inclined her head and glanced half apologetically at the clock, as who should say—"What does the woman mean by maundering about a girl's first ball at such an hour?"

"That reminds me," I sat bolt upright, meeting the steel grey eyes that so unflinchingly regarded me with so stern a gaze. "I came here to speak to you about the pearls. I understand *Belinda gave them to you to take care of!*"

The Duchess gasped, changed colour, cast a threatening look towards Honoria's door, and then, with courage and calmness rarely equalled, rose to the occasion.

"Oh, yes," she said, "she brought them here to me a day or two ago. She's rather young, I think, to have the charge of such valuable things, don't you?" As she spoke her Grace advanced to the dressing-table, opened a drawer, took out a leather case and handed it to me.

I opened it; with joy I saw that it contained Belinda's pearls!

My success inspired me to make a further effort. I determined to try and secure my fan. In my eagerness I forgot one all important point. The pearls had lain at hand, their reappearance entailed no dragging forth of grisly skeletons in the shape of black trunks filled with other people's property.

Not so the fan, it lay in the deepest depths of that black box. I was destined never to hold it more.

"Do you remember, Duchess," I continued, when we had finished admiring the necklace, "do you remember that lovely fan Lord Lesborough gave me? I mislaid it, you know, and it has just occurred to me that I may have left it in your room the night we returned from that dance at the Gheyhezah Palace, just about six weeks ago. Have you come across it?"

"I remember the fan perfectly," said her Grace. "You did not leave it in my room. You—" she gave a grim, hard smile, "you gave it me downstairs in the vestibule; at least, I *understood* you gave it me. I had forgotten my own fan, and you requested me to use and keep yours in its place."

For the moment I was too astounded to do more than gaze in wonder and astonishment. Positively she was marvellous! With a nervous little laugh I hastily disclaimed all desire for the return of my gift, and, bringing the interview to a somewhat hurried close, parted with her Grace the best of friends.

All the same I smarted with the sense of my defeat. I had Belinda's pearls, but the Duchess kept my fan.

Next morning I took the opportunity of Belinda's absence to replace the necklace in her jewel-case. She made no comment then or after as to its return, and what, if any, explanation Honoria gave, I do not know.

For the remainder of our stay at Cairo the Duchess kept her kleptomania severely in check, so far as my property was concerned, which was, all things considered, as well for both of us. The incident had passed off wonderfully, but had the Duchess been treated with indiscretion or a lack of tact, I shudder to think what might have been the consequences.

Her Grace, if anything, was more impolite to Honoria after the occurrence than before. Indeed, that unfortunate young woman had fallen upon rough days, and, but for Belinda's sustaining influence, would, I think, have quite lost the small remnant of intellect she still retained.

Mark Striven, when not engaged in gambling, horse racing, or billiards found considerable amusement in tormenting his *fiancée*. He would subject her to a searching cross-examination, and so bewilder the poor wretch that she returned astonishing and impossible answers to the simplest questions. I had heard or seen nothing of the Egyptian person—El Hamed—as Honoria called him, and was beginning to think he had vanished from the scene. I was, however, deceived in this particular, as I shall tell you.

Late one night, or to be quite correct, very early in the morning—I was returning to my room from Midge's apartments. About six or seven women of our set used to congregate there once or sometimes twice a week to talk scandal, make bets, play cards, eat and drink. There were no men admitted—the most stupid of men are apt to be critical, and at times a woman doesn't want to be criticised.

Play always runs high among women; for some of us, indeed, gambling with cards is not sufficiently exciting. Betting is a more feverish and fascinating form of speculation. What bets have I not seen lost and won! Nothing is too trifling to form the subject of a wager. I was present on the night the young Duchess of M——, just newly married, lost twenty thousand pounds to the Marchioness of A—— all over a raindrop! It was a wet day, and a few splashes of rain had fallen on the window from the coping up above. Two drops in particular attracted attention as they slowly glided down the pane.

"Twenty thousand that this drop reaches the bottom first," cried the Marchioness.

"Done," answered her friend.

The two watched the insignificant globules slowly meander the length of the window amid immense excitement. As I say, the Duchess lost, and paid, the wager.

Bets didn't run quite so high in Cairo; there would have been a difficulty in cashing up so far from home. But they ran into a big sum all the same, and, failing ready money, jewels, furs, laces, and even clothes, were available.

On the evening in question Midge was very unlucky. She had staked her set of sables on the certainty that the buttons on Mrs. Courtney's black silk dress were odd in number. Little Lady Saxby booked the bet against her diamond bracelet. A visit to Mrs. Courtney's apartment—she was a most respectable old lady, wife of a clergyman—revealed the fact that there were twenty-four buttons and two hooks and eyes. The good woman was horribly frightened at our incursion into her bedroom; she thought we were burglars, and begged us to take all she had and spare her life!

After that Midge grew reckless. She dropped a thousand over the length of time a match would keep alight, and literally threw away a Brussels lace scarf on the assertion that my eyes were blue! I had a special liking for that scarf, and when Lady Saxby declared that she was ready to wager the lace and fifty pounds against my chatelaine that Honoria would not marry Mark Striven, I closed with the offer.

"It's more than probable that the marriage will take place before they leave Cairo," I said. "The Duke mentioned it to me the other day."

"They're leaving in a week?"

"Quite so. A week is time enough to get married."

Lady Saxby laughed. "You'll have to hand over your chatelaine, Lady Peggy," she said. "Within a week Honoria will take the law into her own hands. She's going to elope! Oh, no," as I started to my feet. "I'm not going to let you into the secret—I've a particular fancy for that chatelaine. I overheard her ladyship and your dear, innocent Belinda discuss the matter, that's how I know. Honoria was intensely affecting—quite dramatic, in fact. She flung her arms round the girl's neck, and prayed Heaven to bless her. These were her very words. Imagine poor Honoria! 'It seems too good to be true,' she said. 'If only I can get away to El Hamed how happy, how happy I shall be!' And then—" Lady Saxby smiled at the remembrance, "then she fell to kissing and crying over Belinda till I felt quite sorry for her.

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It's bad enough to be kissed by a woman at all. But a *damp* woman—ugh!" And she shuddered at the thought.

I felt alarmed, as you may suppose, at the intelligence. Really, the Eastacres family were very trying; no sooner had one scandal been averted than another threatened. Of course Honoria's elopement must be stopped, otherwise the Duke's chances with Hardy North might suffer. All the same, I did not see for the moment how it was to be done.

At this moment Midge, having lost all her money, and most of her jewels, declared that she must go to bed.

She was not much troubled at her losses; the husband in Chicago would quickly furnish her with supplies. Other women, of course, are not all so fortunate; their husbands not being in Chicago, are inclined to interfere with their wives' personal expenditure. Not that marital authority ever stops women betting with each other. There are many ways of raising money in Society. The easiest and safest, perhaps, is the following:

Have you ever met a smart woman, titled, may be, and turned out to perfection, at a suburban "At Home?" A function given by wealthy and respectable, but entirely plebian persons. Have you not wondered what the *aristocrate* was doing in that place? The explanation is simple in itself. She graced the "At Home," imparted style to the occasion for so much hard cash, the fee ranging in proportion to her rank and to her host's banking account.

There are always plenty of people who will gladly pay a high price for a distinguished guest; for the matter of that, there are several agencies in the West End of London who make it their business to arrange the matter.

I retired to rest, as I say, troubled about Honoria. The fact that in place of my peignoir I found a smoking jacket on my door did not improve my temper. It was an amiable practice of Reg and various other kindred spirits to misplace our things on the evenings that we women met together. It was not an uncommon thing to find a snake, harmless, but none the less alarming, in one's water jug, or for an empty meat tin to fall with an awful clatter on one's head from over the door. Crawley was just as foolish as the youngest and silliest of them all. I recognised the smoking jacket as his property, and spent a good half hour in sewing it up into an impossible shape. My maid took it to him next morning with my compliments!

It wanted three days now to the Khedive's ball. Those three days I gave up to watching Honoria and pumping Belinda. Neither process gave me any information. I was in doubt how best to act. If I questioned Belinda outright as to the proposed elopement, it would, I feared, only precipitate matters. She would tell me nothing and warn Honoria. The same fear held me back from consulting the Duke. He would fall so heavily upon his sister that from sheer fright she would break into open rebellion.

I decided to communicate my suspicions to Mark Striven. He heard me in silence, then, with a horrid sort of laugh, thanked me for my warning.

"Within the next week, Lady Peggy? Is that it? Well, I think I can name the date more exactly than that. The night of the Khedive's ball you will find is the evening my fair cousin has fixed for the elopement. She shall meet this El Hamed right enough—only I shall be there to keep him company. Leave it to me, Lady Peggy, and thank you very much."

Mark Striven was certainly a sensible person. I felt much relieved at his assurance, and turned my thoughts and attention to Belinda and myself. I had had another letter from Hardy North expressing intense satisfaction in regard to his daughter's engagement. He proposed to meet us in Paris, where we were going on leaving Cairo, and hoped to arrange for Belinda's speedy marriage.

I also received a note from Stanley Forbes—as did Belinda. He told me he had found Sheila at the address I gave him, and thanked me for my help. I did not see Belinda's epistle, but from a letter she wrote him which I came across and read, I gathered he had asked for particulars in regard to her feelings towards the Duke, and had hinted that his Grace was not all he seemed.

I promptly burnt Belinda's answer; it would never do for her and Stanley to compare notes upon the Duke. And then I waited in nervous anticipation for the evening of the ball—the evening which would decide Belinda's future.

All my tact and cleverness had been brought to bear upon the situation. The Duke aided me in the best possible manner. Belinda would be congratulated, *fêted*, complimented at the ball, on her engagement; all that flattery and homage could do would be done. A girl must be more than human, I thought, to resist the influences thus brought to bear on her.

The occasion would be her first introduction to an important function. She would realise, for the first time, the prestige accorded to rank, the honour paid to a distinguished member of Society like the Duke.

Something of awe and trepidation stole over the girl as we drove to the Palace. She seemed to shrink from the ordeal through which she had to pass, to draw back from the gamut of criticism she had to run. She looked more than ever like a nymph from a Greek fable, tall, straight, fair, her neck and arms gleaming white, her plentiful brown hair, coiled in classic fashion low on her neck.

The Duke met us in the great hall of the Khedive's Palace. He looked very distinguished, and Belinda for once lost a little of her self-possession as he conducted her up the wide low stairs to where the Khedive received his guests.

The colour came and went in her cheeks; the splendour of the scene, the admiration of the men, the envious looks of the women, affected her as I had hoped they would.

It is a gorgeous affair, the Khedive's ball. The rooms are hung with roses, wreaths of the flowers festoon the walls, twine round the pillars, hang in fragrant masses from the ceiling. Innumerable lights—the Palace is lit by electricity—twinkle among the flowers. The air is heavy with scents full of the romance of the East. Egyptian officers high in the service of the Government throng the place, their gorgeous uniforms in strange contrast to the black coats of British diplomatists. British officers, brave in scarlet and gold, are much in evidence, and there is a good sprinkling of American civilians.

This year the assemblage was more than usually distinguished. Quite a number of our set were at Cairo scattered among the various hotels, and they all put in an appearance.

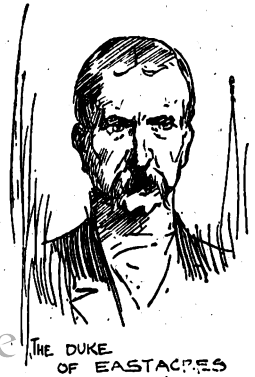
Belinda promenaded the rooms, the Duke in close attendance.

Her progress was a slow one. Every now and then the Duke would stop, and, with a courtly bow, ask permission to present this one or that among his friends to Belinda. And on each presentation followed a little congratulatory murmur, a reference to her engagement, a wish for her happiness.

The colour deepened in her cheeks, her eyes grew restless, she glanced round fearfully, casting anxious looks at me. She had not dreamt of *this;* the congratulations, the compliments, filled her with terror. It was as though a chain were tightening round her, a chain that each moment grew more difficult to break.

It was a fierce ordeal—an impossible ordeal. How could any girl stand out against the forces directed against her? How could she proclaim that she was not in need of congratulations, that she was not going to marry the Duke?

It was an incredible idea. I smiled and thought how cleverly I had arranged it all. Here in the midst of all that was brilliant the figure of David Carr must needs seem plain—existence with him would be a very different matter from life with the Duke!



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

A steady, monotonous future was all that he could offer—that and his love.

The Duchess murmured her satisfaction, forgetting in her pleasure to unduly snub Honoria. Her Ladyship was looking quite presentable, in a pretty gown of pale pink silk. The colour was kind to her skin, which did not look so sallow as usual, and her hair was very nicely done. She was in a great state of nervous tremor, and cast quick glances round the room in search apparently for El Hamed. I was gratified to note that he did not arrive.

Towards the end of the ball, when the success of the evening was at its height, the Khedive made known his desire that Belinda should be presented to him.

An *attaché* made his way down the room and informed me of the royal decree. My heart beat so fast that it was painful. The presentation of Belinda would prove the critical moment. How would Belinda behave? On her action hung the issue of her future and of mine.

£20,000—the price of a peaceful old age—*my* old age trembled in the balance.

That old and distinguished diplomat, Lord Melrose, presented her. The Khedive gazed at her in open approbation. Then with a charming smile—he is a singularly fascinating personage—entered into conversation.

"Did she like Cairo?"

"Very much," she answered quietly.

"You will be leaving shortly?"

"Yes, your Majesty, to my regret."

"Ah! but you are going to be very happy. You are going to marry this gentleman?" He glanced at the Duke. "He is to be envied. I wish you every happiness." The Khedive smiled, the Duke bowed. Belinda, crimson from brow to chin, remained speechless. I thanked Providence for her silence, another minute and it would be too late for her to speak. Too late, it would be impossible. She——

Belinda threw up her head, and advanced towards the Khedive. Then in a clear voice, audible to the whole room, made the following astounding statement. Think of it, a young girl of seventeen having the courage, the will, to openly defy the custom, the conventions of Society!

"It is very kind of you to give me such good wishes," she said simply, not at all as though she addressed a Prince, "but—but—" she paused, "I am not going to marry the Duke," she said. "I am not wise enough, nor clever enough. In fact, I will never marry him, your Majesty."

And without waiting to witness the effects of this moral bombshell, Belinda retired into the crowd, and from thence made her way into the ante-chamber, leaving me to bear the murmurs, the comments, the shocked surprise of the assembly.

I could have screamed in my mortification and my rage. To be set at naught by a chit like that, to have my schemes overturned, my future jeopardised by a girl in her teens!

I took a hatred to the girl. Henceforth I would deal differently with her. She should learn that I was not a woman lightly to be turned aside. Plans for the future I could make in plenty, but for the present I was weighed down with the sense of defeat.

My first attempt at marrying Belinda had failed!

Eager to escape from my friends I hurried towards the room where Belinda had taken refuge. One had to pass through an archway to reach it. Unconcealed by draperies or curtains, the interior of the room was in full view from the other side of the arch.

The Duke had followed Belinda, and they were in deep conversation. I wished much to hear what they were saying. Just a few feet from the archway, however, the Khedive approached and began to talk about Belinda, her beauty, her strange, not to say startling, conduct.

I was standing sideways, half facing his Majesty, half conscious of what was happening in that other room.

At length he turned to speak to an *attaché*—etiquette forbade me to move but permitted me to use my eyes.

I glanced quickly at Belinda and the Duke. They were on opposite sides of the apartments, she close to the windows, long French windows, opening on to the Palace grounds, he facing her, speaking with energy and force.

Suddenly through a door to his right the figure of a woman, closely veiled, stole into the room. Had she made no sign but steadily walked by him, she might have gained the window and passed through unchallenged, but the sight of Eastaeres appeared to terrify her. She uttered a faint cry, clutched her veil, lurched forward, stumbled, fell.

It was the wretched Honoria!

In a minute the Duke had grasped the situation. Honoria was going to meet the Egyptian, to make a last despairing effort after freedom.

With a muttered execration the Duke darted towards his sister.

Belinda rushed between them.

"You shall not touch her, nor hurt, nor stop her. She's going to leave you for ever, to live a free, a happy life. You shall not prevent her."

He waited coolly, quietly, till she had finished, then gently but firmly pushed her aside.

Honoria who by this time had staggered to her feet, was almost within touch of his fingers. Another moment he would have had her in his grasp. But there was still Belinda to be reckoned with. With a swift movement she rushed to the corner of the room where, in Moorish fashion, stood a lighted lamp upon the floor. Snatching it up she stood triumphantly before the Duke.

"Now," she cried, "move a step towards Honoria, and I dash this to the ground." She poised the lamp above her head. "Honoria quick, *fly!*"

Honoria started, the Duke moved, Belinda brought the lamp level with his face!

(*What followed Belinda's action will be told next Tuesday.*)

A little girl, hearing it remarked that all people had once been children, artlessly inquired: "Who took care of the babies?"

Mother: "What have you done to your little sister?" Boy: "Nothing." "Then, what is she crying for?" "She's cryin' because she can't think of anything to cry for."

"Yes," murmured the bald-headed man, "I've been married twenty years, but my wife and myself never had but one thought in common." "And what was that?" asked the thin man. "Oh, it was when the house caught fire, and we both thought we'd like to get out first."

Missionary: "Was it liquor that brought you to this?" Imprisoned Burglar: "No, sir, it was cleanin'—Spring house cleanin', sir." Missionary: "Eh? House cleaning?" Burglar: "Yessir. The woman had been house cleanin', and the stair carpet was up, and the folks heard me."

Managing Editor (to reporter): "Are you engaged to be married, Mr. Scarehead?" Mr. Scarehead: "Er—yes, sir; I——" Managing Editor: "Kindly draw on the office for forty shillings, get married immediately, and let me have two columns on 'Married Life in a Great City' by twelve o'clock. And—er—congratulations!"

An aristocratic lady, meeting a beggar in rags, gave him her card, saying: "Here is my address. If you will call at any time you can have some of my husband's left-off clothes." A few days later she saw the poor fellow again in the street. "Why did you not come as I told you?" "Please, ma'am, this is Wednesday, and on your card it says: 'At home on Thursdays.'"

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Storyettes.

News to Both.

Mamma: "What is the matter?" Little Jack: "Me an' sister was playin' keep house, an' I was the papa, an' she was the governess, an' she told me to kiss her, an' when I did, she slapped me hard—boo, boo! I didn't know that was in the game." Mamma (thoughtfully): "Neither did I."

A Search for Pleasure.

Little Johnny: "I've got on my new boots." Little Tommy: "So've I." Little Johnny: "Have yer? Let's hunt for a puddle."

The Song of the Gay Coquette.

"I know," remarked the gay coquette, "I haven't caught a husband yet; but then," she added, softly sighing, "I've had some fun while I've been trying."

The Butcher's Way.

A young woman asked her butcher to weigh the baby. "With pleasure, madam." (After having examined the scales.) "Ah! thirteen and a half pounds, madam, with the bones."

To Amuse the Guests.

Hostess: "Dear me, the conversation is flagging dreadfully. What can we do to amuse these people?" Host: "I don't know, I am sure, unless we go into the other room for a bit, and give them a chance to talk about us."

A Kindred Feeling.

"Let me tell you, Mrs. Thomas," said a happy parent to a rustic neighbour, "my son, Ernest, has got a first prize." "Oh! I quite understand your feelings, marm; I felt just the same myself when our young pig carried off a medal at the agricultural show."

The Dream and the Reality.

After dreaming for three years of a fairy prince, riding into town on a fierce charger, with a glittering sword hanging by his side, a Colchester girl is about to marry a man who has a charger that is hitched to a milk cart, and she is doing remarkably well these hard times to get him.

A Thoughtful Spouse.

"I've a good mind to go and jump into the river," said Mr. N. Peck, at the end of a little domestic discussion, as he picked up his hat and started out. "You come back here," said his wife. "If you intend any such trick as that, just march upstairs and put on your old clothes before you start."

Why He Danced.

There is a story of an Imperial Highness waltzing thrice in the same evening with an English lady at a Court in Berlin. She naturally felt, and frankly confessed, herself highly flattered by the compliment. "I did not intend it as a compliment," was the answer. "Then," said the lady, somewhat upset, "your Highness must be very fond of dancing." "I detest dancing," was the still unsatisfactory response. Undeterred by her ill success, our fair Englishwoman still prosecuted her inquiries. "What then, may I ask, can be your Imperial Highness' motive for dancing?" "Madam," was the exalted personage's curt reply, "I *dance to perspire*."

The Lady's Retort.

He: "Really you must excuse me, but I thought it was Hetty Smith." She: "Well, you're excusable. A man that would want to kiss Hetty Smith is not responsible for his actions."

Easily Surmounted.

Millie: "I don't mind marrying you, Clarence, but I hate the idea of giving up my two pounds a week situation at the shop." Clarence: "Then, don't give it up, dearest. I'll give up mine. I'm getting only thirty shillings."

When a Girl Bets.

Clara: "Now remember you have bet me a box of gloves, and if I win, you must buy me just the kind I like." George: "Yes, and if I win——" Clara: "If you win, you have the privilege of buying me a cheaper sort—if you are mean enough to do it."

Why She Wanted Him Scolded.

Wife (to her husband): "Arthur, love, I want you to give Jack a good scolding to-morrow morning." Husband: "What for? I am perfectly satisfied with the fellow." Wife: "Well, you know, he has to beat the carpets to-morrow, and he strikes ever so much harder when he's in a bad temper."

True Philanthropy.

"Wasn't it sad about old Jobley's failure?" "What! Has he failed?" "Yes, gone clean smash." "That's too bad. He promised me something yesterday; but now, in his trouble, I will not hold him to it." "That's generous of you. What was it?" "His daughter's hand in marriage."

Sentiment and Business.

Young Man: "I cannot understand, sir, why you permit your daughter to sue me for breach of promise. You remember that you were bitterly opposed to our engagement because I wasn't good enough for her, and would disgrace the family." Old Man: "Young man, that was sentiment; this is business."

Quite a Little Matter.

As the girl rose from his knee, a look of deep concern appeared upon the young man's face. "Surely, my darling," he said, in anxious tones, "your love has not turned cold?" "No, George," the beautiful girl replied, "I only want to change to the other side; the ticking of your watch unpleasantly disturbs my ear."

Baiting the Situation.

Mr. Sidney Smith: "Are you the policeman on the beat near my house?" Police-Constable Toulson: "Yes, sir." Mr Sidney Smith: "Would you mind standing near our kitchen entrance next Saturday afternoon for a few minutes? We're having some trouble in getting a girl, and I want the one who comes on Saturday to have every possible inducement to stay."

Where Silence was Golden.

"Did you know that I passed your door last evening?" said the young man tenderly. "Of course," replied the beautiful girl, with reproach in her glistening eyes. "Do you think I would not know your step?" "Certainly," said the happy young man, as he directed the conversation away from the subject, and avoided remarking that he passed the door in a cab.

It Would not Harmonise.

"I want," she said hesitatingly, as she poised her basket in front of her pretty chin with a thoughtful air, "to get some lettuce." "Yes'm," said the market man; "here's some—very nice it is, too." "Is it all that colour?" "Why—er—yes'm; all lettuce is green, you know." "Oh, it is too bad. I got a lovely blue dish to put lettuce in; but I'm sure green would look horrible in it. I never thought about there not being any shades, you know." And as she turned away the market man was almost sure he saw a tear of disappointment in her eye.

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The Wooing of Peggy.

The Difference between Peggy Smith and Lady Vesdris.

"I WISH to see Lady Vesdris Pendual." The soberly dressed little man, looked questioningly at the maid servant who opened the door to him.

"Nobody of that name in the house, sir."

"No? You surprise me," he smiled, then added: "However, as I am not blind, I can see her at this very moment playing tennis in that court."

He pointed casually in the direction of the distant lawn.

"That is Miss Peggy Smith, sir. The gentleman she is playing with, being the young master."

The little man coughed.

"Then, my good girl, would you have the kindness to tell Miss Peggy Smith, that Mr. George Brent, Solicitor to the late Earl of Porthawn, would like to see her for a few minutes."

The servant stared, then asking the solicitor into the house, she showed him into the drawing-room and departed on her errand. Brent had not long to wait, for ere many minutes had elapsed, the door opened and a pretty, winsome girl, entered the room, closely followed by the young fellow whom the solicitor had seen playing tennis with her, when he had entered the grounds a short while before. Like his partner in the set, he looked hot and somewhat moist-visaged.

"So you have found me out at last, Mr. Brent," she remarked by way of greeting.

"'Um, yes, my dear Lady Vesdris," replied the solicitor, his eyes twinkling with latent merriment. "And a fine dance you have led me, too! To come down to Yorkshire from London is quite an undertaking for a man of my age, you know. Now that I have at last arrived in this very pretty, if extremely out-of-the-way, locality, I should be pleased if you would accord me a few minutes private conversation—alone."

"Well, we are alone, dear Mr. Brent," said Vesdris smiling. "Bert being in the room does not alter that fact, for—we, you see, we have no secrets from each other."

"Ahem." The solicitor's eyes twinkled more than ever. "Am I to understand, by that confession, that you are engaged to this gentleman?"

"Not *yet*," replied Vesdris, hurriedly, before Bertram Wilmot had time to get a word in edgeways. "We—we——" She paused, then flushing hotly, said, "What was it that you wanted to see me alone for?"

"Ah, of course, I was forgetting the object of my visit in the pleasure of seeing you." The smile died from his lips, as he added, seriously. "It is my pleasant duty to inform you that my late client, the Earl of Porthawn, died intestate, and such being the case, you, as his lordship's only surviving relative, inherit alike his estates in the Duchy of Cornwall and his fortune." He paused, then added, "The title, of course, lapses though it could doubtless be revived, always supposing that you contracted a suitable marriage."

Vesdris laid a hand on the little man's arm.

"That, Mr. Brent, you know that I should always do," she said, smiling into his eyes.

"I am far from being certain on that point," said the solicitor, a slight note of testiness apparent in his voice. "I remember the time when you told me in all seriousness, that you wanted to marry the gardener's boy."

"But that was when I used to invite you up to the schoolroom to tea with my dolls, Mr. Brent." Always pretty, she looked singularly winning at that moment.

Brent being merely a man, suffered the smile to be wooed back to his face, as pinching her gently on the cheek, he said;

"Those were happy days, Vesdris, when I used to come and drink thimblefuls of tea with you, and listen to the respective family histories of your dollies! Eh? I little thought then that you would ever have been thrown alone on the world as Miss Peggy Smith. You should have come to my house, little girl, instead of hiding yourself away in the wilds of Yorkshire as a companion. Two years hard hunting it has taken me to find you."

"I knew that you would want me to come to you, if I let you know of my whereabouts." Vesdris said softly, "I did not want to be a burden on you, for I thought that I could earn my own living! Rather than do that, I would have accepted the hundred a year Uncle Walter offered me, when he stepped into everything at the death of my poor father." Her lips trembled ominously for a moment, then steadying, she continued, "I have been very happy here. Everybody has been so kind to me, and Bert has looked after me as carefully as if I were his own sister."

"Perhaps more so than if you were," said the solicitor drily, adding briskly as the young man coloured awkwardly, "Well, I must be off now. I am due at York at two, and——"

"But you will stay and have some lunch," said Wilmot, speaking for the first time. "I know Peggy—er—Lady Vesdris would——"

"Thank you, but I am afraid that I cannot. My train leaves at 12.43, and if the clock on the mantelpiece is correct, I have just ten minutes in which to get to the station." The solicitor spoke briskly. "Good-bye! Of course you must leave here, little girl, at once, and come up to town. You have a lot of documents to sign before you can enter into possession of your own. Let me see, to-day is Monday—I shall expect you at my office not later than Tuesday week. Good-bye! Good-bye! Remember what I said about the title and making a suitable marriage. As you are one of, if not the biggest heiress in England, you have enough money to revive it." And so saying, the busy little solicitor walked to the door and out of the house, pausing at the drive gate, to wave an *adieu*, before he stepped briskly out towards the station. Vesdris closed the door softly, and sped lightly back to the drawing-room, where Bert had remained, with unwonted discourtesy, whilst she had shown her visitor out.

He was standing by the window, his hands thrust down into his jacket pockets, gazing absent-mindedly out into space. So occupied indeed was he in his own thoughts, that he was unaware of Vesdris' presence till he felt her hand lightly placed on his shoulder.

"Bert," she said wistfully. "You told me this morning that you had something to speak to me about—it was just before Janet came to tell me that Mr. Brent was in the drawing-room."

He turned to gaze at the girl beside him in mute agony.

"Won't you tell me now, what it was you wanted to say to me, dear?"

"No, I am afraid that I cannot," he said hoarsely, as once again he turned to look out of the window. "I—I—to tell you the truth, I—I forget what I was going to say."

"Don't tell a fib, Bert," she said quietly, as putting her arm through his, she laid her head upon his shoulder. "You know really quite well what you were going to say. Won't you tell me—that is, if I really want to hear?"

A faint smile stole over his features.

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"You—that is—I can never tell you what I was going to say, now."

"Why?" She raised her head from his shoulder, to glance inquiringly up into his face. "Why won't you tell me now, when half an hour ago you were willing to?"

"Why?" He placed his hands on her shoulders and looked straight into the violet eyes raised half-shyly to his. "A great deal has happened in those thirty minutes—and I wonder if you would be angry with me, if—I said—that you have hardly been quite fair with me."

"Hardly fair. Why do you say that, Bert?" she asked. A faint flush suffused her cheeks, mounting to the very temples where her soft golden hair strayed in unruly curls of gold. "Why do you think that I have been unfair?"

"I don't know why I should have said it," he said, "unless it is, that the world has suddenly seemed to grow cold and bitter to me," he added abruptly, his voice becoming oddly strained. "You came to us as Peggy Smith, nearly two years ago, and as Peggy Smith, I loved you! I——"

"Cannot you see your way to love—Vesdris Pendual as much—as you loved Peggy Smith?" The faint flush mantling her cheeks, deepened into a furious blush.

"It would not be honourable on my part to tell her so, even if I did, and——"

"But you have," she said, a ring of triumph in her voice. "And now will you explain to me why it would not be honourable for you to tell Vesdris Pendual that you love her, when you could do so without dishonour to Peggy Smith?"

"Ah, little woman, cannot you understand," he said fondly. "You are an heiress, and one of the richest women in England at that; whilst I—I am merely the son of a country squire, with a few hundreds to call my own! As Peggy, I might have found courage to ask you to be——"

He paused abruptly, to turn and gaze anew out of the window.

"Yes, dear—to be what?" She glanced up at his face pleadingly. "Bert, to you I shall always be Peggy. Don't let money prove a barrier between us! We have been so happy together, and, Bert, tell me what you were going to say?"

"Vesdris," he interrupted hoarsely, "do you know what you are saying? Do you know that you are tempting me?"

"I want to tempt you, dear," she said, as laying her head on his shoulder she hid her tear-blurred eyes from his view.

"Then Peggy, darling—for I shall always call you by the name I first learnt to love you under—will you be my wife, dearest?"

Though tear-stained, it was a happy face she raised to his, as she replied simply:

"Bert, dear, I shall be the happiest girl in the world if you will only have me!"

"If?" He pressed her closely to him, smothering her resistless lips with hungry kisses. "If? It will be more to the point to say, if Mr. Brent will let me have you."

"I am of age," she said, mutinously. "But somehow I don't think that he will find there is a just cause or impediment why we should not marry, dearest."

Vesdris proved a prophetess. Mr. Brent did not, and when the one time Peggy entered into her own, it was as Lady Vesdris Wilmot.

H. Morton Baird.

SPLENDID @ CHRISTMAS

DOUBLE NUMBER @@@@@@

NEXT TUESDAY@@@@@@2d.

A GRAMOPHONE FOR AN OPINION.

In order that those of our readers who have not yet managed to secure one of these splendid instruments may still have an opportunity of doing so, we offer ten more of our famous Gramophones this week.

These prizes, as every successful competitor will tell you, are well worth trying for. They reproduce splendidly both the human voice and musical instruments. With each instrument is presented two records, and as a Christmas party entertainer they are hardly to be equalled.

What you have to do to Win a Gramophone.

In *Short Stories* week by week, as you know, are several features, namely—(1) The Serial Story; (2) The Series, "How I Chaperoned Belinda"; (3) In Confidence page; (4) The Birthdays Information column; and (5) Editorial Chat.

I want you to tell me which of these features interests you most, which next, and so on.

What you have to do is to write on the back of a postcard the titles of the features in the order in which you like them best and send them to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking your postcard in the left-hand top corner "Feature."

To the ten readers whose opinions most nearly represent the concensus of opinion will be awarded a handsome Gramophone.

All opinions must reach us not later than by first post on Tuesday morning, December 16th.

Result of the "Anagram" Competition.

In the above competition a Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following competitors:

A. Fortheringham, 6 Greenfield Street, Govan.
J. F. R. Anderson, 2 West Mayfield, Edinburgh.
J. Smith, 51 Shakespeare Crescent, Patricroft, Lancs.
F. McClellan, 3 Mounsey Road, near Tranmere, Birkenhead.
A. Reoch, 123 Victoria Road, Dundee.
G. Humphreys, 19 Colville Street, Nottingham.
C. Payne, St. Aubans, Burlington Road, North End, Portsmouth.
F. Gale, 1 Park Place, Cheltenham.
E. Mill, 12 Green Street, Neath, South Wales.
R. Wild, care of E. Wilson, 2 Orchard Villas, Linden Road, Ashford, Middlesex.

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The Conversion of a Tragedian.

By the Love of a Woman.

Mr. Treadwell was making a matutinal repast of a slice of corned beef and an olive, and thirstily watching the concoction of a roseate study in still life, when I first made his acquaintance on a morning two years ago. He paid for his libation and its more substantial accompaniment with the last coin that he possessed, but he did it with the air of majesty which characterised all his movements on and off the stage.

He was presented to me as "Mr. Treadwell, the tragedian," which implied the compliment that he was quite too well known to need any further description.

Mr. Treadwell, the tragedian, was sadly in need of a shave, and there was a haggard look about his eyes which bespoke hard lines of fate. A hair-cut would have altered his appearance greatly, and would have done him no material harm. His long, fur-caped and fur-cuffed overcoat was faded and threadbare, and was kept closely buttoned for the reason, it may be supposed, that his under coat was still less prepossessing to the eye. His shoes, which once had been patent leather, were cracked and seamed, but polished. His hat was not quite new—in fact, there was a bare dent in the background, which, carefully as the nap had been brushed, could not be concealed, but the rim was soiled and bent.

But notwithstanding Mr. Treadwell's seedy appearance, and the fact that he was almost a counterpart of many another stranded actor who has haunted the Rialto in years past, there was something about him which impressed one favourably and held the attention.

"Genius is nothing without opportunity," said Napoleon—and Treadwell had been thus far without the necessary opportunity to raise himself to the heights which he felt entirely competent to attain, and which he was modestly confident that he should attain eventually. For he was ambitious as few men are. Ambition was the warp and woof of his whole nature. It was honest, legitimate ambition, and it was backed up by a tenacity of purpose that was somewhat remarkable, considering the trials and tribulations he had borne in the pursuit of his aims. The spirit of humour and flippancy which characterises the dramatic age was so foreign to his nature that he was unable to understand that there was practically no demand for a new Hamlet or Othello, or Richard III. His world was one of solemnity and earnestness.

Treadwell came into my office one afternoon, looking more seedy than usual, but graver, more austere, and more majestic.

"I have just been insulted," he said, in suppressed, tragic tones, as he sat down in the easy-chair by the fire.

"No trouble, I hope," I said, by way of encouraging him to continue in explanation.

"Well, no; though I should have preferred to have struck the dog down. It was Conrad, the manager of the Metropolitan Theatre, where a crowd of giggling fools are amused nightly. You cannot imagine what the despicable scoundrel said to me. 'Treadwell,' he said, in that patronising way of his, 'you don't seem to be playing in much luck of late. Hang it, man,' slapping me on the back with disgusting familiarity, 'haven't you found out that tragedy is dead and buried? Heaven help you, sir! The people don't want it and they won't have it. You would starve ten times over while you were convincing them that you were a second Irving. The rattle-headed public wants screaming farce—that's what it wants. That's what it's willing to shell out its silver shekels for, and that's what we must give if we want to live. You've got to come to this view sooner or later, and make the best of the situation. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you £10 a week to join my 'Willy Wally' company at the Metropolitan, and appear just as you are, without one bit of make-up. Your duty will be to go on and act your natural self. Why, man, as the busted tragedian you would have the whole town holding its sides. You don't appreciate what a frightful guy you are. You mustn't even get a shave, you know. I want you just as you are. You don't say no? There's a good thing in it for you, old man, and it's the only sensible thing to do.'"

"What did you say?" I asked, amused, but disguising the fact.

"Say," thundered Treadwell, with a magnificent gesture, "I told him to go and boil himself! I was angered as I never was before. Burlesque myself, eh? I wanted to crush him to the earth! 'I may starve, sir, yes, starve,' I said, 'but I will not pollute myself and desecrate my noble art by accepting such a diabolical proposition as this of yours. You are a craven insulter, sir!' And with that I turned on my heel and left him."

"The offer was very ill-advised," I commented, "but perhaps he meant well. You can afford to be charitable, Mr. Treadwell."

I soothed his ruffled feelings as best I could, and presently he asked me to accompany him up the street to Chalmer's Theatre, where there was to be a benefit performance that afternoon.

"Some very good talent—worth seeing," he added sententiously.

I have always been more or less a Bohemian, and the idea of walking up the Strand in company with Gilbert Treadwell had no embarrassment for me. Furthermore I understood my obligations, and we pushed in the well-known yellow doors, and then pushed them out again, before we turned into the *foyer* of the playhouse.

Treadwell had a passing acquaintance with the man in the box-office, and by reason of his being a member of the "Profession"—a capital P—had no difficulty in securing passes for us both. The inconsistency of asking for tickets for a benefit performance did not seem to occur to him. If everyone gained admittance in this way the benefit part of the performance would scarcely materialise.

"Who is the beneficiary?" I asked casually, when we had gained our seats.

"One of the noblest little women that ever lived," he answered warmly. "Ramona Darling. You know of her, of course. She was rarely talented, but sickness and desertion by the man whom she loved have reduced her to absolute poverty."

"Yes, I remember Ramona Darling. In her palmy days, when she was at the height of her popularity, I thought her the most *chic* and cunning actress on the stage."

I felt almost a personal gratitude to those sympathetic artists who had volunteered to give their time and talents towards the benevolent project of relieving her distress.

The entertainment was made up of a medley of songs, dances, and portions of acts from plays which were at the time running at the different theatres in the city, and, altogether, was clever and interesting. But the fickle, thoughtless public, unfortunately, had not shown the interest in Ramona Darling's case which it was expected it would, and as a result the audience was not only small, but was composed in greater part of "deadheads," like Treadwell and myself. This incensed the tragedian greatly. The funniest things that were said and done on the stage only deepened his gloom. It

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was evident he not only disapproved of the audience, but of the acting as well. He had felt it his duty, however, to show his approval of the benefit, and its object, by lending the influence of his presence to the occasion, and in pursuit of this duty he retained his seat during the whole of the performance.

Just before the curtain went down on the final scene, Mr. Chalmers, the manager of the theatre and the organiser of the benefit, appeared on the stage.

"I am very sorry to say," he announced, "that the proceeds of this benefit amount to a trifle less than thirty pounds. And this sum, I fear, will be required to pay the expenses of a funeral. I have just heard that Ramona Darling is dying."

As Treadwell and I went slowly out of the theatre, I fancied he brushed a tear from his eye.

"If you'll pay the bus-fare, Felix," he said in a strained voice, "we'll go round to her house. I didn't know she was so bad as that. I want to see her once more before she goes."

There was humour in his pathos, for, despite himself, in all that he did, Treadwell was a humourist.

I was quite sufficiently interested in Ramona Darling to cordially agree with his plan to visit her, and in a few minutes we found ourselves ringing at her door. The place was one of the cheap boarding-houses which abound near King's Cross—one of those unpleasant abodes where the co-mingled odours of cabbages and onions salute the nostrils of the visitor as he enters the door.

We were conducted up two flights of stairs and shown unceremoniously into a dim, dull room, where the one time popular little favourite lay white and still upon a by no means luxurious bed. Everything about the place betokened poverty and suffering.

She was attended only by a stupid-looking German girl, who withdrew as we entered. A child, a sunny-haired girl of five, was kneeling pathetically by the bed clasping the white hand of the dying woman, and hiding her face in the covers.

We advanced softly to the bedside, and the child raised her tear-stained face and stared at us inquiringly. The woman opened her eyes wearily, and a gleam of pleasure shot into them as she recognised Treadwell.

"Gilbert," she murmured faintly, with a great effort holding up her hand to him.

He bent and kissed the hand, and groaned as he sank down on a chair beside the bed.

"Ramona," he said tremulously, "I never thought it would come to this. It is not your fault, I know."

He smoothed back the fine hair from her forehead with touch as tender as a ministering angel's, and the tears trickled down his cheeks upon the white pillows.

"The benefit was a success," he went on with spontaneous perjury, "there will be plenty of money now to provide for all your needs. You will be quite well in a week. I—I wanted to see you, and this is my friend, Mr. Felix, who used to write pleasant things about you in the *Age*. I am sure you will be well in a week, Ramona."

"No—no," she responded, "I am dying, Gilbert; oh, God, I am dying."

With a convulsive movement she caught the arm of the child and drew the little one's face close to hers. She held her thus silently for a moment, while the child sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Gilbert," she said, presently, "you loved me once."

He looked up at me and said, half apologetically. "Yes, I loved her once."

Then he fell on his knees beside the bed and continued, brokenly, "I love you now."

He seemed to me like a new order of Othello as he knelt there grief-stricken, unmanned, touched to the heart by this unwonted spectacle of the woman he worshipped, bending to catch the last words that fell from her fluttering lips. He was a tragedian in earnest for once.

"I want you to take her, my little Dollie," she went on. "Take her and see that she is cared for. She is my only one—mine and—*his*. I can trust you, Gilbert. She is all I have, and you will—cherish her—for my—sake. Do not let her love—unwisely, as her—mother did. Promise me, Gilbert?"

"I promise, Ramona. For your sake I will do anything—everything."

She sighed with relief, and for several moments lay silent and with closed eyes. Then, with a strenuous effort, she raised herself up and held her white arms aloft as if to pronounce a malediction.

"Never let *him* contaminate her with his touch," she cried, feverishly and wildly. "Should he come to you, tell him that I died hating him!"

Then she leant forward and kissed Treadwell, and took up the child in her arms and caressed her passionately. The following moment she sank back among the pillows, dead.

I notified the woman of the house, and a few moments later Treadwell and I went out and took a return 'bus.

Neither spoke. He seemed completely unnerved. When we had reached our destination he told me he was going to make arrangements for the funeral, and bade me good-night. Knowing that he was without money, I offered him a note, but he refused it.

We were almost at the door of my office, and I took his arm and pressed him to go in.

"Now, what are your plans?" I asked. "You are not exactly in a position to assume such a responsibility as you have undertaken. I speak frankly, old man. How are you going to take care of this child?"

"Can't I do it on an income of £10 a week?" he responded. "Didn't I have an offer of that for my services this afternoon?"

"Yes; but——" I began.

"The circumstances are changed now," he interrupted.

He strode majestically out of the door, and that was the last I saw of him for two days. I read the announcement in a daily paper of his engagement for a burlesque part in "Conrad's Popular Willy Wally Company," and I thus knew that his revised plans had been successful.

I had always cherished a certain faith and confidence in Treadwell, born, perhaps, of my admiration for his utter sincerity and his strength of purpose in clinging to his tenets against every adversity; now, I began to respect him. I knew what a sacrifice he had made as perhaps no one save himself did. I could imagine what torture the new order of things was to him. For whatever Treadwell's faults and deficiencies, he was a man of artistic soul, whose purposes were honourable and earnest, and whose ideals and standards were of the highest.

For the sake of the mother, the child had become more to him than his own future. He was to care for it, and cherish it, even as he had cherished the hope of his own eventual success. To do this it was no longer possible to continue in the old way; he must have money, and there was but one way open to him to get it.

He did not ask me to the theatre to witness his performance; but I went one night, and sat where he could not see me.

Conrad's predictions were well founded. Treadwell was a success. His appearance brought forth a storm of applause, and his extravagant manner was a continual source of merriment. I felt truly sorry for him, knowing what he suffered. There was an expression of the keenest pain on his countenance when the audience roared at his manœuvres, but it all intensified the humours of the character he so well impersonated, and few suspected that it was not assumed for that purpose.

A day or two afterward he took me to see his new charge. She was harboured in the house of a kind old lady, who provided her with the utmost consideration and care, and took a motherly interest in "the little dear."

She was really the prettiest and sweetest child I ever saw. And as she ran to Treadwell and put her baby arms affectionately about his neck, he kissed her tenderly and smiled. Yes Gilbert Treadwell actually smiled.

G. Parkyn

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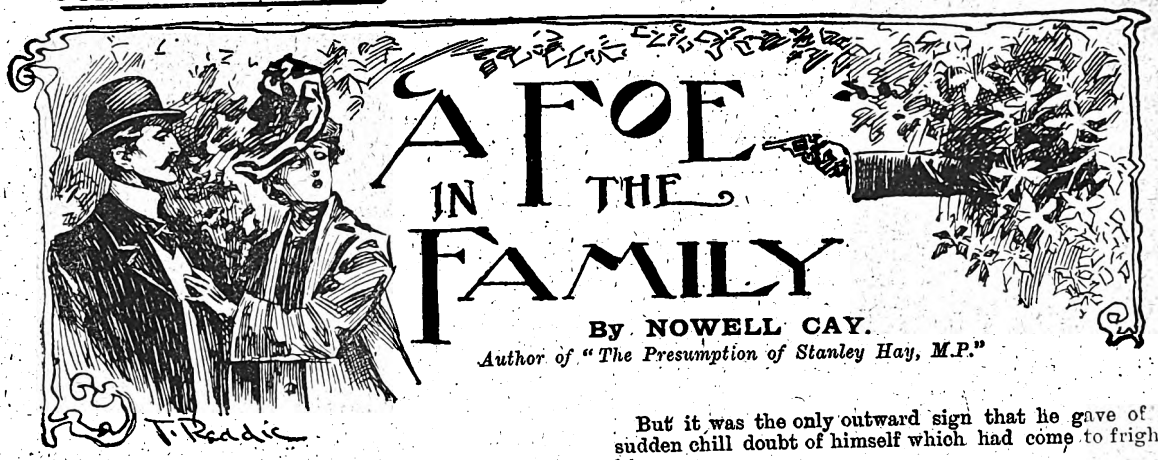
OUR SERIAL STORY.



Wherein Grant's Hopes are Raised.

They still stood in the draped hall where they had met, but for the moment Cathie had forgotten her anxiety for her cousin.

At first she had been bewildered, but as his impetuous string of words allowed her to understand more and more clearly what was in his mind her cheeks flushed scarlet. Her heart beat rapidly with a strange tumult of emotions. She was angry and indignant, and yet in spite of her anger she was pleasantly conscious that the man she loved was admitting his preference for her. He had never spoken so clearly before. She could be almost certain now of something she had half believed, half felt ashamed of believing.

Grant had never looked quite so handsome to her as he stood with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks pouring out his undeserved condemnation. And he had said that he would have given his life for one kind word from her.

But to believe that she was in love with Lord Ilden, and had acted towards his wife as she had done at the Hall through a feeling of mad jealousy. Her eyes flashed as brightly as his.

She would not condescend to answer accusations so unfounded and unjust, and without a word she turned on her heel.

But as she turned with his denunciatory "where have you sent her?" sounding in her ears she found that they were no longer alone.

Florence had been unable to bear the suspense any longer. Grant must have brought bad news of George or Catherine would have returned to her, and she was now in the doorway.

"You have news of him?" she said appealingly. "Catherine dearest, you will not hide it from me."

Catherine shook her head.

"No dear. Mr. Ilden has heard nothing." She turned to Grant whose surprise showed itself clearly in his face. Catherine's had lost its flush and was quite calm. A strange smile played in her eyes.

"You asked where Lady Ilden was, but gave me no time to tell you that we came here together. By the way you have not yet been introduced to your new cousin. Florence dear, this is the real Grant Ilden."

Poor Grant's face was a study of bewilderment as he acknowledged the introduction. On one point at least his fierce denunciation of a moment before had been proved unjustifiable. There was no doubting the friendliness of the two girls. And he had accused Catherine of a jealous hatred of her rival. His face, that had been flushed, turned pale.

But it was the only outward sign that he gave of the sudden chill doubt of himself which had come to frighten him.

"And why the *real* Grant Ilden?" he asked, his tone polite and formal.

"That is a matter for Percival to explain," said Catherine with an animation which she tried in vain to control for Florence's sake. "But the time has come to tell you everything, now that we are depending upon your help."

"All the help that I can give is at your service," he said as she led the way back to the room from which they had come, and he listened in silence while Catherine ran hurriedly through the whole story of Despard's pursuit of Ilden, together with the recently-discovered explanation of his enmity, which showed beyond doubt that it was misplaced.

It was the story which she had been very anxious to share with him from the first moment when Ilden's account of the attempts on his life had made her eager for a confidant with whom to share her anxiety. But George, firm in his theory that his enemy was a member of the family, had bound her to secrecy. Now his theory was proved wrong, and the position was too serious to stand upon a merely theoretical point of honour. Catherine welcomed a new liberty, and told her story, not without a pleasant sense that it was making Grant very much ashamed of his accusations. Not that she made the slightest reference to them, or made any direct or apparent effort to meet them. But she confessed her mad suspicion against Lady Ilden, and turned to her to thank her again for the readiness with which it had been forgiven.

Grant's face became more and more strained as he listened, until Cathie felt quite sorry for him.

But, when she had finished, it was only of George's danger that he spoke, justifying her reliance upon him by his suggestions.

There was just a probability, he thought, that Ilden might have changed his mind after all and returned to Sydenham. They might, at least, wire to him there and inquire. It would be as well, too, to wire to Lochtarry, on the vague chance that he might actually have decided to go there and have taken Percival into his confidence, improbable as it appeared.

Grant was loth to believe his brother a complete scoundrel, in spite of the evidence which Percival had given him throughout his life. For himself, Grant proposed to make inquires along the line, in the hope of discovering at what point Ilden had left the train which Catherine herself saw him enter.

It was not till he was starting, and Cathie was left for a moment alone with him in the hall, that his eyes dared to meet hers.

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"Can you ever forgive me?" he said, deeply, and Cathie managed to look judicial, although her heart was beating quickly.

"I do not think you realise yet how much there is to forgive," she said gravely.

"I realise that I have acted abominably. I ought to have known that you, the best woman in the world, could not have acted as I was mad enough to think."

"Despite my infatuation for cousin George?" she asked, coldly; and Grant hesitated, biting his lip.

Did she expect him to pretend that she was not in love with Ilden? He could not perjure himself, and Cathie took pity on his confusion.

"There is one more thing that I think I ought to tell you, after the horrible things that you have said," she proceeded severely. "I do not think that cousin George would mind now that he has found a perfect wife and realised how foolish it would have been to marry for convenience. But the day before he met Florence he asked me to be his wife. I refused because I did not think it right to marry one for whom I could feel only friendship."

Grant's face had flushed.

"You refused him!" he repeated, too surprised to quite conceal the incredulity in his voice, and Cathie's brow contracted.

"Forgive me," he said quickly, "I have been a jealous fool. I see it now that it is too late for you ever to forgive what I have said."

His tone was sufficiently penitent now to justify her in relaxing a little of her severity.

"I will forgive you," she said, "when you have found cousin George."

Something in the tone made it seem as though she had promised more than he had asked, more than he could ever allow himself to ask, unless the reading of his father's will on the next day fulfilled the hopes that he was building on it.

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it with an intensity that thrilled and almost frightened her, and then without a word turned to leave the house and begin his quest.

His heart beat high with a hope that was almost pain. To know that Catherine Hay was free to be won, to dream that she might even now care for him, and not to know whether his father's will would put it in his power to try and win her.

The doubt tortured him, mingling its bitterness with the sweetness or what she had told him, and he put the thought of her away resolutely. She had demanded a service of him, and he gave all his mind to its fulfilment.

But as he passed from telegraph office to railway station and from one station to another, making inquiries everywhere, a question seemed to ring monotonously in his head not to be silenced: Shall I ever be able to ask her? Shall I ever be able to ask her?

At Shipton Gate his repeated inquiry met for the first time with success. The station-master recognised his description of Ilden without hesitation, and was sure that he had alighted there on the previous morning. He was equally sure that the gentleman had not returned to the station, and Grant wired off to the Castle where the two girls waited in suspense, Florence building her hopes on an answer from Sydenham which never came.

They started for Shipton Gate by the next train.

An Unjust Will.

It was not until the body of Rupert Ilden had been laid in the family vault without any sign of George's appearance that hope died finally in the heart of the seekers.

Catherine recalled how determined he had been to let no thought of his own danger interfere with the duty he owed his uncle.

(*Continued on next page.*)

For those Exposed to the Weather.

EFFECTS OF COLD AND WET ON THE SYSTEM.

Out-door workers, and those whose occupations necessitate their spending a good deal of time in the open air, should take steps to fortify their systems against bad results. Cold and wet throw extra work upon the internal organs, and liver chill, piles, and rheumatism are often contracted during the winter season.

One of the best-known figures on the high road from Breadsall to Derby was Mrs. Caroline Bennett, of the Mill Farm, Breadsall. Morning after morning, through sleet, or rain, or snow, she drove to the county town with the milk. One day she was missed, and an enquiry showed that she had contracted a severe chill which had attacked her liver and compelled her to keep to her bed. That other ailment which commonly results from cold and wet — piles — also affected her, and had it not been for Charles Forde's Bile Beans the results would doubtless have been most serious.

"I suffered terribly for three or four months," says Mrs. Bennett, "the piles being so painful and the liver complaint taking all power to fight against pain out of me. I could not walk, being so weak, and I was getting worse and worse no matter what medicine I took, when a relative advised me to try Chas. Forde's Bile Beans.

"I soon found out the worth of them. They commenced to do me good after I had taken the first dose. In a week or two the piles disappeared, and as I continued taking Bile Beans, the liver disorder I had suffered from ceased. It has now left my system completely, and I am as well and strong as ever. I shall always feel grateful to Bile Beans, and would advise those who suffer as I did to give them a fair trial."

All chemists stock Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, or they may be obtained post free for 1/1½ or 2/9 per box from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross St., London, E.C. They fortify the system against winter's trying weather, and cure liver chills, piles, rheumatism, headache, digestive disorders, and constipation. Avoid imitations.

REAL DEVONSHIRE CREAM (CLOTTED); absolutely pure: no preservatives used; the most efficacious substitute for cod liver oil; invaluable for children and invalids; ½lb. 1s. 4d.; 1lb. 2s. 4d.; 2lbs. 4s. 4d., free. supplied constantly to the Countesses Cadogan, Pembroke, Sefton, Dundonald, Guilford, Lichfield, etc., by MRS. CONYERS, Morchard Bishop, Devon.

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Percival too, who stuck staunchly to his story that Ilden had told him he was going to Scotland and denied as stoutly having given Lady Ilden any name but his own, made no secret of the fact that his cousin had promised distinctly to be present at the ceremony.

As a matter of fact he looked for his appearance there with considerable anxiety, and as the funeral *cortège* returned to the house felt inclined to congratulate himself that he was a decided step nearer to the Barony of Ilden than he had been two days earlier.

"Ilden is one of those fools who make much of a promise," he said to himself, "and if he were alive he would be here."

It was the thought which, differently expressed in Catherine's mind, forbade her even to speak of hope any longer to the dry-eyed woman at her side whom she had learnt to love, and who seemed to depend upon her so completely.

The remembrance of George's promise had brought the two as a last hope to Mordenhale, where they watched the last scene in the old-fashioned churchyard without joining the mourners. But the figure for which they watched did not appear to join the little group round the grave.

It was a reward perhaps for the lack of any human sympathy or emotion which the Honourable Rupert had shown during his life that so little personal thought of him was in the minds of those who paid to his body the last outward tribute of respect.

His brother was thinking uneasily of the chances of his own death, and impatiently waiting for the time when the ceremony would be over and he could drown his uneasiness in a debauch that would only bring the death he feared more quickly.

Percival was patently nervous and restless, and could not keep his glance from wandering round the churchyard. Sir Charles Barton showed a more perfect decorum outwardly, while he calculated for the hundredth time how much his wife was likely to benefit pecuniarily by her father's death.

And even Grant, although he was the sincerest mourner present, had received from the man who was dead too little of sympathy or affection to make his sense of loss conquer the anxieties which filled his mind.

He could not forget either, that the fate of his cousin was still unsolved, or that the next hour would decide whether he was a beggar—his interests, ignored as they had always been for the benefit of his brother—or the possessor of an income, modest enough, but sufficient perhaps to justify him in asking for the hand of the woman he loved without feeling disgraced by her wealth.

His suspense increased as they wended their way back to the rambling old house close by. It was indeed only a stone's-throw from the churchyard, from which its grounds were separated only by a narrow coppice.

The nearest cut was by a path through the coppice, but the mourners went round by the road, Grant with his eyes moodily cast on the ground, and his mind full of anticipative misgivings.

Sir Charles, walking at his side, tried to enter into conversation.

"I understand from your brother that your poor father made a new will at the Hall just before the end. It seems strange to me that Jane should have known nothing of the fact. I suppose that you did?"

"No," said Grant gloomily. "My father did not take me into his confidence at all. At the end especially he seemed to have a prejudice against me, and only cared for Percy to be with him."

The remembrance did not add to his hopefulness. He had felt at the time that his brother was intriguing against him for some purpose of his own. If his father had really made a new will at his instigation, the purpose was likely to be made patent now.

At the time he had scarcely cared. Money had seemed to matter so little when he believed that Catherine was in love with Ilden. Now he could be indifferent no longer; but whatever his father had done at Percival's instigation had been done irretrievably.

He walked onward with downcast eyes again, and did not notice, as he might have done had he turned just before entering the house, that Catherine was hastening after him at her utmost speed, distractedly seeking his assistance.

It was to Grant that her thoughts had instantly flown when the need presented itself; but it was too urgent for her to follow him. Some of the servants following the chief mourners had stopped, and Catherine appealed to them excitedly.

"Despard, the man who tried to kill Lord Ilden, is hiding in the coppice. Lady Ilden has followed him. I want you to come at once to her assistance!"

The story of the midnight intruder at Pennybrook Hall, for whose recapture Mr. Jasper had offered a reward, had already been carried from Pennybrook to Mordenhale, and Cathie's summons caused as much excitement as she could have desired. A little crowd followed her back to the point in the coppice where Florence had caught sight of Guy Despard's haggard face watching the mourners as they moved away from the churchyard.

"I must see him and make him tell me what he has done," Florence had cried, and Catherine was already inclined to regret the decision which had made her hasten for assistance instead of accompanying her; for in the coppice path was no sign either of the desperado or the brave girl who had gone alone in pursuit. The little party spread itself out among the trees in a vain search.

But in the house nothing was known as yet of this new sensation which had made the ordinary excitement of a funeral insignificant by comparison.

In the gloomy dining-room Mr. Murgatroyd was unfolding the last will and testament of the man who had just been laid in the grave, a will drawn up and signed only two days before his death.

Its reading was a matter of only a few minutes. For the will itself was a short and simple one. Apart from a trifling bequest to his daughter, Lady Barton, and an annuity of a hundred pounds a year to his second son, Grant, the dead man had left everything to his elder son and heir.

To Grant it seemed only a moment from their return to the house before it was all over, and he realised that his worst fears were fulfilled. His father had been as unjust in death as he had been in life, and had left him a pauper.

He rose dizzily, his voice breaking the silence that had fallen on the room.

"There is no mention made of my mother's money. It was understood that that should be mine on my father's death."

Mr. Murgatroyd rubbed his fat little hands together.

"If such an understanding existed, it is one to which my late client has not chosen to give effect. His late wife's fortune was left entirely to his disposal. His disposal of it which is

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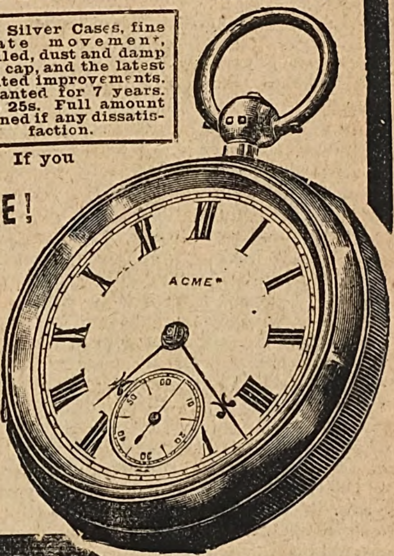

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noluded in the document before us, is all that has ogal force. It is open, of course, to your brother, the residuary legatee, to give what effect he wishes to any private wish or understanding that is not mentioned here."

Grant smiled bitterly. To appeal to the generosity of his brother! That would be hopeless indeed.

But the thought of Catherine, which had nerved him to make the protest, might even have urged him to the hopeless appeal if Percival's face had not answered it already.

He turned upon him with a sudden outburst of anger.

"This is your doing," he cried. "My father would never have been so unjust."

"That is an opinion which I must indorse," said Sir Charles, who till now had been speechless with indignation at the bequest made to his wife. "When the will is so extraordinary in character, so inconsistent with those deep ties of affection which connected my poor father-in-law with his younger children, I must protest with Grant that there is *prima-facie* evidence in support of his theory that undue influence has been used to affect poor Mr. Ilden's mind at the last."

But Grant did not wait to take part in the wordy wrangle that followed. The thing was irretrievable. Henceforth he had no home and no brother. He must go out into the world, a wanderer, and he walked abruptly from the room to pack up his few belongings, leaving the irate baronet to fight his own battle, a battle doomed at the outset.

Percival was smiling with a consciousness of his triumph and its security.

"I cannot see how anybody can call the will extraordinary," he said indolently "My father was naturally anxious that Mordenhale should be kept up as it ought to be, and knew that such a thing would be impossible if he squandered among you all the income which he himself found barely sufficient for the purpose. I do not pretend that there has been any personal preference in the matter. If I had been the second son I should have been in Grant's position. If I die without an heir he will be in mine."

"And in any case your sister's interests are totally ignored," said Charles, hotly. "I protest that there has been undue influence brought to bear on my father-in-law."

Percival smiled complacently.

"This is scarcely the place to discuss the question," he said, rising. "If you care to carry it into a court of law, I can trust the defence of the will to Mr. Murgatroyd. I myself am leaving England, as you know, and start immediately. So I am afraid that I must leave the discussion, if you want it here, to Mr. Murgatroyd, and your entertainment to my uncle, who has kindly promised to act as host for me while I make my final preparations."

He left the room as he spoke, with a complacent smile on his handsome, wicked face, which faded away abruptly as he reached the hall; for entering through the doorway was the man whom he had almost felt justified in looking upon as dead and removed from the path of his ambition.

(The conclusion of this story will appear in next Tuesday's issue.)

Jack: "It's all over. I'm a cooked goose." Tom; "Wouldn't she have you?" Jack: "Confound it, no. Cool as a cucumber about it." Tom: "Any chance of—er—her exercising woman's peculiar prerogative?" Jack; "Changing her mind? Not a bit." Tom: "I suppose, too, you had planned to buy her a ring if she'd have you?" Jack: "Yes, I suppose so." Tom: "Had your money all saved up for it, hadn't you?" Jack: "I should say so. Had £10 all ready." Tom: "Ah, yes. I say, Jack——" Jack: "Well?" Tom: "You—er—couldn't lend me—er—a fiver till you find some girl who will have you, could you?"

Pedlar: "Is the lady of the house in?" Mr. Newlywed: "Yes; but there isn't a thing in the wide world we want." Pedlar: "All right, sir; I'll call again when the honeymoon is over."

Fat Lady: "I am going to ride on one of the donkeys, and will pay for one for you if you like to accompany me." Small Boy: "Thankee, mum, but I'd rather sit here and laugh."

"Goodluck has had his salary raised; was it for extra work?" "Yes. He always listens when the proprietor tells his baby's smart sayings."

Mr. N. Peck: "I think if anyone is entitled to a pension it's me." Mudge: "You were never in war, were you?" Mr. N. Peck: "No, but the fellow my wife was engaged to got killed at El Teb."

"Dear me!" cried the nurse. "The baby has swallowed my railway ticket. What shall I do?" "Go and buy another right away," returned the mother. "I'm not going to have the baby snipped."

Susy is a young lady of five years and also of a very difficult disposition. The other day a visitor at her father's house found Susy weeping bitterly in the corner. "Why, what are you crying about?" she was asked. "'Cause all my b-brothers and sisters have a h-holiday, and I don't have ny. Boohoo!" "And why don't you have any holiday?" "Cause I—I don't go to school yet!"

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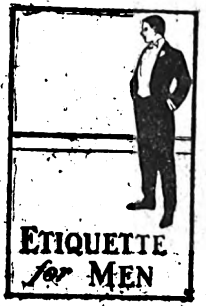

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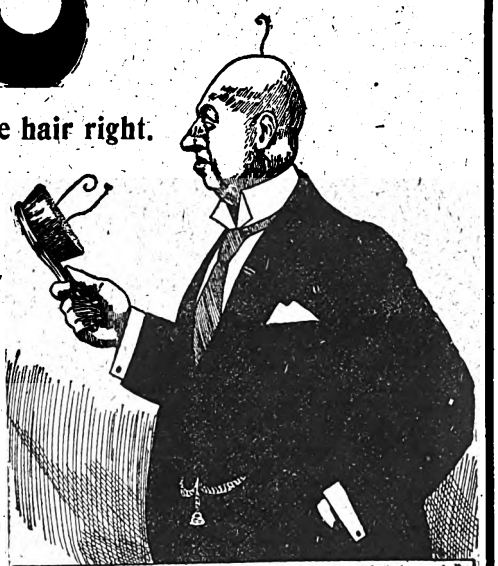

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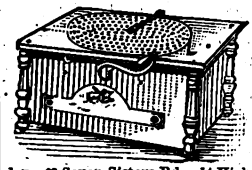

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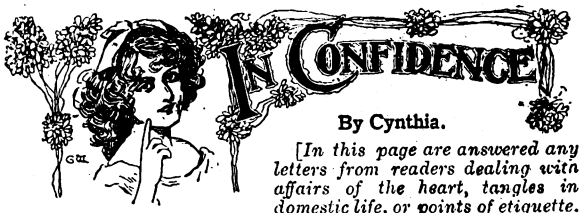

By Cynthia.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must in future be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

A Word in Advance.

Naturally before you accept me as your adviser in place of Miss Morris, you will like to have a word or two from me as to the lines on which I am going to try and carry on her work. First, let me say there are very few things on which I do not share the views of Miss Morris. Like her, I shall not try to sit in judgment on anyone, but hope to find myself in sympathy with all my clients, whom I shall try and advise from a human, and not a judicial point of view. Nobody need be afraid to write to me out of fear that I shall think them foolish. We are all foolish in some form or another, and, oftener than not, in matters of the heart. Though a woman, do not let that fact prevent those of the opposite sex, if they feel disposed, from writing to me. I am no enthusiast about "Woman's Rights," and shall never attempt to champion one sex against the other.

* * * *

Further, I hope to have among my clients, not only young unmarried couples, but also married ones. Love does not end with matrimony, but only enters on a new phase. Any troubles between married people, therefore, will have my earnest attention. If you have any puzzling question about etiquette, or want a little advice as to how to behave under strange circumstances, I will try and counsel you how I should act myself were I in your position. So let me, before entering on my duties, hope that, as in the case of Miss Morris, I and my readers will soon become fast friends, and know each other as well as is possible through the medium of cold print.

❦❦❦

A Changeable Girl.

"R. E. G." met a girl three years ago, but she told him she could not like him as he wished her to. The other day he met her again. She now confesses that she likes "R. E. G." much more than she did. However, "R. E. G." has his doubts. He thinks that if anybody has once taken a dislike to another, they can never really alter that sentiment however they try. He asks me is it so with girls?

* * * *

No, it is not so, "R. E. G." Three years ago you may have had mannerisms which did not appeal to the girl. Further, she may have then had different ideas of men to those she at present holds. Time brings great changes. On her meeting you again, she may have perceived something about you which did not originally strike her, and quite possibly may have completely changed her views. I have known of scores of cases of persons ultimately learning to grow very fond of those whom they have once disliked. As has been pointed out in *Pearson's Weekly*, what we call "dislike" is only too often another name for unconscious love. To instantly "like" a person often means that their attractiveness is only on the surface, and is never likely to go deeper. To "dislike" them often means that one does not understand them. Further acquaintance brings out points in their character which one does not observe at first. So do not let any theory you may entertain stand in the way of your intimacy with this girl.

A Unique Case.

"W. L. W."—Your case is extraordinary. I have every sympathy with you, as I fear you are the victim of a wrong train of thought. I should imagine you have never had a very extensive acquaintance with the opposite sex. Too many men shut themselves off from women solely out of nervousness and reserve. Continued absence of meeting with girls makes many men delude themselves that they are women-haters, whereas all that is really wrong with them is this shyness. Let me advise you to try your hardest to meet as many women as you can. They will bring out many good qualities which your aloofness hides from view. I do not prophecy that you will readily meet the woman of your heart, as you are very likely a man of a distinct temperament. But continued meetings with women will enable you to form a right judgment as to which type of the sex is most in sympathy with you.

❦❦❦

Boy and Girl Love.

"Dick" is eighteen, and is in love with a very attractive girl of seventeen. Naturally, he is too young to become engaged to her, but, at the same time, wishes to have some understanding with her. They have, therefore, arranged that, if they continue to know each other in four or five years' time, they will resume the intimacy. Their parents do not know of this, and "Dick" asks me if it is his duty to tell them.

* * * *

You are very sensible, "Dick," to wait until you are in a position to become engaged, and your arrangement is, I think, the best you could make. Of course, as neither of you are in any way bound to each other, I do not see that you need reveal your understanding to your parents unless you think necessary. You should convey to her parents that you would like their consent to your friendship with their daughter, and if they are willing that you should meet each other you need not reveal anything about an understanding until it becomes necessary. There is nothing at all unusual in friendships between boys and girls (if you will excuse the expression), and I believe most parents prefer their daughters to be in the society of those of their own age than older and often less sincere suitors.

❦❦❦

A Photo Question.

"L. M." (Johannesburg) writes: "Would it be etiquette for me to send a photo to a gentleman friend whom I have known for six months? He asked me for one before he went away, but I had not one to give him. Then he asked me to send it to him.

* * * *

It all depends on your relationship with the gentleman friend. If he is a chance acquaintance, it is not usual for a girl to send her photograph. If you have promised to do so, of course, send it, but if not I should wait until you know more of the gentleman. If you have been very friendly with him, there can be no harm in an exchange of photos.

❦❦❦

See a Doctor.

Lil is constantly troubled with styes in her eyes, and has tried many remedies without result. Can I recommend anything? Well, Lil, styes in the eye are only an outward sign of disordered blood. Certain persons are more liable to them than others. If you have one only occasionally, the cure recommended is bathing at intervals with hot water until the stye bursts. But if you are very much the victim of them, you should ask your doctor to prescribe medicine which will put your system in order. In your case I recommend the latter. The doctor's fee is often an economy, seeing what bad results spring from neglecting oneself.

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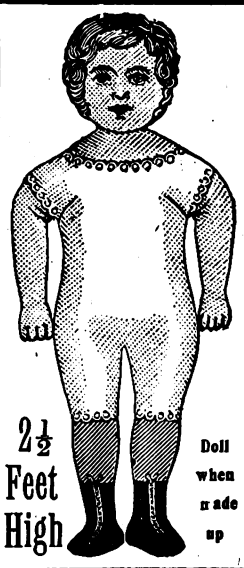
Such questions as these, for instance:—Can I learn how to hypnotise? Why is the art not more widely known? Just how should I set about it to learn at home, and practise it? Is instantaneous hypnotism possible? What is "personal magnetism," and how is it acquired? What is the mysterious secret of the wonderful success and influence of certain people who seem most ordinary in other ways? Is there really a scientific mode of life or thought which attracts health, success, and happiness? Is it possible to thus radically change one's whole life in a few days, as many claim to have done? Is it true that humanity in general is, in a sense, hypnotised by conventionality and thus blinded to splendid opportunities for success and happiness which lie on every hand? What can I do to arouse myself from this "hypnosis of custom," and rise to the attainments which my natural ability would warrant? What must I do to become a hypnotist? To develop a magnetic, attractive, forceful character? To acquire courage, ambition, cheerfulness? To kill fear and worry? To make myself a source of happiness and inspiration to my friends?

The reader will readily see that a book, especially a free book, dealing with such vitally interesting subjects as these is arousing a lively demand, and the edition provided by the Company is being rapidly exhausted. To obtain this book, which is entitled "The Power Within," it is only necessary to send your plainly written name and address, enclosing a penny stamp for return postage, to the Psychic Research Company (Dept. 437), Temple Chambers, Temple Avenue, E.C.

As the nature of the contents of this book is of such vital interest and importance to many, it is requested that no one write out of mere curiosity. It is desired to supply the book only to those having a genuine wish to be informed on these subjects.



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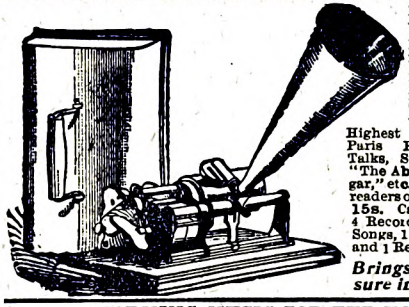

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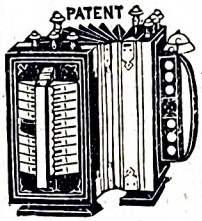

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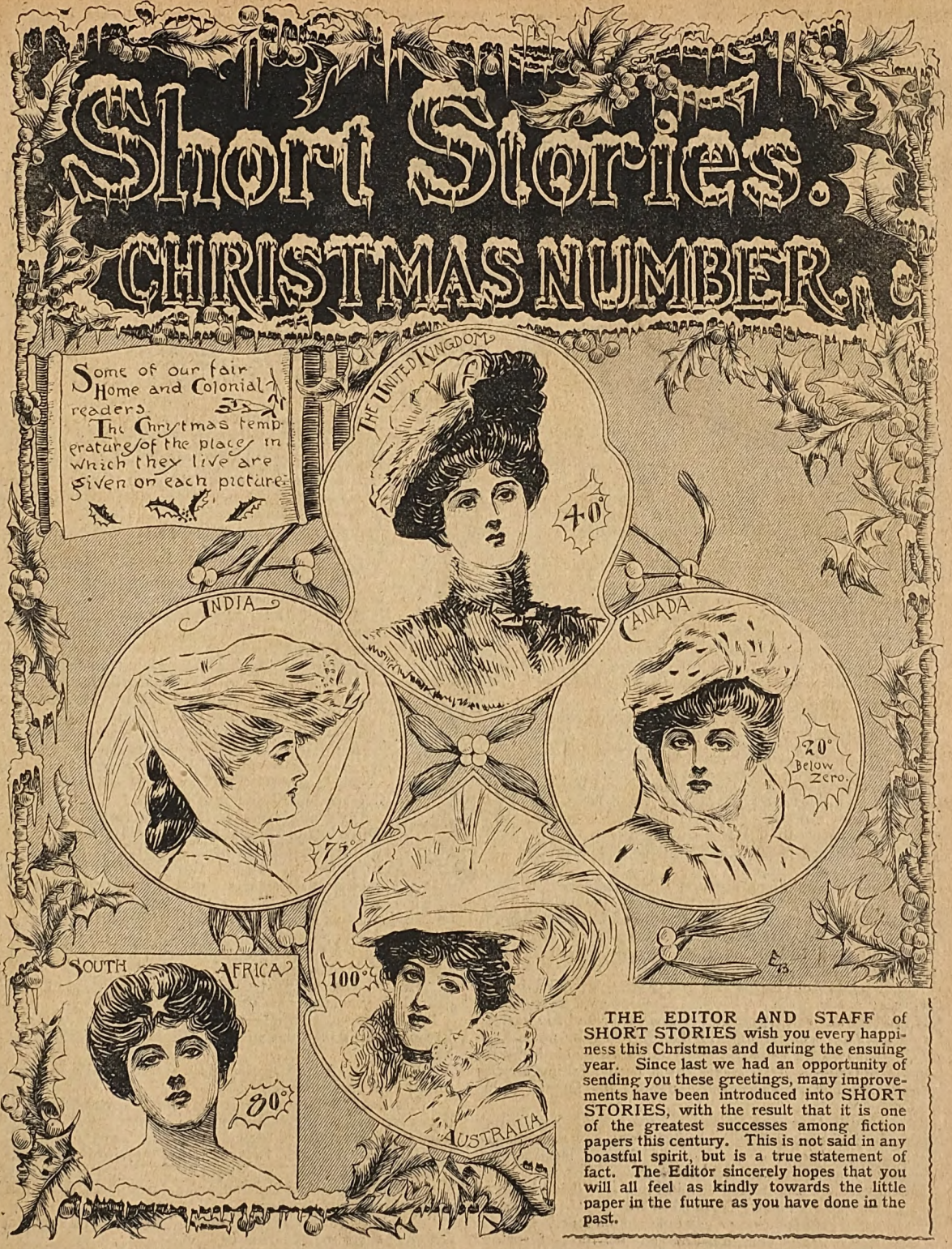

THE EDITOR AND STAFF of SHORT STORIES wish you every happiness this Christmas and during the ensuing year. Since last we had an opportunity of sending you these greetings, many improvements have been introduced into SHORT STORIES, with the result that it is one of the greatest successes among fiction papers this century. This is not said in any boastful spirit, but is a true statement of fact. The Editor sincerely hopes that you will all feel as kindly towards the little paper in the future as you have done in the past.

No. 729.] TWOPENCE. [Dec. 20, 1902.

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SYLVIA'S HOME-COMING.

A Tale of Two Christmas Eves.

On the Christmas Eve when their baby came to them there could not have been found in the length and breadth of England a happier couple than Miles Denver and Sylvia his wife; and, of course, they were perfectly positive that never since the beginning of the world had there been so adorable, so wonderful a baby as the wee thing with the crumpled rose-leaf face who lay in Sylvia's arms!

"I never thought anybody could be so exquisitely happy," the young mother whispered, looking up into her husband's face with shining eyes. "I don't feel as if I should ever know the meaning of the word unhappiness again, now that I have got—this," and she pressed her lips to the soft, downy head upon her arm, "this—and you," she added, putting out her free hand to Miles and drawing him down towards her.

"Are you happy, too, Miles?"

Was there just a note of wistfulness in her voice? Just a shadow of anxiety in her sweet eyes? If so, both were dispelled by the young husband's eager reply and impetuous kiss.

"I should rather think I was happy," he answered boyishly. "I never thought a baby could be such a—such a jolly interesting sort of thing; and really, Sylvia, she seems to like me, she's gripping hold of my finger like mad with one of those queer little hands of hers."

And then the two happy young things laughed for sheer gladness of heart, until the nurse bustled in and hustled Miles unceremoniously out of his wife's room, to sit in his own den downstairs and dream most marvellous dreams of the future of that strange new being—his daughter!

His thoughts went back to his first meeting with Sylvia, and their early wedded life. They had been married a year and a half, and he was convinced that no man ever had so sweet, so lovely a wife. What though his family had been not a little vexed with him for selecting as the mistress of his beautiful home a nobody—a girl who had even been working for her living! He had metaphorically snapped his fingers at his family.

It was quite true that Sylvia had worked for her living; indeed, he had first met her when she was governess in the house of some friends of his own, and he had been at once attracted by her lovely face, her gentle, gracious ways.

But it was not true to call her ill-bred, and to declare—as his mother had frequently declared—that Sylvia belonged to nobodies, and that some day she would shame Miles.

"Blood will out," old Mrs. Denver was fond of saying, "bad blood as well as good. And I warn you, Miles, Sylvia's blood is probably bad, therefore beware. I never heard yet of any girl of decent family who had no relations at all."

Irritated though Miles was by his mother's words, he was fain to confess to himself that Sylvia's absence of relations of any kind or degree had struck him as strange, and sitting over the fire to-night, meditating on his new happiness, he thought again of his wife's lonely position, and wished for her sake that she could have had people of her own to be with her now.

Thinking this, he sprang suddenly to his feet.

"Thoughtless brute!" he exclaimed. "I might have suggested her having her own old-nurse instead of the creature my mother has sent to look after her. I wonder Sylvia didn't suggest Nurse Browne herself," and a puzzled frown crossed Miles' face as he remembered the affection with which Sylvia spoke of the old nurse she loved, and whom she insisted upon going to see at more or less regular intervals.

Nurse Browne lived in Surrey, and Sylvia's regular pilgrimages thither had been a source of a certain mild banter on her husband's part; but she had never allowed him to accompany her on her visits, declaring that Nurse would be terrified and overwhelmed by such an honour.

On that Christmas Eve when baby Sylvia came, Miles, sitting by the fire and calling Nurse Browne to mind, leapt, as has been said, to his feet, and repeating to himself that he was a brute, ran upstairs two steps at a time and softly re-entered his wife's room. She greeted him with a lovely smile, and held out her hand whilst the nurse advanced, frowning, from the dressing-room.

"Darling," Miles bent over Sylvia, "it has just dawned upon me what a thoughtless fool I am."

"Has it?" she laughed gently, and stroked his hand. "My dear old boy, what makes you abuse yourself?"

"Why, sweetheart, sitting down in my den by the fire, I began to think of you, and then I thought of Nurse Browne, and——"

"What?" A quiver came into Sylvia's voice, a curious intent look crept over her face.

"Yes, dear," Miles went on unheeding, "I remembered your old nurse, and your love for her, and I called myself names for never having suggested to you to have her here now that——"

"*Have her here?*" Sylvia's voice rose into a thin little scream. "Why, Miles, Miles!" She breathed quickly, and her eyes gleamed feverishly; an uncontrollable agitation seemed to have seized her.

"Wouldn't you like her to come?" the husband continued, a note of surprise in his voice.

"Like her to come? No, no; I mean it—is—impossible." Sylvia controlled herself by a tremendous effort, and the colour came and went upon her face. "Impossible," she repeated faintly.

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My darling, I never meant to upset you so," Miles exclaimed remorsefully, "I only thought——"

"Oh, no!" she said, still speaking with big panting breaths, "I am not upset; at least, I mean—I think I was just surprised—startled. Old Nurse—is—is too old—to—to leave home."

That tremendous effort after self-control was making Sylvia very white and tired, and Miles, terrified by the result of his words, hastily summoned the wrathful nurse to his wife's side, and was turning away when Sylvia's voice said weakly,

"You—you won't send for Mrs.—for old Nurse, Miles, will you? I—she would fidget me; and I—I only want you, dear."

The smile that accompanied the words somewhat neutralised the effect of the strange, frightened look in her big blue eyes, but the whole incident left a curious impression on Miles' mind, an impression he only shook off when, on Sylvia's recovery, she herself laughed over what she called her "silly, hysterical behaviour over old Nurse."

"I *was* a goose," she said, clinging to Miles' arm and looking up bewitchingly into his face; "fancy my making such a fuss over poor old Nanna, as we used to call her! Only, dear, she is so old and—and fussy, and I imagined her worrying about me, and I pictured your being away all day, fetching her, and—and—it gave me the horrors."

After that Miles forget the affair altogether, or only remembered it when Sylvia went off on one of her regular visits to Mrs. Browne, visits which took up a whole day of every month. And as time slipped away the memory of it also slipped entirely from Miles' mind, not to be reawakened until the Autumn that preceded baby Sylvia's third birthday,

* * * * *

On an October morning nearly three years after her baby girl's birth, Sylvia stood looking out of her bedroom window with a troubled look on her face.

"Oh, I wish she wasn't coming! I wish she wasn't coming!" The words were uttered aloud, though there was no one to hear them. "I distrust Clara Metcalfe; she has always spied on me!"

Sylvia's blue eyes clouded. She no longer saw the loveliness of the Autumn world outside; the handsome face of her husband's cousin—the widowed Mrs. Metcalfe—danced before her vision instead, and seemed to mock her with triumphant smiles.

"It's jolly of Clara to want to come and spend a long time with us," Miles' voice exclaimed, as he entered his wife's room. "Clara and I have always been like brother and sister, and I shall like her to be with us for Christmas. She will be a companion, too, for you, darling, now that I have so much to see to at the other end of the estate."

"Yes," Sylvia said mechanically; whilst the thought of Clara's lengthy visit made her heart sink like lead. "I hope she—won't be dull here."

"Dull? Not she! Clara is never dull, she always has plenty on hand."

"Yes, plenty," mused the young wife bitterly, when Miles had vanished again. "She is always busy over other people's affairs. God grant she may not want to find——"

Her musings broke off suddenly, as she caught sight of her little daughter running across the lawn hoop in hand. Sylvia leant far out of the window to watch the child, a smile flickering over her face, a smile that fled quickly as she drew back into the room again.

"My little child!" she whispered passionately, "my little child. How could I bear it—if you ever knew—if Miles ever knew, if—— Ah, I wish Clara were not coming, I have a presentiment of evil. I feel as if a snake were coming into my house that will never leave it till she has wrecked my happiness!"

* * * * *

Clara Metcalfe sat alone in the luxurious spare bedroom at Denver Manor on the first night of her arrival there. Nearly three years had passed since she had last seen Miles and Sylvia, and during those three years her short married life abroad and the early months of her widowhood had kept her out of touch with her English relations.

During their boy and girl days, she and Miles had been—as Miles had told his wife—like brother and sister; at least, the sentiment on Miles' side had been purely brotherly; on Clara's a deeper feeling had existed, and to this fact, perhaps, was due the undoubted antagonism that existed between Miles' cousin and Miles' wife.

Clara's one previous visit, paid to the Denvers in the early days of their marriage, had left no favourable impression of the beautiful woman upon Sylvia's mind. Clara's inquisitiveness about herself, her past, her relations, had irritated the young wife; in her own mind she had designated Miles' cousin "a spy," and Clara's marriage and removal to foreign countries had produced in Sylvia a great sense of relief.

On the other hand, Clara, beneath all her outward professions of affection towards Miles' wife, hated the girl because she had won his love, and bore her a secret grudge for having dared to become his wife.

To-night, at Denver Manor, Mrs. Metcalfe looked at her own dazzling reflection in the glass, and laughed aloud.

"My poor Miles," she said, "you would have done better to make *me* the mistress of your house, instead of that poor, puny, silly thing with the great, frightened eyes. And what is her twopenny love worth, in comparison with *mine?*"

She drew herself up to her superb height and laughed again, a laugh half of scorn, half of triumph, as the light flashed upon the insolent beauty of her face, and shone upon the golden glory of her hair.

"The silly fool has found out my secret!" she went on, a dark look crossing her face. "She has found out that I love Miles. I saw it in her eyes to-night as she watched her husband's face and mine. Perhaps she has realised, too, that my love is to hers what sunlight is to moonlight; perhaps she knows that in a battle between us *I must win.* And—if—she—has found out my secret—I will find out hers," she added slowly, as she unclasped the diamonds from her throat. "I could swear she has a secret; I saw that, too, in her frightened eyes, and I swear I will find it out!"

* * * * *

"Dear Miles, she is so young; sweet, indeed, I grant you, but so young to have so much liberty!"

Clara's soft voice spoke the words as she and Miles paced up and down the rose garden on a November morning.

"Much liberty?" Miles looked surprised. "I don't understand, Clara. In any case, I trust my wife absolutely, but she rarely does anything without me. What do you mean?"

A perceptible hesitation followed the words, and Mrs. Metcalfe traced patterns on the path with the stick she carried.

"Miles," she said suddenly, raising her eyes candidly to his, "I can't bear to make you uneasy, or—or raise doubts in your mind, but—*have you ever been with Sylvia to see that old nurse of whom she speaks?*"

Such significance rang in her accents that Miles stopped dead and stared at her, a sudden recollection sweeping over him of Sylvia's strange conduct when he had suggested that Mrs. Browne might be a comfort to her.

"What do you mean, Clara?" he said sternly. "What are you trying to insinuate?"

"Miles—dear Miles"—she laid a soft hand on his arm—"do not be angry. It is for Sylvia's own good and yours that I speak otherwise. It is a thankless, distasteful task, but are you sure *who* Sylvia goes to see on that monthly visit to Surrey?"

"Of course I am sure!" Irritation born of a tiny

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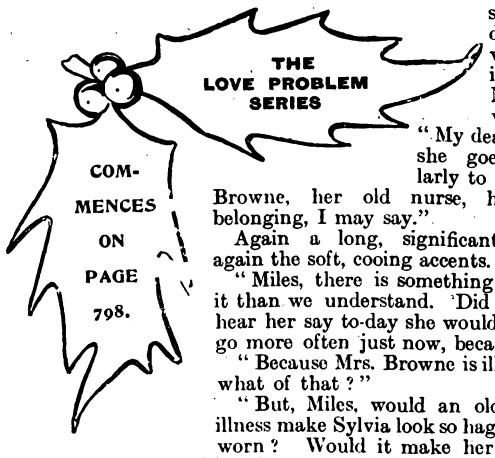

speck of doubt was audible in Miles' voice.

"My dear Clara, she goes regularly to see Mrs. Browne, her old nurse, her only belonging, I may say."

Again a long, significant pause, again the soft, cooing accents.

"Miles, there is something more in it than we understand. Did you not hear her say to-day she would have to go more often just now, because——"

"Because Mrs. Browne is ill! Well, what of that?"

"But, Miles, would an old *nurse's* illness make Sylvia look so haggard—so worn? Would it make her start at every sound? Would it bring that terrible fear and anguish into her eyes? Ah, wait—listen to me a moment! I am a woman of the world—she is not. I can see she is in some difficulty, some—some——"

"Then I will go and ask her about it, and help her!" Miles cried impetuously. "You are imagining absurdities, Clara. What difficulty could my wife ——?"

His voice dropped into silence before the strange glance in Clara's eyes.

"Go and ask her by all means," his cousin said slowly, "and by her manner when she answers you, you will be able to judge whether I am exaggerating or no. For the last week and more she has been restless, worried, anxious. The arrival of the post has excited her almost beyond control, and now she says she must go often—often—to see this Mrs. Browne. Miles, believe your old cousin who has been like your sister—*something is wrong!*"

Looking into her exquisite face, seeing the witchery of her eyes, hearing the shake in her lovely voice, what wonder that Miles, being a man, fell under the spell? What wonder that he listened more and more attentively to the words his cousin spoke, whilst they paced up and down the rose-garden, watched, unknown to themselves, by a white, anguished face from the window of Sylvia's room; what wonder that at last, when they turned towards the house, he had yielded to Clara's persuasion and agreed to follow a line of conduct which, in his own heart, he knew to be cowardly and mean?

That evening, after dinner, he drew Sylvia into what he called his "den," a cosy room lined with books, in which the husband and wife had spent many a happy hour together.

"Dear," he said, trying, not very successfully, to keep from his voice some of the hardness and irritation welling up in his heart, "you said to-day you must go and see your old nurse, Mrs. Browne, to-morrow, because she is ill. I have never seen her, I should like to go with you and see what can be done to alleviate the old woman's sufferings. I think I will be your escort to-morrow!"

Sylvia's face grew white, she swayed where she stood, an awful fear looked out of her eyes.

"No—no," she gasped, her hand going up to the collar of her dress, as though to loosen it. "I—you—it is impossible," and she breathed heavy, panting breaths, Miles scanning her intently the while.

"Very well," he answered with assumed carelessness, (Clara had taught her lesson well) "I didn't mean to upset you, dear."

"It—it—isn't that," she panted out. "I—I am tired to-night—it is silly," she tried to laugh. "Why should what you said have upset me? That would be absurd. Only—I don't think I could let you come to see poor Nanna—she—she is so ill—it would frighten her!"

Sylvia's eyes, still wide and terrified, searched her husband's face, but could not read the meaning of the expression there He had learnt his lesson very well indeed; Clara Metcalfe was a past mistress in the art of deceiving!

"Very well, dear," he said carelessly again, "I don't really mind. Go alone and stay with the old woman as long as you like."

And in the great relief that surged over Sylvia's soul, she forgot to note the strange look in her husband's face, the suspicion in his eyes. She even failed to observe that he left the room without giving her his customary kiss!

* * * * *

"Hush—wait! I heard her voice then!"

"I don't like this sort of thing, Clara; it is mean—it is hateful! I shall go straight up to the cottage and declare myself—and——"

"And spoil everything?"

The last voice, soft as it was, held also a note of derision.

"These things are mean and horrible, I agree, but deceit must be met by deceit! Do you intend that your wife should go on living a lie? If you wish to discover the truth, remain silent!"

Silence fell indeed over the two figures who crouched behind a high hedge that bounded a cottage garden. Miles' face was drawn and white with emotion, upon Clara's hovered a little smile of triumph that melted into sorrowful distress whenever Miles' head turned towards her.

From the cottage over the hedge came a subdued sound of voices, a man's low and deep, and a girl's, and, in the clear, sweet accents of the latter, Miles recognised his wife's! The words were inaudible at first, but presently there came the sound of an opening door, and the two watchers crouched further down behind the sheltering hedge.

Yes, it was Sylvia who issued from the cottage—the cottage to which Miles and his cousin had been directed by the porter at the station as Mrs. Browne's. Sylvia came out, her face white as death, her eyes streaming with tears, and close on her heels followed a man, tall, fair, handsome, but with disease, nay, death itself, plainly stamped upon his face.

"You will come again?" the man said, and his voice was hoarse and choked with emotion.

"Can you ask me that, Dick?" Sylvia turned and flung out her hands to him wildly. "Would I not be here always, always—if—if——"

"If you could leave your fine husband, and put up with a cottage," the words were half a laugh, half a sneer.

Miles nearly leapt from his hiding-place, but Clara held him back.

"Ah, don't, Dick, don't, don't!" Sylvia cried. "Miles is so good to me—so good! All the comforts you have are owing to him—all——"

"Are they, though?" muttered Miles with a savage oath, and Clara put her hand hastily over his mouth.

"I would come to you every day, if I could, my darling," Sylvia's voice went on. "I cannot bear to be away from you now, not for a day—not for an hour—when——" Her words ended in a storm of bitter weeping.

"My dearie, you must go now, or you'll be late," came an anxious voice from the doorway, as an old woman appeared on the scene.

"Mrs. Browne," Clara whispered.

"I am going, Nanna, I am really going." Sylvia's voice was still broken by sobs. "I wish I could stay—I wish I could stay, but I must go, or Miles——"

She broke off and suddenly flung her arms round the fair man's neck.

"Good-bye, Dick, my darling," she said, "till next week—only till next week, dear, then your own little Sylvia will come back. Take care of yourself—take care of him, Nanna—till then!" And drawing herself out of the tall man's close embrace, Sylvia passed slowly down the path and out of sight, weeping bitterly as she went.

But that evening, when she reached Denver Manor an hour later than Miles and Clara had reached it, she found a note awaiting her from her husband; she found that he and Clara and her child had left the house a quarter of an hour before her arrival.

Miles' note was very short

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"*I have found you out. You wish to stay with your Dick for always; you are free to do so. I never wish to see your face again.*"

* * * * *

It was Christmas Eve, and Baby Sylvia's third birthday, but as the child stood looking round the library, whither her nurse had brought her, a forlorn feeling stirred within her that something had gone very wrong indeed with her little world. Nothing, indeed, had seemed quite right since mummy went away—even daddy had been quite, quite different, and instead of the glad greeting to which she had always been accustomed, Baby Sylvia found nowadays a silent father, and rooms that, even to her infant soul, conveyed a sense of desolation.

Miles sat by the table now, his head buried in his hands, heedless of the entrance of his little daughter. His form looked bent and aged, there were white threads in his dark hair—marks of the agony he had gone through during the months that had passed since he had, as he expressed it, "found Sylvia out."

In the corner of the room the child could just see a tiny Christmas-tree, waiting to be lighted for her benefit; over the mantelpiece hung a large portrait of her mother—a portrait which Miles refused to have taken down, but at which he looked every day in exceeding bitterness of soul.

The child's step on the floor made him lift his head, his eyes were dim with tears, and the little one crossed quickly to his side and laid her hand on his knee.

"Daddy crying?" she said in her soft little voice. "Whatever's the matter, daddy?"

"It's nothing, darling!" he answered, mastering his emotion. "Daddy was only remembering—other Christmases when—when——" His voice shook, his eyes glanced involuntarily at the lovely pictured face over the mantelpiece.

"When mother was here too?" the child asked wistfully, her glance following his. "Pretty, pretty mummy!" she whispered, kissing her hand to the smiling girl in the portrait. "Where is mother to-night, daddy?"

The earnest words, the pressure of the little hands on his knee, the wistful, upturned face, struck Miles like a blow. He sprang to his feet and began to pace the room restlessly.

"I don't know!" he muttered. "I don't know where she is. If I knew—if I could find her, I would forgive all—all—I——"

He lifted his eyes again to the lovely face on the wall, which seemed to look down at him reproachfully, and again he repeated brokenly:

"I would forgive all, Sylvia! I would forgive all, if——" Then he sank down by the table again, and once more buried his face in his hands.

No word, no sign had come from the wife he had lost since that fatal day when he and Clara had watched her from behind the high hedge.

Urged thereto by his cousin, under whose spell he still lay, he had written that letter to his wife on his hurried return from the Surrey expedition; urged also by her he had left the house before Sylvia's return, going to London to his mother's house with Clara and the child.

And then had come a sick revolt against himself, a sick loathing of his beautiful cousin, and a wild, intolerable longing for his wife—his Sylvia, his darling.

A journey to the Surrey cottage had revealed an empty, deserted house, and all his inquiries in the neighbourhood elicited only the fact that Mrs. Brown, the gentleman who lived with her, and a pretty young lady had all gone away together, whither no one could tell.

Then Miles returned to his desolate home, insisted upon baby Sylvia's return there also, and utterly refused to allow his mother, his sisters, or his cousin, Mrs. Metcalfe, to come near him.

"You all hated her—my darling!" he wrote; "leave me alone in my grief. My child and I will comfort one another."

And so the days had dragged wearily by until Christmas Eve and Baby Sylvia's birthday came together, and Miles strove to arouse himself from the deadly lethargy of sorrow to make his little daughter happy.

But the child's wistful words had unmanned him.

"Where is mother to-night?" she had said in her clear, baby voice; and Miles could only echo the words drearily: "Where, indeed?"

There was a long silence in the library after that outburst of grief from Miles, and baby Sylvia stood beside him watching him with loving, troubled glances.

"Won't mummy come home for Baby Sylvia's birthday?" she whispered suddenly; and Miles lifted his tear-stained face and caught the child to his breast.

"I wish to God she would!" he cried. "I wish to God she would! Ah! Sylvia—Sylvia—Sylvia! come back to me!"

The child, frightened by his vehemence, clung to him closely, and the door opened and shut softly unheard by them both.

"I wish we knew where mummy was," the little girl said. "Baby Sylvia dreadful frightened—wants her mummy!"

There was a little rustle of skirts, a broken sob, a low exclamation, and all in a moment someone was kneeling by Miles' side, gripping at his arm with clinging, feverish touch, and a voice said breathlessly:

"Ah! Miles, Miles, say it again; say 'Sylvia, come back!' See! She has come—I have come back to you, Miles—to ask you——"

Her sentence had no ending. Miles lifted his dazed and miserable face from Baby Sylvia's golden curls, and looked down at the kneeling form at his feet. And when he saw her white, worn face, her dim eyes, the trembling of her sweet mouth, everything was forgotten but his love for her, and he stooped and gathered her into his arms, murmuring:

"Thank God! Oh! thank God—my wife!"

Presently, when they were calmer, she said brokenly:

"Miles, I crept in an hour ago by the back door, and I have been long, so long in the hall listening to your dear voice and my baby's. And I heard you say 'I would forgive all.' Ah! my dear, you have much to forgive; but not what you thought. I have never been untrue to you, my husband, in word or thought." Her voice was very grave, her eyes met her husband's frankly.

They were sitting side by side upon the sofa, baby Sylvia gathered close into her mother's arm, and Miles looked into his wife's face narrowly.

"Then, who," he said—"what—who was Dick? What did it all mean?"

She answered: "Miles, I *have* deceived you—deceived you always, but not as you feared. Dick was my brother, my only brother. He—he is dead!" She glanced at her black garments. "He had committed a crime for which he should have suffered punishment, but—— Oh! Miles, we hid him—old Nanna and I—and nobody ever knew where he was. I did not dare to tell you that my brother was a forger. I did not dare let you know the truth; it was cowardly, it was wrong of me, but—I was afraid! And then he became ill, desperately ill, ill unto death. It was at that time you found out, Miles! His illness was breaking my heart, but having deceived you so long I was afraid to tell you the truth then. When I found your awful letter—oh! Miles it nearly killed me; but Dick was dying; I was afraid lest you should discover his identity and insist on his punishment. I think I was mad! Nanna and I took him away and nursed him till he died; and pride and terror combined prevented me from exonerating myself in your eyes. I hated to think you had distrusted me; I knew it was Clara's doing, and I was heartbroken! To-night, my baby's birthday, I *had* to come home—home to you both, and now—and now——"

"And now we will never distrust each other again, sweetheart. We will never let a living soul come between us any more. There is only one woman I love in this whole wide world, and her name is—Sylvia!" **L. G. Moberley.**

An Extravagant Man.

FATHER: "Yes, I admit your lover has a good income, but he has very expensive tastes, very." Daughter: "You amaze me; what does he ever want that is so expensive?" Father: "Well, you for one thing."

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A Fairy's Revenge.

A Christmas Pantomime Story.

"Look here, you two girls!" said the stage manager warningly; "if there's any more of this sort of thing at show-time, you'll have to take a week's notice, both of you!"

The "sort of thing" consisted of a noisy passage of tongue—almost of arms—between the two ladies referred to; both of whom were in what is theatrically known as the "front row."

The feud had gone on all through the rehearsals of the pantomime at the "Coliseum," having originated in the determined endeavour of Hannah Dent to lure from his allegiance the affianced lover of Cissy Lane.

The gentleman in question was a prosperous young "coster" on the south side, known to the general public in the neighbourhood of the Old Kent Road as "King Jack" and the "Coster King."

The rivalry between the two coryphees for the valuable affections of his coster majesty, had culminated on Boxing Night, when, owing to the absence of the principal solo dancer, through sudden illness, Cissy Lane was hurriedly requisitioned to fill the gap.

Professional jealousy is not an altogether unknown quantity in theatrical life, but in this particular instance there was only one voice raised in angry disapproval. With the majority of the ballet girls, Cissy Lane, by reason of her happy good-humour, and kindliness of disposition, was a great favourite, and no one, except Hannah Dent, envied her her good fortune.

"I've been longer at it than she has," spitefully whispered the latter to her neighbour, as the Fairies of the Glen stood in a half circle and watched the evolutions of Cissy as Fairy Queen. "There'll be no bearing her now! I can't make out what Marlow" (the stage manager) "sees in her!"

"Oh! Cissy's a daisy!" whispered back the neighbour, glad of an opportunity of setting down the maliciously-minded Hannah. "An' as for her dancin', there ain't no one in this show as is fit to chalk 'er shoes for 'er!"

"*Rats!*" was Hannah Dent's elegant rejoinder, and at the same moment Cissy finished her *pas seul* at the *O.P.* corner with a succession of rapid pirouettes, that elicited a perfect storm of applause from the crowded house.

It was then that, standing in the proscenium opening, close behind Hannah Dent, Cissy—never one to start a quarrel or altercation—was goaded to reply to an aggravating remark made by her rival over her shoulder.

One word led to another, resulting, as has been said, in a warning reprimand from the stage manager.

Still, things might probably have simmered down to at least something in the shape of a truce, but for a definite statement of Hannah's that she had in her pocket a letter from Jack Martindale to herself.

"Jack write to you!" said Cissy hoarsely, her eyes ablaze with angry disbelief. "I don't believe you! You're a wicked woman!"

"Don't spoil your beauty, my dear, by gettin' in a tear! I've got it, an' I'll show it you in a minute, when we're off!"

"You can't! You can't! My Jack wouldn't look at you!"

"Oh, indeed, wouldn't he? Well, p'r'aps you'll alter your tune when I tells you as he's arsked me to drive with him to Greenwich on Sunday! All right, Mr. Marlow" (to the stage manager), "I'll shut up! I've said all as I wants to!"

"That's lucky!" Marlow replied. "It will be as well to mind what I've told you."

"Mind!" Cissy hissed in the other's ear, as the manager passed out of hearing. "You show me that letter—if you can!"

Then everybody was on the move for a concluding wild dance as the scene closed in.

The dressing-room accommodation of the "Coliseum" was not by any means worthy of praise, being alike limited, dirty, and inconvenient.

Cissy Lane, as merely a temporary substitute for the *première danseuse*, was, of course, still reckoned only as one of the rank-and-file, and so far as dressing arrangements went, was treated accordingly.

As Hannah Dent pressed into the low, narrow room, in the train of the muslin-skirted crowd, she saw Cissy standing by the rickety bench, which did duty for a dressing-table, her face set and white, and in her eyes a look of stony expectation.

By this time all the other girls were full of the matter, sympathy for Cissy being, however, almost the universal feeling amongst them.

"Show me that letter!" said Cissy at length, mechanically.

"What! in front of 'em all?"

"Show me the letter!" the girl repeated, this time in a slightly raised tone.

"Oh, I'm agreeable! if you are, my dear! Only I thought p'r'aps as you wouldn't care to give yourself away-like!"

"The letter!"

"'You needn't think as I'm goin' to let you read it! You know's Jack's writin'. Well, an' how he signs his name. There you are, my dear!" (folding a letter, which she drew from the bosom of her dress, so as to show the signature only, and holding it close to Cissy's face), "is that anythin' like it, eh?"

One glance was enough! She had had only too many of Jack's labouredly-penned notes left for her at the stage-door, not to be able to recognise the writing.

For a moment the assembled girls looked for their badgered, insulted comrade to turn and rend her persecutor. And, to a girl, they would have applauded any such action on Cissy's part, and stood by her. But to their astonishment she said nothing. She just put both her hands up to her face, and seemed to shrink into herself.

Long after Hannah Dent's departure from the theatre, she stood still in her stage finery alone, and unmindful of everything around her. By-and-bye the wardrobe woman, an especially good friend of hers, came into the room.

"Good gracious! My dear, not gone yet? What on earth is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Smith," she replied wearily.

"Nonsense, child, don't tell me! Why you're crying! And if you stands 'ere much longer in them flimsy fal-lals, you'll ketch your death-o' cold."

"Never mind me, Mrs. Smith," she said. "I'm going to dress now."

"I should think so indeed, an' a smart young man a' wearin' 'is boots out, to say nothin' of 'is 'cart, walkin' up an' down outside, like a caged zoological."

"Tell him to go away, Mrs. Smith! Please tell him to go away!"

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"Now then, Cissy!" said the old woman, suddenly putting out her hands and gripping fast hold of both the poor Fairy Queen's. "You'll have to tell me what's up! What's Jack Martindale bin doin' of as you wants to chivey 'im?"

"It's not him so much," sobbed Cissy, "it's Hannah Dent."

"Well, what's that hussy's game?"

"She's taken Jack from me!" said Cissy, completely breaking down, and laying her head on Mrs. Smith's sympathetic shoulder. "He's written her a letter, asking her to go to Greenwich with him on Sunday, and—and I've seen it!"

"Seen the letter?"

"Well, I saw his name at the bottom of it."

"That's nothin'! It's a trick of that artful piece of goods, Hannah Dent. I knows 'er! Come, dress yourself quick! child, an' go an' arsk Jack straight, if 'e's off with you an' on with Hannah? It's the only way to get at the truth of it. For my part, I don't believe Jack Martindale would do such a dirty trick, while I *do* believe as Hannah Dent wouldn't stop short o' murder even if she 'ad 'er knife into anybody."

But when, a quarter of an hour later, Cissy, piloted by Mrs. Smith, passed through the stage-door into the street, there was no one there; no signs of Jack.

"Well, my dear, I don't want to hurt your feelin's, but you've only got yourself to blame. But let's arsk Tims! 'e'll know. 'Ere, Tims (to the door-keeper) seen anybody a waitin' outside?"

"Yes. Jack Martindale. He arsked me, 'alf-a-dozen times, when Cissy Lane were comin'. He were tearin' mad-like when I told 'im as I didn't know. Ten minutes ago Hannah Dent come along an' they went away together, Old Kent Road way, though I must say as 'e didn't seem as if 'e wanted to go much. But she whispered 'im, an' laughed a bit, and e' went off with 'er."

"Come along, Cissy!" said Mrs. Smith grimly. "Good night, Tims! Now look a-here," she said, when they were out in the main road. "You leave this to me! Go you home, an' go to bed. If I don't spring Hannah Dent's trap, and catch 'er in it finely, so as she can't easy set it again, my name ain't Martha Smith."

* * * * *

When Mrs. Martha Smith once put her hand to anything, she, as a rule, was successful.

For more than an hour that night, bitterly cold as it was, and inclined to snow, she traversed the length of the Old Kent Road in quest of Coster Jack.

Just as she was about to give up her search, she saw him coming along the almost deserted pavement, his hands in his pockets, his head bent, and about him altogether a curious air of depression. In common with most folks in the district she knew him, and did not hesitate now to accost him.

"Good evenin', Mr. Jack Martindale!" she said, with dangerous pleasantness.

Taking his pipe out of his mouth he returned "Good evenin'," and made to pass on his way.

"Can I have a word with you?" said the old wardrobe woman, barring his passage.

"A word with me? Course you can, if you wants one. Wot is it?"

"Oh, I shan't keep you long! I wants to ask you a matter of two simple questions."

"Arsk away! Don't be long about it, for I wants to get to bed. 'As to be up at four in the mornin', you know."

"All right. Well, did you ever write a letter to Hannah Dent?"

"Well, if you wants to know pertickler, though I can't see as it's any business of yours, Mrs. Smith—I did write Hannah Dent a letter."

"Oh, you did! Well, p'r'aps you'll tell me, as is Cissy Lane's good friend, poor girl, if you've done with her, an' 'a' taken up with that shame-faced hussy, Hannah Dent?"

"Have I done wot?" exclaimed the other. "Why, you're mad, Mother Smith; it's Cissy as 'as chucked me up!"

"Not she! She's too fond of yer! Will you tell me what you said in your letter to Hannah Dent?"

"I don't mind tellin' you. I just said as I'd 'eard from one of the girls at the theatre as she were givin' Cissy too much chin-music, an' I tells 'er as she'll 'ave to stop it. That's all!"

"On yer gospel?"

"Yes."

"Jack Martindale, I believes yer! Shake hands! Now listen to me! I'll see Cissy to-morrer mornin' first thing, an' tell 'er the truth. You come round as usual after the show in the evenin', an' if you don't then, between you, make it up, so as it can't come undone agin', why you're no man, an' Cissy's a little fool!"

The next morning Mrs. Smith carried out faithfully her part of the programme, leaving Cissy in a state of eager longing for the moment of reconciliation.

But, like many another anticipated life-pleasure, that moment was delayed beyond almost the bearing-limit of two really loving hearts.

* * * * *

In the scene of the Fairy Glen, torches were used to give a weird effect in the semi-darkness. At one point in the action each ballet-girl, previously provided with an electric torch, which up to then she had held behind her, suddenly produced it, and held it arm-high, above her head.

By some mischance, on the second night of the pantomime, the wire attached to the portable battery, concealed in the wings on Hannah Dent's shoulders, became fused, and before it was realised what had occurred, the unfortunate girl's costume of light material was in a blaze.

Shriek upon shriek went up, as the victim of the accident ran hither and thither, to her own danger, and the danger of those about her similarly attired.

Before the curtain could be lowered, a scene was witnessed by both audience and stage hands which neither will ever forget.

At the left wing, half way up the stage, stood a throne, with about it voluminous hangings.

Towards this Cissy Lane was seen rushing. Tearing down one of the curtains, she first deftly dodged the now maddened Hannah, and then, throwing the curtain over the other's head, clasped her arms round it and her, and rolled the object of her heroic efforts frantically to-and-fro upon the stage.

When both rescuer and rescued were medically examined at the adjacent hospital, it was found that Cissy Lane's arms and neck were fearfully burnt, while Hannah's state gave very little hope that she would ever recover.

That this latter prediction was falsified was due more to splendid nursing than to anything else, and to the cheering encouragement of her bed-neighbour, Cissy Lane.

Cissy left the hospital first, but she never missed a visiting day, when she would take her quondam enemy such little luxuries as the rules allowed.

But Hannah came to look, not for the fruit or other delicacies, but for Cissy's smile and word of tender sympathy.

She did not as yet say much, but lay apparently quite content to listen and to gaze.

One afternoon Jack Martindale, at Hannah's special request, accompanied Cissy.

Association with Cissy had rubbed down all that was rough and coarse in his nature, and any feeling of dislike and contempt, which he might otherwise have had for the author of the cruel plot to spoil his and Cissy's lives, was lost in her sufferings, and for her prospects of a maimed and useless future.

She did not say much even now.

Taking the hands of Jack Martindale and her sweetheart between her own, she looked up at them, her eyes swimming with tears, and just said, "I *do* arsk your pardon, both of yer! Jack, you've got as true an angel as ever's up in Heaven!"

"I knows it!" said Jack.

"But angels have wings, Jack," said Cissy, feeling that she must say something.

"Has they?" he answered her. "Well, I'm mortal glad you hasn't, as I'm sure now as you'll never be able to fly away from me."

Ralph Enderby.

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Mistletoe.

A Christmas Story.

It was the morning of Christmas Eve. The ground rang hard underfoot and the newly risen sun, shining red and wintry through the black, bare trees, made the frost-whitened lawns and hedges sparkle as though they were powdered with jewels.

Striding across the grass went Frank Sinclair, twenty-one, manly and handsome. He walked quickly, for his way led to the orchard where he was to meet his sweetheart; yet his face bore a sad, troubled expression. After to-day he would not see her for a long time, perhaps not for four years. He had to spend Christmas Day in London and then he was off to the east coast of Africa, there to help the construction of some railways. Of the future he had no doubt. He would soon achieve a good position and return to marry Blanche Harrap; but it was hard to leave her, his little Blanche, so soon after they had plighted their troth.

Fast as he walked Blanche had reached the trysting-place before him. As he entered the orchard he saw her standing beneath an old apple tree whose bare branches bore here and there large boughs of dark green mistletoe. His eyes shone with delight as he gazed on the pretty picture she made. Her shapely head was crowned with a large black hat, on the under side of which was a bunch of violets nestled against her beautiful brown hair. A close-fitting jacket of warm brown fur covered her body, and her right hand hid itself deep out of sight in a large muff, of the same rich skin, to which she had pinned another bunch of violets. Her left hand held gracefully from the ground a trailing skirt of dark grey cloth.

"Why, Blanche," he cried, as he kissed her, "how long have you been waiting, lassie?"

"Not many minutes, Frank," she answered, gazing wistfully up at him. "I came in plenty of time, for I could not bear to lose a single minute of our last hour together."

For answer he kissed her again passionately.

"I'll not be away from you long, Blanche," he said. "Very soon I'll come back again. After that we will never part any more."

"You won't forget me? Promise, Frankie," she intreated.

"Forget you! Of course I won't forget you, little Blanche."

"And you'll write to me often—very often?"

"Yes, if you don't get my letters you will know that I have been sent where there is no post, or——" The grey eyes gazing into his were rapidly filling with tears, so, kissing them, Frank, who was himself very near tears, sought to interest her in other subjects.

"Come, lassie," he said, "there are very many places I want you to take me to. I must say 'Good-bye' to all our favourite walks and views; but first of all I am going to climb into this dear old tree and bring you down a great big bunch of mistletoe. Then we will go to Davis, and ask him to save a piece from this very tree for us every year. Until I come back he must send it to you. When you get my Christmas letters will you open them under the mistletoe?"

Frank quickly and lightly swung himself up amongst the branches, and was soon down beside Blanche again, bearing in his hands the largest bough that had grown on the tree. He held it over her head. His other arm incircled her waist and drew her to him. Their lips met.

"Blanche, little Blanche," he cried, "never mistrust me. I will always, always love you."

* * * * *

Mamie Russell dashed into her aunt's boudoir.

"Auntie Blanche, Auntie Blanche," she cried excitedly. "Harry has come home. He will be here to-day. See, here is a letter from Southampton and a telegram from London. He has discovered a gold mine—he and three others, and he has come home to me again. Just fancy, he will be here for to-morrow—Christmas Day, and I did not expect to see him again for another two Christmasses. Oh, Auntie, dear, isn't it just splendid?"

Putting her arm round her aunt's neck she gave her a great kiss and then ran to the door.

"I must tell them to get his room ready, and then I will take the trap and drive down to the station to meet him. The train will be here in half an hour." She opened the door, and then turned back, holding a letter in her hand. "Oh, Auntie, I am sorry," she said, "here is a letter for you. I should have given it to you at first."

For a long time after her niece had left, Blanche Harrap sat gazing out of the windows over the frost-covered hedgerows and meadows. There was a great longing in her beautiful grey eyes. Fifteen years ago that day she had said "Good-bye" to her sweetheart, and she still waited his return. For the first two years he had written to her regularly. Then came a letter which said he expected to be home in a few months for the work was almost done. After that there came no more. She wrote three letters to his last address; but they were returned marked "gone away." A letter to the man he had worked under elicited the information that young Sinclair had set out on a hunting expedition into the interior and had not been seen since. After that she sent no more; but waited for him to come, remembering the words he had said when he kissed her beneath the mistletoe on that last day so long ago.

There still came to her every Christmas a bunch of mistletoe from that same apple tree. She would have stopped its annual appearance, but that, deep in her heart, there was a feeling that as long as the token hung overhead at Christmas time there was still a chance that a letter from Frank, or perhaps Frank himself, might come to greet her with wishes for a happy and joyous year.

With a sigh she opened the letter in her hand. As she read she gave a little cry of distress and tears came into her eyes.

"Dear Miss," it ran, in the trembling writing of old Davis, "I am sorry that this year we cannot carry out Mr. Frank's wishes. There was only one branch of mistletoe on the old tree, and I regret to say that some stranger came into the orchard last night and took it."

"Oh, they might have left me that," cried poor Blanche, "it was all I had left. I wanted it so! I wanted it so!"

Just then she heard the wheels of the dogcart on the gravel below, and dried her eyes hastily. In a few minutes her niece

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came in, her eyes aglow with pleasure, followed by Harry, bronzed and well and evidently also very happy.

"Welcome home, Harry," she said, rising to meet him. "I hear that you have good news. I am very glad, both for your own sake and for Mamie's. I hope you are going to stay in England for a long time. Mamie has been very lonely without you."

Harry gently gripped the hand extended to him, and said never a word. He knew nothing of Miss Harrap's story; but to his mind she was a woman who deserved far greater happiness than had fallen to her share. There was a touch of sadness in her welcome that set him thinking that perhaps she understood more of Mamie's loneliness than she had ever told.

"Oh, Auntie, it's such a wonderful story," broke in Mamie. "Harry rescued a man from a tribe of savages and through that found the gold. You tell, Harry."

"There is nothing much to tell," said Harry. He disliked talking—talking to one's sweetheart is a different matter of course. "You see, Miss Harrap, after I had finished with those steamers on Lake Nyassa—Mamie probably told you about them—I took a little holiday. I and two other men struck west into British Central Africa. We had not been on the march for more than a fortnight before we came across a man—an Englishman—who had been carried off by one of the native tribes and held captive for twelve or thirteen years. We rescued him, of course, and he showed us one of the richest gold mines I have ever heard of or seen. It was worked some hundreds of years ago I should think, but has long been in disuse. The rescued man and I have come to England together to manage the business side of the operations."

Blanche Harrap's breath came fast as she listened to the tale.

"What is this man's name? You have not told us," she said in a low tone.

"Oh, have I not," answered Harry. "It is——"

"Mr. Frank Sinclair!" announced a servant, flinging wide the door.

"Frank, Frank!" cried Blanche, with a little laughing sob, as she gazed at the tall man who entered, his arms filled by a big bunch of mistletoe.

Before she could realise her happiness the mistletoe was over her head, a strong arm was round her waist, and his lips were pressed to hers.

"Blanche, my little Blanche, I have never loved any one save you," was all his greeting.

Harry looked on in amazement.

"Sinclair," he said at last. "How did you come here? Why did you not tell me that you knew Miss Harrap?"

Frank answered him; but his eyes were turned towards Blanche.

"I thought it must be my Miss Harrap," he said slowly, "but I dared not ask until I reached England. Then I went straight to old Davis; but reached there too late last night to see him. I went into the orchard and saw this, which I took to bring to you. It is from the old tree. In the morning I found Davis and learnt that he had that moment sent off a letter telling you that the mistletoe had been stolen. I asked your address, and—Blanche, Blanche, you are more beautiful than ever you were!"

"I think there will be two weddings instead of one," said Mamie, smiling up into Harry's eyes.

Ernest Herbert.

Cora: "You have a fine sense of the ridiculous." Dick (rather flattered): "Why do you think so?" Cora: "I noticed you smiling at yourself in the mirror."

Little Tommy (son of host): "Oh, Mr. Newrich, I do so wish I was you." Mr. Newrich: "Do you, my little man? And why do you wish you were me?" Little Tommy: "'Cos you don't get your fingers rapped when you put your knife in your mouth."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

December 16.—If the birthday falls here, then care will be needed over writing, news and friends during the next twelve months.

Girls will have attentions, but should see that these are not from married men.

The day is not good; many promising speculations may be met with, but these should be passed by.

A child born here will be fond of change, and if born near 1 p.m. will travel much and go abroad.

December 17.— Attend to business and domestic matters. The health will need some extra care. Bad for farmers and builders.

Young girls should be cautious in their love affairs; some friction; letters cause anxiety.

The day is good for dealing with doctors, dentists, and military men; evil for doing business with aged people, or for marriage.

A child born here will be active, but too fond of pleasure. The mind will be quick, though there will be too much caution at times.

December 18.— An unfavourable birthday; avoid law, speculation, and attend to business. Those in employ are in danger of losing it.

Girls will meet with disappointments in love matters.

The day is evil for most matters; go quietly and let others make the first move.

A child born here will be quick of wit, but cunning, and will meet with but little success in life.

December 19.— A fortunate day, and the events through the year will go well. Promotion is shown for those in employ.

If engaged, girls will marry, and love matters are very interesting.

The day is good for buying or selling: for engaging servants, marriage, visiting, letter writing, asking favours or changing residence.

A child born here will be quick, ingenious, and cheerful. Will be fortunate and do well in business for itself.

December 20.— The year will require some care; danger of sickness in domestic circle.

Girls born near 9 p.m. should be cautious and prudent with opposite sex.

The day is not promising for letter writing, love affairs, dealing with landlords, builders, farmers, and literary men.

A child born here will be moody, and difficult to understand.

December 21.— A mixed year; much change and travel. Insure against fire and accident. Better for elderly people.

Girls born near noon, or between 4 and 5 p.m. will quarrel with lovers and need care against deceit.

A child born this day will be rash and headstrong; travel much and often be in danger of mishap.

December 22.— Much perplexity and worry for the year; sickness in the household; avoid speculation and law

Young girls meet with many crosses in their love affairs, and will have cause for grief.

The day is evil for speculation, marriage, letter writing, or doing business with young people.

A child born to-day will be idle, fond of company, and very crafty. It will not be fortunate; unhappy in marriage if a girl.

Asturel.

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HE, SHE AND ANOTHER.

A Tale of Christmas Theatricals.

"If there is one thing I despise more than another," says Kitty, with an air of lofty indignation, "it is a man who doesn't know his own mind for half an hour together."

"Meaning ——?"

"Meaning no one. I simply stated a fact."

"Now, that's unkind. I can stand a good deal, but to be called 'a fact' is too much, Kitty. You told me the other day that you hated 'facts and figures,' and such rubbish; and you don't hate me, do you, dear?"

"There's no dealing with you, Gilbert, when you go on like this. I can't argue. I don't profess to be smart with my tongue. I leave that to clever people like you—and Paula Chester. But"—and Kitty rises to give emphasis to the remark—"I don't say one thing at breakfast, and another at lunch, and a third at dinner."

"Good gracious, Kitty, do you give vent to the same remark all the time? I confess I'd not observed it."

"As I have already said"—Kitty advances gracefully towards the door—"I can't argue, so I'll leave you in possession of the field. I hope"—a little viciously—"you'll enjoy your walk with Paula, but I'm afraid it's going to rain. May I trouble you to move from the door? I wish to go out."

"Not while you are cross, Kitty. I sha'n't allow you to pass till——"

He stoops, turning the winsome face up to his own.

"Give me a kiss, little woman, and be friends."

Kitty draws back, her face aflame with indignation.

"No, that I will not put up with. You think that you can treat me like a child. You flirt with another woman, slighting me the while, and then when the mood takes you, imagine you can come back again to me."

Gilbert Danvers looks grave. "Hush," he says, coldly, "I cannot let you say such things to me, Kitty."

"And I," she retorts, "will not allow you to stop me telling you what everyone is saying, what everyone declares to be the truth, that you seize every opportunity to be with Paula Chester—watch her, and wait for her every minute in the day."

"You believe this, Kitty?"

"How can I help believing it? I have shut my ears to the gossip in the house about you, I have taken myself to task for noticing how many times your eyes stray from my face to hers. I have combated every accusation brought against you. But I can bear no more. This afternoon"—she catches her breath in an effort to speak calmly—"this afternoon you told me that you had important letters to write, and so could not go with me, as you promised, for a drive. And then, when I come down, I hear that you have changed your mind, and are going out with Paula Chester."

"Who told you so?"

"*She*," flashes Kitty, "*she* told me, with an air of incomparable insolence, as though to say, 'You see he only talks to you from duty; his desire is to be with me.'

"But, perhaps"—Kitty's voice sounds softer, and her eyes have lost something of their scorn—"perhaps she was mistaken?"

Gilbert Danvers glances at the dainty figure, and a hot flush dyes his face.

"Did you ask her to go for a walk, Gilbert?" She has come a little closer, her silken skirts brush against him, and he breathes the subtle perfume which clings round her—a step nearer and he could have clasped her in his arms. The thought of her warm, red lips, that a few minutes ago had clung to his—her round, white arms, that she had clasped about his neck, soften him. He cannot let her go in anger.

"Kitty, my darling, won't you trust me?"

He thinks she will not demand an explanation about Paula after all, that she will let the matter drop. But Kitty is not so easily dissuaded.

"Did you arrange to go out with her, Gilbert? Tell me," she adds beseechingly. "I won't mind very much, only tell me."

He squares his shoulders and looks over her head.

"I did."

"You forgot what you had said to me, perhaps?"

"No."

"You *preferred* to go out with Paula Chester?"

He shifts his position uneasily. Kitty is his darling, and his sweetheart, as good, as beautiful as man could desire, but he could find it in his heart to wish that a little mercy should temper her judgment.

"I don't think, dear," he says at last, "that I need answer that question. I did arrange to go out with Miss Chester, but beyond that I can tell you nothing. I have no explanation to offer."

He knows it is not fair to her, he knows that to hesitate is only putting off the day of reckoning, but he knows also that Kitty loves him with all the strength of her tender heart.

"Gilbert!" she cries pitifully, and puts out her little hands.

But knowing the battle is won, he disregards the invitation.

"Do you trust me, Kitty?"

The answer is inaudible, and he judges it best to put it in a different form.

"You know I love you, dear?"

"Yes," with a little gulp, which causes Gilbert to call himself bad names, "she thought so."

"Then, dearest, how could I wish to slight or hurt you? Only trust me, darling, and all will be well."

She sighs and gropes feebly for the handle of the door.

"Don't you think you owe me reparation, Kitty?"

He is amazingly audacious, and she knows it; but he is very much to her, this tall, good-looking lover, with the grave, dark eyes, and so she turns her face towards him, thankful that the twilight hides her blushes.

But he is merciless. "No," he says; "to take is not to give. You must kiss me of your own free will."

She hesitates, and then standing on tiptoe—for Gilbert is a giant among men, and Kitty herself of the adorable order of women, neither short nor tall—draws his head level to her own.

Something of passion stirs within her, her love seems altered, grown, intensified. She lays her lips on his, and with her whole soul in her eyes kisses him, not once but twenty times.

"My love, my darling." He strains her closer in the darkness; but, shamefaced, she breaks from him, and hurries with beating heart and burning cheeks up to her room.

Gilbert breathes a little quickly at the thought of her last kiss, then lighting a cigarette, strolls to the window.

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"It's an awful nuisance," he thinks, staring moodily at the grey autumnal afternoon.

"Ten to one Kitty will see me, and then——" with an expressive shrug, he turns away and makes for the fir plantation, where he knows Paula Chester has been waiting this last half hour.

"I thought you were never coming, Gilbert."

It is a low, rich voice that greets him, but at the sound the young man stiffens, and his face wears a strangely hard, almost forbidding look as he greets her.

Tall, dark, and passionate, Paula Chester has been likened to a pomegranate blossom, with her scarlet mouth and glowing cheeks. But Gilbert, beauty lover as he is, seems curiously unmoved by the lovely face upturned to his.

The interview is short and apparently unsatisfactory to both parties, for Gilbert returns to the house with bent brows and tight set lips, and Paula, gazing after the tall, straight figure, clenches her little hands and breaks into a sob.

"My darling, my darling," she cries, "you were mine once, and you shall be mine again. In spite of yourself I'll make you love me!"

The Time is Christmas.

There is an air of subdued excitement about the house. Mysterious confabs are held in remote corners, everybody bears a more or less distracted or abstracted look, and refers perpetually, to a small paper-covered book.

"One would think we were conspirators," laughs Kitty, as she runs up against Freddy Hunter. "Who could imagine that all this preparation and mystery was in connection with private theatricals?"

"That's where the fun comes, Miss Trent. We are all about to spring surprises on each other. For instance, you would not think that I should make a realistic bandit?" with an air of pride.

Freddy is a fair and somewhat meek-and-mild young man, with about as unbrigand-like a countenance as can be imagined.

"No," falters Kitty.

"So I expected," chirps Freddy; "wait till you see me in a black wig and corked eyebrows and you won't know me."

"But," she protests, the spirit of mirth lurking in each dimpled cheek, "surely there's no brigand in 'The Magistrate'?"

"Oh, I wasn't speaking of the play!" somewhat contemptuously, "I meant the tableaux. You know, Miss Trent, tableaux are always such a success. I thought a few serious scenes would come in well after Pinero's farce."

The idea of Freddy as a bandit is anything but serious, but Kitty chokes back her laughter, and agrees to urge the point with Gilbert, who, as stage manager, is, as his sweetheart somewhat pertly puts it, "bossing the show."

Paula hears the atrocious piece of slang and gazes with unspeakable contempt in her direction.

"It's such a mistake," she murmurs to the curate, her abject slave, "for women to be slangy. Mr. Danvers has such an objection to it."

Kitty moves away, a little hurt that Gilbert has not championed her cause, instead of leaving it to Freddy Hunter, who, with a devotion worthy of a better wit, flings himself into the breach, and makes matters worse by stating that, "Danvers is not everybody, is he, Miss Trent?"

She wishes the theatricals were at the bottom of the sea, wishes she'd never accepted Lady Rawton's invitation, wishes still more ardently that Paula Chester were anywhere but here.

"Paula's an old school-fellow of mine, dear," little Lady Rawton had explained; "she used to know Gilbert years ago, I fancy—when he was poor, you know, and studying in Rome. I hardly know how I came to invite her; but anyway here she is, and I must confess a tremendous acquisition to a house party. All the men are mad about her."

Lady Rawton's tender blue eyes and engaging baby face had not been altogether innocent of mischief as she spoke. Kitty Trent was too near her own age not to be regarded as something of a rival—although she, Fanny Rawton, had been married these five years—and the demure little matron was not at all averse to give her "dearest friend" a little suffering.

She it was who seconded Paula's suggestion that she and Gilbert in "The Huguenot" would make a splendid "living picture," and laughed at Kitty's feeble reminder that the woman should be fair.

"Surely, my dear, you're not jealous, are you? Paula and Gilbert will make a lovely pair. I think Freddy's idea of tableaux is splendid."

For the next fortnight Rawton Hall resembles nothing, Kitty declares, so nearly as a private lunatic asylum. Connected conversation is impossible; Gilbert is hardly ever to be met with, save in the agonies of a rehearsal, and habitually wears a worried look. Truth to tell, it is no light matter to drill the members of the caste into their respective parts, for save Paula—a born actress—and Kitty, whose sweet face and *naivette* of manner would make her fortune on the stage, the histrionic ability of the company generally is conspicuous by its absence.

At last, on the day before the eventful evening, there comes a lull. Human nature can bear no more rehearsing, hysterics and bickerings are in the air, Freddy stalks about like the ghost of an injured bandit, and the curate is reduced almost to tears by the snubbing his goddess has administered.

"I can't stand it any longer," says Gilbert. "I've had too much already. For goodness sake, Kitty, let's go out for a stroll."

He is his old self again that afternoon, and Kitty, radiant in sealskin and sables, thinks she has never seen anyone to compare with her lover as he waits at the bottom of the stairs.

He glances round hastily, then lifts her veil and kisses the tempting lips again and yet again, regardless of the fact that the violets nestling at her throat are not improved by the process.

It is a bright, pleasant afternoon, and Kitty's cheeks glow with the frosty air, and her heart keeps time to her happy dancing feet. Is she not with her lover? Has he not told her for the hundredth time how infinitely dear she is to him?

Gilbert falls to planning the future—not so very far away, he hopes—when he and Kitty shall have set up housekeeping together. And Kitty is in heaven, and forgets all the vague unhappiness and dull misgivings she has had of late.

She returns radiant from her walk. Paula stops her in the corridor leading to her room.

"Have you had a fortune left you, Kitty?" she says with a sneering laugh. "One would think you had heard some wonderful news."

Kitty smiles brightly; and even feels kindly towards this woman who has caused her such pain and suffering.

"I *am* happy," she says softly. "Gilbert and I have been planning what we shall do when we are married."

She passes on, still with the smile upon her lips, but Paula leans against the wall, and her face seems suddenly grown old and grey.

"He shall never marry her," she mutters; "never, never marry her."

But at dinner that evening she is the gayest of the gay, queening it in white satin, with quaintly carved ornaments of gold and a necklace of sapphires. Kitty, girlishly lovely in a creation of white chiffon, pearls round her neck and in her golden hair, feels a little envious of that glowing face, until she catches the smile which Gilbert flashes across the table, a smile which says as well as words, "There's no one can compare with Kitty."

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The memory of that smile remains with her through the next day, a talisman against which the whispers and asides that reach her about Paula and Gilbert fall powerless.

"The Magistrate" goes off without a hitch, Kitty creating a furore as the little music-mistress. It is, in fact, a frantic success, and the audience wait impatiently for the promised *tableaux*.

Kitty as "The Fair One with the Golden Locks" is charming; Freddy, to his intense joy, scores a success in his impersonation of "The Bandit at Bay;" other members of the company acquit themselves creditably, and then the curtain rises on "the" picture of the evening.

Never has Gilbert looked so handsome, nor Paula so beautiful. The dark, stern face of the man, the pleading loveliness of the woman hold the onlookers in a spell. Gradually the woman's expression seems to change, her eyes grow agonised, passionate, and over the countenance of the "Huguenot" there steals something of pity, his arms tighten round her, his lips curve into a smile.

Kitty grips her fan tightly, and her heart feels like lead.

"Perfect." "How exquisite." "What a charming picture." Admiration is expressed on every side. Kitty is seized with a wild desire to rush away and hide herself. She cannot sit and listen quietly much longer.

She hurries past the library, turned for that evening into a "green room." She gazes a little wistfully through the open door at the mirror facing her; it reflects a sad, wistful Kitty.

Someone inside the room is speaking. She cannot distinguish the words, but the voice—a woman's voice, thrilling with passion, pain, and the ineffable longing of love, she recognises as Paula Chester's. Kitty has no thought of playing the eavesdropper, another moment and she would have passed by, when a man's voice answers—

"Remember, think what would happen if——"

The woman interposes with a cry.

"Think of *me*, this once. Put the thought of that other woman from you. Think of the years of my sorrow in the past, the years of regret to come. Hold me in your arms, Gilbert, to your heart. Forget all that has come between us, remember only that once I was all the world to you."

She clings to him in an agony. A man were more than mortal to resist her.

He stoops and gathers the clinging figure close.

"Hush," he says gently, "hush," and kisses her softly on the lips.

What Paula says is true. Gilbert Ramsey had loved her once with the unreasoning passion and devotion of a boy. But in those day she was ambitious, she put aside her artist lover, with nothing but his talent, youth, and the dark beauty of his face, in favour of an old and wealthy nobleman. The latter had died during the period of their engagement, leaving her the bulk of his fortune. Then Paula learnt just how much she'd lost in casting Gilbert's love away. For years she had sought to meet him, she was ready to throw her money at his feet, so he would take her in his arms.

And now, now she has found him, and his love is no longer hers!

And yet the memory of those far-off days in Rome comes to Gilbert with a rush of pain. Again he waits for Paula in the scented darkness of a grove of orange trees, again he feels the ecstasy of her first kiss. Her face upturned in the moonlight glows with a strange, unearthly beauty, her arms enfold him in a fond embrace.

His breath comes quickly, he stoops and kisses her again—the woman he loved *once*. Then lifting his head, he sees facing them both, Kitty—the woman he loves now!

It is an awful moment. Gilbert falls back, the situation is beyond him, he cannot cope with it. Kitty's eyes, full of a dumb reproach, are worse to bear than invective, tears, or lamentations. If she would speak, if she would upbraid him, anything rather than stand silent before him, her girlish face white and drawn.

"Why," she says at last, "have you deceived me? I asked you not a week ago if it was not *I* you really loved. It was cowardly to answer as you did, cruel to me, unfair to *her*."

She motions towards Paula, but does not look at her. Kitty does not feel anger against her, pity rather, in that Gilbert has deceived them both.

"Why did you say you cared for me?" she goes on relentlessly. "Why did you tell so base a lie?"

He makes no answer. Of what use to protest, to attempt to explain that it was not love that moved him towards Paula. Kitty would not believe him. Women, he reflected bitterly, attach such terrible importance to a kiss. To a man it means so many and such different things.

He looks from her to the other, rage in his heart. For the moment he hates Paula. Why did she tempt him, why did she soften him by talk of days long since forgotten, buried, *dead?*

"I told you the truth, Kitty," he answers doggedly. "I care the world for you."

Paula flushes and then turns white.

"Why did you——" Kitty pauses. "Oh, answer me," she cried, "have pity on me. Let there be no more evasions. If you and Paula Chester don't love each other, why did I find you a moment since *now*, your arms about her? Why did you kiss?"

For the life of him Gilbert cannot answer. He is not hard enough to tell the truth, to confess that it was not for love's sake, but for pity that he'd acted as he did.

Paula reads the decision on his face. Even for Kitty's sake he will not lower her self-esteem. But even as she realises this, she realises also that she can never win back his love. His heart has gone for ever from her, to a slip of a girl with golden hair and pansy-coloured eyes. It lies with her, Paula, to say whether or no that girl shall pass out of his life. If she keeps silence they will part, they *must* part for ever. If she speaks—a low cry breaks from her lips. Passionate, undisciplined, generous of impulse, quick to love and quick to hate, Paula can rise to heights of sacrifice undreamt of by older, better regulated dispositions.

"It was for pity's sake," she cries, "he kissed me. Yes, for pity. He loved me once, when we were little more than boy and girl, and we were to have been married. But we were poor, and I was sick of poverty, and I had others to consider. My father was old and broken, and my brothers were but children. I listened to my people and to ambition. I flung over Gilbert for the sake of riches, and became engaged to another man. But"—she pauses—"he died—and left me all his money. But ever since I've hungered for Gilbert, night and day I've thought of him. To-night I offered him my love, but he could only give me pity. You, and you only, are the woman he desires."

Kitty listens, her eyes filling with tears. Then as the last words fall from Paula's lips, she turns—not to her lover, but to the woman whom she thought her rival.

"You poor thing," she says softly, exquisite tenderness in her voice. "How you must have suffered. Come with me, dear, I want to tell you just what I think of you—just how much I admire you."

She slips her arm round Paula's waist, and ignoring Gilbert, draws her gently from the room.

* * * * * * *

It is a sad-eyed Kitty that greets her lover on the morrow.

"Paula has gone away," she explains. "Oh, Gilbert, I am sorry for her."

"What about me, Kitty, don't I deserve commiseration? Consider what a terrible ten minutes you gave me last night."

"You deserved it," she answered. "I'm angry with you, sir. You should have told me about Paula sooner. Then I should not have minded, even——" she stops and blushes.

Gilbert smiles.

"I rather question that," he says. "But am I forgiven, Kitty?"

For answer she lifts her face, her eyes are wet. Kitty is very tender-hearted.

He draws her to him, and—they kiss again with tears.

John K. Prothero.

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A Christmas Eve . . . . . in Shadow.

THE TALE OF AN ABDUCTION.

In the first place the ice was in splendid condition and well brushed from end to end, secondly the Squire was the heartiest and most jovial old host it was possible to imagine, and, finally, it was Christmas Eve. Small wonder, then, that the little band of skaters were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

For several days past the belt of trees that bordered the frozen lake had been almost hidden beneath a thick coating of snow. The Grange on the right side, and the little cottages on the left, just visible in the vague December light, were also shrouded in whiteness, and even now, the tiny flakes were again beginning to fall slowly, flung lightly to and fro by the wind.

Recruits were constantly arriving to join the enthusiastic party on the ice. The jingling of their skates sounded like music on the frosty air. It was the work of a moment to seat themselves, to fasten their skates, and then away they glided into the merry crowd.

As for the stout old Squire, he swung himself along at a prodigious rate, to the terror of all who crossed his path. The cry of "'Ware Squire" had become a classic phrase in the district. He was a very good skater "on the straight," but had no idea of stopping or turning. If nobody tripped him up on the way, he generally crashed headlong into the mound of half-frozen snow that surrounded the lake. He was up again in a moment, though, and off in a fresh direction.

It was just as he was picking himself up after one of these little mishaps, that he made a surprising discovery.

The short wintry afternoon was drawing to a close, and the light was fading rapidly. It was difficult for the skaters to recognise each other as they glided swiftly past. When the Squire had stumbled ruefully to his feet again, he found himself in an almost deserted corner, close to where a hole had been broken in for the ducks. There were two people, however, who stood a little distance away, with their backs towards him, who did not appear to object to the solitude.

There is something in the appearance of a pair of lovers that betrays them in a moment. The Squire stood in the gathering twilight and saw two shadowy forms, a man and a woman whispering together. That was all, and yet he knew at once they were lovers, and his kindly old heart was delighted.

But, however pleased he might be at this unexpected love affair amongst his guests, he had no right to listen to their conversation, and so he started away. The impetus of his own weight swung him forward at a great rate, over which as usual he had no control. Unfortunately for his peace of mind, just as he started, he heard the girl say something in a louder tone than previously, and recognised her as his wife's companion. And the voice that answered her, in words that were unmistakably affectionate, was that of his only son!

The old Squire, though the kindliest of men, had a very choleric temper. His beaming smiles disappeared, and his face became almost purple with indignation. The change was made in an instant, like the change of slides in a magic lantern.

The effort to maintain his indignation and his balance at the same time was too much for him, and after floundering wildly for a moment, he collapsed in a heap and slid ignominiously along the ice in a sitting position. His son hurried to the rescue without knowing to whom he was coming. Dora Chassens skated away towards the crowd after a brief farewell to her lover.

"You went with rather a smash that time, father!"

"Yes," answered the Squire grimly, "I did go with a smash. Thank you, I'm all right now."

His son's hurried glance to the rear increased the old man's indignation.

"If you'd like to join her, Tom, don't consider me."

"I didn't know you'd seen us together. It was Miss Chassens."

"Yes, I saw you. And look here, my lad, you must stop that game at once. In the first place, I won't have the girl trifled with."

"I've no intention of trifling with her. She has promised to marry me."

"And as a marriage between you is, of course, quite impossible," growled the Squire, unheeding his son's last remark, "the sooner you begin to leave her alone, the better. You'd better go away for a month or two."

"I may go away or not," said the young fellow hotly, "but I'm going to marry her."

"You shall not marry her."

"With or without your consent, sir. I'm old enough to choose for myself."

"But not clever enough, apparently. However, we'll speak of this later. I see the others are all going back to the Grange."

"I'll come home presently," said Tom moodily, "I want to have a quiet smoke here."

"All right, my lad. I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings, but——"

"Is it any use discussing the question, sir?"

"Perhaps not, at present," said the old man, more gently than he had hitherto spoken. "Then, I'll leave you, Tom. Will you—do you mind giving me a push off?" he added.

Tom laughed in a mirthless kind of way, and gave him the required assistance. The Squire loomed swiftly for a moment through the darkness. When he had disappeared Tom skated slowly to the bank and sat down to take off his skates. At the same moment several men crept from behind some bushes near the lake, and closed stealthily in upon him.

* * * * *

About half an hour later, the Squire and his wife were having a quiet talk in the library at the Grange.

"The girl's all right, personally," said the old man, "I haven't a word to say against her, but Tom must look some-

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where else for a wife. Indeed, I have set my heart on his marrying our neighbour's daughter."

"Yes, my dear," agreed his wife placidly.

"The two properties join so well," continued the Squire, tapping his foot irritably against the fender, "acre by acre together right down to the meadows. And now this bit of a boy and girl affair is to thwart the whole business. There's only one thing to be done, Mary. The lad must travel for six months, and you'd better dismiss the girl."

"She has her living to make," said the old lady.

"Pay her a month's salary—six months' if you like."

"Tom won't give her up easily."

"He must be made to do so."

"He has more than a bit of your spirit, my dear, and I don't think you would have given *me* up for forty fathers."

"Not I," said the Squire affectionately. "Do you remember how the old boy threatened to turn me out—disown me—disinherit me——!" he stopped rather confusedly.

"The cases are very similar."

"Tut, tut, nonsense. You're not in favour of the match?" severely.

"I rather think I am," said the old lady seriously. "Tom is only doing what his father did before him. A girl may be a lady and be fitted for any position in England, and yet according to your words—although I know you don't mean them——"

"Not mean them!" roared the Squire, who, in fact, was beginning to feel rather ashamed of his mercenary ideas.

"No, you don't mean them," said the old lady proudly. "I should be thoroughly ashamed of you if you did. According to that theory a lady is one who has sufficient money to keep her in idleness. Dora Chassens is a very good girl indeed, and a clever one as well."

"But she hasn't a penny to bless herself with," said the Squire feebly.

"Tom has, or will have, enough for both."

"H'm—well—love and kisses—we'll talk about it later—there's the dinner bell," said the Squire.

"All right!" said his wife, who knew by this shelving of the subject, that her cause was won. "I wonder whether Tom has come home yet?"

The old fellow's face was already beaming with smiles again. It was a great relief for him to return to his real self. But as he opened the library door for his wife, a sound of hysterical weeping in the hall broke upon his ears. Guests and servants were crowded indiscriminately together.

"What's the matter here?" he cried testily. "Wilson, has Mr. Tom come in yet?"

"No, sir," said the butler.

"What's the matter? Who's this?"

"It's the new kitchenmaid, sir, Jane Durridge. I was bringing her to see you. She's been to her mother's in the village, and come back all of a fluster."

"Well, what's the matter, Jane?" said the Squire more gently.

"It's—it's your son, sir."

The old man sprang forward in an instant.

"What about him?" he cried. "Speak up—quick."

"I asked if he was home, soon as I come, and they told me 'No,' and I was sure then I'd seen him as I passed the lake," panted the girl breathlessly. "He was quarrelling with some one, and they were standing near the hole in the ice, and I knew his voice, although I couldn't see him. I don't know the other man."

"Bosh!" roared the Squire. "How dare you come frightening us this way? *I* was the other man. We did have a few hot words about—never mind what—get to your work, all of you."

"But this warn't you, sir," said the maid timidly.

"Not me! It *was* me!" he shouted angrily, "Must I take my oath upon it?"

"Then two men quarrelled with your son, sir."

"What do you mean?"

The girl's eyes distended fearfully as she replied—"He struck at Master Tom with a great heavy stick, and the ice broke with his fall, and they both went in—and I screamed and ran away," she cried, breaking down again.

"Take that girl away," said the Squire, "and tell the housekeeper to put her to bed. Wilson, my overcoat and stick, and a lantern, and send a couple of them on to follow me to the lake."

Then he led his wife into the dining-room.

"We must hope for the best," he whispered huskily, "and if it's a false alarm—if we get him back, Mary—he can marry whoever he likes."

The old lady shook her head mournfully as her husband hurried from the room. Dora Chassens advanced from the hall to meet him. Her face was white and drawn, but her mouth was set firm.

"I've sent a man for Dr. Thompson," she said, "and the housekeeper has been told to have a bed ready, with hot water and warm blankets."

The Squire was touched to the heart. "You're a good girl," he said, and stooped and kissed her before them all. "Will you go into the dining-room now? Keep her spirits up whilst there's any hope left."

He made his excuses to the visitors, and then hurried out through the open doorway and down the great stone steps. Along by the side of the house, all carpeted with moving shadows, where the trees rustled their naked branches to and fro, past the plantation, where the path was shrouded in a heavy gloom, at the end of which the frozen lake showed dimly, like a great mantle spread amid the darkness. And there the Squire stopped suddenly, while fear gripped his heart, and turned his strength to deadly faintness.

Something lay silent and motionless at his feet, covered with a long overcoat. The men had broken the ice in several places, and were feeling carefully along the shallow bed of the lake with boat hooks and oars. So far, only one body had been found.

The Squire knelt down and plucked the covering from the face of the drowned man. Next instant he sprang to his feet. "Oh, thank God! Thank God!" he cried, "it isn't Tom!"

Across the darkness, from the other end of the lake, a sudden shout was heard. The old man ran across the ice, over the surface of which the water was rising from beneath.

"What is it?" he shouted hoarsely. "Have you found anything?"

"It's Master Tom's hat, sir," said the voice, and next moment a man loomed suddenly through the darkness.

"His hat?"

"Ay, his hat, sir," said the man. "but Master Tom ain't in the lake. I'll swear to that. It's scarce three foot deep, and we've felt all over."

"Where are the nearest grappling irons?"

"Lower Branniston, sir, ten miles away."

"Perhaps we can do without them. Have the ice broken up and removed, and let a couple of the men put oilskins on, and wade through to make certain."

"Yes, sir."

As they turned towards the side, there was a sudden crack, and the ice, already weakened, gave way in all directions. There was no time to get to the bank. Without a word the two men gripped hands and waited. The instinct that led them to do this, perhaps saved their lives for, as the ice sank, their united weight forced it down, until presently they stood in three feet of water, with the broken places rising slowly around them in the darkness.

It was a strange position to be in, but the Squire and his men soon cleared themselves. With hands still gripped together, they forced their way through the water, pushing the ice to either side, until presently they reached the bank and clambered with some difficulty on to dry land.

Not a word had been spoken since they first clasped hands, but now the Squire turned towards his companion with white, quivering face, and pointed to the water that rippled to and fro at their feet.

"If he is in there," muttered the old man hoarsely.

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"He's beyond our help," said the other. "But you must hope, Squire; I'm 'most certain he bain't in the lake, for we've dragged every foot of it."

* * * * *

Dinner at the Grange that evening was a very mournful affair. The old lady had retired to her own room, where she sat with her companion. If she had felt any objections to her son's choice, that night would in any case have silenced them for ever. The two women sat in darkness, for the flaming gaslight has no sympathy with grief.

There were long periods of silence, broken only by the heart-broken cries of the elder woman. The younger one suffered perhaps more, for young grief is always more poignant, but her stronger nature impelled her to silence. They mingled their tears together, and talked of their lost one as only women can.

Downstairs, the Squire sat at the head of the dinner-table, attending with exquisite care to every detail of his duties as host. His face was white, and the corners of his mouth trembled convulsively when he glanced at the empty chair half way along the table, but he sat bravely to his work without flinching.

It was a mournful Christmas Eve though. Several of the visitors came to him after dinner, and made their excuses for leaving in the morning, which he accepted with a silent grip of the hand that showed his appreciation. Some were for leaving forthwith, but these he asked to postpone their departure over night.

"Before very long I shall have some certain news," he said gravely. "If by some strange mercy of Providence it is good, and there is still hope, the house shall ring with joy as it has never done before. And if we get bad news—God help us, we must bear it as we can," he muttered to himself.

She stopped and pointed forward with a gesture of contempt.

A few minutes later the butler tapped at the door. Before he could open it the Squire was running across the room to meet him, to hear the news from the lake. But the man held out a dirty, crumpled note, without envelope, addressed to Miss Chassens.

"A boy left it, and wouldn't wait for an answer, sir."

"Miss Chassens is with my wife," said the Squire, almost piteously. "What about the lake?"

"I was just going to tell you, sir. They've taken all the ice out and walked right through the water in every direction."

"Well?"

"There's nothing there, sir. They're absolutely certain."

The Squire gazed around him in utter amazement. The suspense of the last two hours was beginning to tell on him.

"What shall we do?" he said feebly, "I can't understand it."

"Send round to the village and ask if they know anything," suggested one of the guests. "Let us all go and search through the plantation and along the side of the lake. He may have climbed out and fainted, or hurt himself in some way."

It was a good suggestion, and everybody in their eagerness to help the poor father adopted it at once. The guests crowded into the hall, hats and overcoats were donned in an instant, the lanterns were lighted, and then the whole party streamed out through the open doorway.

* * * * *

Five minutes later a woman, cloaked and hooded, passed quietly from a side door of the Grange, and running lightly over the snow-covered path, presently reached a wicket-gate that opened on to the Brannston Road. A man who was sheltering beneath the trees stepped forward to meet her.

"Miss Chassens?" he said, and touched his hat obsequiously.

"Yes," was the curt reply. "Which way do we go?"

"This way, miss. I have a carriage round the corner."

He turned and led the way along the deserted road, the girl following. Once he fell back as though to walk beside her, but she stopped and pointed forward with such a gesture of contempt, and such scorn flashing from her eyes, that he hurried to his former place like a beaten cur. And presently they came to a quiet lane into which he led the way.

The girl hesitated for a moment. Was this a plan to decoy her into an unfrequented path, and there rob or murder her as they had perhaps murdered her lover already? A moment's reflection, however, set her fears at rest. Whatever there was about the Squire's son, she was certainly not worth so terrible a risk. If robbery had been the man's object, he might almost as easily have waylaid any of the visitors at the Grange with ten times as much money and jewels as she possessed.

"Are you coming, Miss?" said the man, who by this time had reached the carriage—a ramshackle vehicle hired from a neighbouring hostelry—and now stood with his hand upon the open door.

She hesitated no longer, but ran towards him and got into the carriage. As soon as she had done so he closed the door, kicked the clinging snow from his boots, and clambered into the box seat.

They drove down the lane, and jolting into the Brannston Road held steadily on at a good pace. The snow that carpeted the ground deadened the rattling of the wheels.

Inside the carriage the blinds were all drawn, and what was worse were screwed firmly to the woodwork to prevent the passenger from recognising the roads by which she travelled.

"But I have the revolver, fully loaded," she thought, "and in any case I am going to help *him*—perhaps to save him."

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After driving for over an hour, the carriage slowed down and finally came to a standstill. The driver jumped clumsily from his seat and opened the door for her to alight.

The girl looked round her in astonishment. She stood in a narrow path before a little cottage that was built on the wooded slope of a hill, now entirely shrouded in whiteness. All around her the great trees reared their gaunt heads towards the sullen sky. Their branches, thickly powdered with snow, added to the weird appearance of the scene. Some distance below, in the valley, a few lights twinkled from the narrow cottage windows, but most of the villagers had retired to rest some time ago. She could not recognise the scenery in any way.

"Will you come inside?"

The man who spoke stood at the cottage door. The girl looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, wondering whether she should produce the revolver and let him see she could protect herself. Fortunately for herself and for Tom, she decided to keep her advantage to herself and await developments.

She entered the cottage, closely followed by the man who had last spoken to her. A backward glance showed her that the other man was removing the screws that held the blinds down in the carriage, probably before he returned it to the landlord of the village inn. She felt pleased now that she had scribbled a hasty note during her long ride through the darkness. Probably the driver would not trouble to look inside the carriage before returning it, but she had a shrewd idea that an ostler generally did so before cleaning the outside.

The man led her up the narrow staircase and stopped at the first door. "He's in here, miss," he said, inserting his key in the lock and pushing back a newly fixed bolt. "He's been very obstinate, and won't come to terms nohow."

"What do you mean?"

"We want £1,000, bank notes, before we release him, and he's awkward about it. We wanted to settle with *him* before risking ourselves at the Grange. And so we've taken the liberty, miss," he threw open the door so that the occupant of the room should hear, "of securing another visitor to persuade him to give in."

"I called you a scoundrel before," said the young Squire cheerfully, "but now I think you're an idiot as well."

One man rushed forward only to drop with a bullet in his shoulder.

"Ay, of course," answered the other man shrewdly. "We're going to keep you in separate rooms."

The sudden change in his prisoner's face was almost ridiculous.

"You shall have an hour together," he added gruffly, "so you can make up your minds what you're going to do."

He walked out of the room and locked the door from the outside. In an instant Dora had passed the revolver to her lover, whose eyes brightened at the welcome sight. He placed it carefully in a side pocket.

"I couldn't tell your father where I was going," she whispered, "but I left the man's note on the dining-room table. They're all out looking for you in the grounds, but I daren't stop to say you were safe, because they might have prevented me from coming to you."

"But you have come," he said tenderly.

"I should have been jealous if anybody else had saved you."

"We shall both be out of here before very long. Don't be alarmed if there is a bit of a struggle. It's only make-believe on my part."

Her woman's courage failed her now her share of the work was done.

"You won't hurt any of them with that thing," she said.

"It's very possible," he answered grimly, "but not too seriously. Don't worry yourself, dear. Keep up your courage."

They spoke together for some time, their voices unconsciously falling to a whisper, and then the key turned slowly and noisily in the lock, and the gaoler entered the room. Two other men, the driver and another, could be seen loitering in the passage, ready in case of emergency.

The prisoners stood apart in sudden dismay, scarcely believing that their hour had gone.

"Now then, sir, will you promise to pay up?"

"I don't see why I should," said Tom with exasperating calmness. "You've got us both certainly, but you daren't harm us." He walked carelessly towards the principal villain. "I'll tell you what will happen," he cried with pretended passion, "my father will search the whole countryside until he finds us." He was standing close to his man by this time. The girl, with some idea of his plan, stood apart, resting her elbows on the mantelpiece. The young Squire shook his fist threateningly. "You infernal scoundrel," he shouted, "I've a great mind to break every bone in your body."

"Fair words," said the other sullenly, "or else we'll have to gag you, captain. We can't run any risk of outsiders hearing you."

"Fair words!" scornfully. "Bah! pearls before swine!" he shouted with increasing vehemence.

The two men by the doorway shuffled uneasily into the room.

"We'd better put summat in his mouth," said one of them. "There's an old fellow coming along the path. He'll hear the row certain."

The leader took an improvised gag from his pocket. "I've had it ready all along," he said grimly, "and now it's time to use it. Not as anyone's likely to notice what you say, for I've led 'em to believe you're troubled with D.T. But we've had enough of your high faluting. Lock the door, Bill. Put the key in your pocket—quick, or he'll get it!"

The young Squire's opportunity had come at last. He sprang forward and delivered a terrific blow right in the face of the man who was fumbling to withdraw the key from the lock. The force of the blow flung him violently against the wall, after which he staggered round

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to the other side of the room and joined his accomplices. In a moment the Squire had whipped out his revolver and faced the three men, with his back against the door, which was exactly what he had intended to do.

"Hands up!" he roared, "quick—or I'll fire!" Two of the men obeyed, but the man who had already been struck ran forward with horrible imprecations, only to drop helplessly with a bullet in his shoulder. The room was filled with smoke in an instant. Before the two men had time to make any further move, the Squire's son had the door unlocked, and he and Dora were standing in the corridor, breathless but triumphant. Then he locked the door from the outside, and the next thing they did, with a fine disregard for the proximity of danger, was to kiss each other, not once, but many times!

Afterwards she ran down the snow-covered path to the village, while he remained on guard at the door. She was back again in about twenty minutes, but still by herself. One of the policemen could not be found, and the other had taken a considerable amount of awakening.

He promised to follow as soon as he had dressed himself and discovered his companion.

In the meantime Tom told her how the three men and also the one who had been drowned, were Londoners. Burglars by profession, they had decided to embark in a new line, and a chance newspaper reference had decided their steps to Davyhulme. They skulked about the wicket-gate in the Brannston Road for a couple of days until a chance arrived, which proved both disastrous and lucky. Their accomplice, who tackled Tom and called upon him to let himself be taken quietly, grew desperate at the openly expressed scorn of the latter, and struck at him with his heavy stick. The blow partly stunned the young Squire, who fell headlong upon the ice, which cracked ominously. The other man fled from the danger, and, in the darkness, blundered straight into the hole which had been broken for the ducks.

"He must have been carried somehow beneath the ice," concluded Tom gravely. "As for myself, I was insensible, and they carried me into the road, where they had a carriage waiting."

It was nearly an hour before the policemen arrived from the village, and then they went back at once on the plea that they required a stretcher for the wounded man. The young Squire and Dora were naturally anxious to get home, but the law, or its bucolic representatives, could not be hurried unduly. It was after five o'clock in the morning before the prisoners were safely lodged in the village lock-up, the injured one being carried upon a cottage door, which was hurriedly taken from its hinges for the purpose.

Eventually, Tom and Dora set out upon their homeward journey. The sleepy landlord of the "Britannia Arms," aroused at last by the unusual bustle in the village street, opened his bedroom window.

"Be you a-going to Davyhulme?" he queried.

"Yes."

"Ay?"—a pause of several minutes. "'Cause I might get the carriage ready."

"You might, in about a week," said Tom sharply. "I think we'd better walk. You can direct us there if you will."

"Ay?"—another long pause. "Follow the path till you reach the high road, and then ax agen," and he closed his window and returned to his warm bed, yawning heavily.

It was a lonely walk, and yet a happy one. They dawdled abominably on the way, although the air was bitterly cold, and the road in absolute darkness. You see, they had such a lot to say to each other. It was not that they actually said so much, but lovers can put a great deal of conversation into a mere squeeze of the elbow. However, when at last the snow-covered roof of the Grange came into view, their hearts beat faster, and for the first time during the journey they hurried forward. By tacit consent they made their way towards the lake, thinking to cross the ice, and so save about a hundred yards or more.

* * * * *

It was nearly eight o'clock in the morning. The poor old Squire, who had not been to bed all night, was sitting in his place at the breakfast-table. The note left by Dora had comforted him considerably, while creating a fresh anxiety in his mind. A dozen times during the meal he jumped from his chair at the sound of footsteps passing beneath the window, but each time the footsteps died away in the distance, and he sank into his place again with a groan.

The fact that it was Christmas morning caused him an additional sorrow. To be gloomy on this day of all days, was against all the traditions of his family. He played nervously with his ring, hoping no one saw how his hand trembled.

Suddenly a loud scream resounded through the house. Everybody sprang to their feet and rushed pell-mell towards the door, that is, everybody but the Squire, whose grey head sank helplessly upon his breast, as he waited for the last crushing blow.

Then the door was opened quietly, and two people entered, the others remaining in the hall.

"Father!"

And when the guests presently trooped back they brought such a roaring and cheering as made the old rafters ring again. The blinds were rattled out of sight in an instant, the fresh light of the morning poured radiantly across the merriest party that even the Squire—whose eyes were dim—had ever presided over, and it was Christmas Day at last.

Wal Frank.

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ASTOUNDING SOCIETY REVELATIONS. BEGIN TO-DAY.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter o Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penni less suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who visits Cairo.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

WHILE staying at the Continental Hotel at Cairo, I lose my fortune by the failure of Hammond's Bank. I undertake, therefore, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, the daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire, and to bring about her marriage with the son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres, and his mother, the Duchess.

The Duchess and I agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions ; we do everything, therefore, to bring this about.

One evening, under the guidance of a fine-looking Bedouin, we all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing, when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Instantly all is confusion. The guide snatches Belinda and hurries us away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, and suddenly, with a cry of "Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all, he's David Carr !" throws herself into his arms.

The dragoman is dismissed and on our return to the Hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes me to task for the occurrence. I retort that not long ago I saw the Duchess' own daughter, Honoria, in the arms of a real Egpytian !

The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and, after storming at her, slaps her face. Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room.

Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help !" The voice is Belinda's !

Rushing upstairs, I discover that Belinda has only just prevented Honoria poisoning herself to escape marriage with her cousin, Mark Striven. Later in the day we go to the Pyramids.

Lord Reginald Davenant, a new arrival at Cairo, accompanying the party, at one time in love with Mrs. Murchison-Lee, now transfers his affections to Belinda. The slighted Mrs. Lee, or "Midge," as she is called, is furious, and threatens violence to Belinda.

I checkmate Midge, however, by abstracting the morphia to which she is a slave), with the hypodermic syringe, from her dressing-case.

That same evening I suddenly discover the Duke of Eastacres and a new-comer, Stanley Forbes, in the midst of a violent altercation. Fearing that a duel may ensue, I rush between the two men.

Sending Eastacres off on some errand, I tax Stanley Forbes with quarrelling with the Duke in regard to a girl named Sheila Kenwyn. She had disappeared some time back ; it is thought the Duke is responsible for her disappearance. An open scandal about Eastacres would interfere with my matrimonial projects.

"Forego a quarrel with the Duke," I implore Stanley, "and I will extract Sheila's address from him."

Stanley consents. With some diplomacy I entrap the Duke into telling me where the girl is.

Next morning I start Belinda and the Duke off to Cairo, and tackle Stanley Forbes successfully in their absence. Later, I return to the Continental and find my labours rewarded. I behold Belinda clasped in the Duke's arms !

On offering my congratulations, however, Belinda repudiates all notion of an engagement with the Duke. She explains that her attitude is one merely of liking for him, and that when in token of friendship she gave her hand to her lover, she found herself embraced.

"I made Miss North a proposal of marriage," says the Duke. "She did not answer me in words, but put her hand in mine. Am I to be blamed if I misread her meaning ?"

I assure the Duke that his conduct has been quite natural, entirely blameless, and represent to Belinda that, after her behaviour, marriage with the Duke is inevitable, as I was not the only one who saw the Duke's embrace, and that unless her engagement to Eastacres is announced she will be looked upon as an immodest girl.

Belinda still refuses to regard herself as engaged, however, and as a last resource I threaten to send her back to her father. She consents under great pressure to an engagement in name only for a month. At the end of that time, when we shall be leaving Cairo, I promise to announce that the engagement has been broken off.

Close on her consent the door opens, David Carr enters, just sixty seconds late.

My influence had obtained an appointment for him at St. Petersburg, and he had come to say good-bye. The Duke lays his hand upon Belinda's arm, and remarks calmly, "We are just engaged."

"It is a lie !" cries David, and appeals to Belinda.

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Then, for the first and only time while she is with me, Belinda faints. I turn the two men out of the room and get Belinda to bed. She asks for Honoria. That ungrateful girl brings a base advantage of my kindness and brings David Carr a message from my *protegée*.

"Belinda says she won't be married for a year, at least," announces Honoria. "Will you please come to her wedding?"

David, greatly comforted at the words, departs.

Our stay in Cairo now draws to a close, the Khedive's ball ending the season. I determine on that occasion to make a public announcement of Belinda's engagement to the Duke.

One night I discover that Belinda's pearls are missing. I go to the Duchess to consult her as to the best means of recovering them. Looking through the door of her room, I discover her Grace in the middle of the room, one hand raised in a threatening attitude towards her daughter, in the other lay Belinda's pearls! The Duchess explains to Honoria that Belinda gave her the pearls to take care of. Honoria retires to her own room and the Duchess proceeds to empty the contents of a trunk upon the floor. It contains all sorts of knick-knacks; amongst them I recognise a valuable fan of mine. The truth suddenly dawns on me. The Duchess is a kleptomaniac! I obtain the pearls from her Grace, on the plea that Belinda told me she was keeping them for her, but she will not give up my fan.

On the night of the Khedive's ball, Belinda publicly declares she is not engaged to Eastacres. The latter follows her to a side room to remonstrate. I am about to join them, when the Khedive enters into conversation with me.

From where I stand I see that Eastacres and Belinda are quarrelling. Suddenly through a door on the Duke's right a veiled woman appears. At sight of Eastacres she screams.

It is Honoria, who is about to elope with El Hamed, her Egyptian lover. She rushes towards the long French windows opening on the grounds. Eastacres darts forward to stop her. Belinda flies between them: Snatching up a lighted lamp from the corner of the room, she exclaims to the Duke:

"Go one step after Honoria and I dash this lamp at your feet!"

This Week's Instalment.
We Arrive in Paris.

To what tragic end Belinda's impetuosity might have led her, there is no saying. It is quite possible that she meant to endanger, indeed, would have endangered, the Duke's life, by upsetting the lamp, had not an unlooked-for turn come into the affair.

The sound of loud and angry voices, men's voices, from the palace grounds, distracted her attention. High above the masculine tumult sounded the thin, feminine tones of Honoria.

"Belinda!" she cried, "Belinda, come!"

At the cry Belinda wavered—so did the lamp. After a moment's hesitation she put down that formidable weapon, and gathering up her skirts, fled through the window in the direction of the tumult.

By this time, escaping from etiquette and the Khedive, I had made my way into the room. I arrived in time to view the end of Belinda's skirt vanishing in the distance.

"Duke," I cried, laying a restraining hand upon his arm, "don't go. Indeed, there's no necessity; Mark Striven is there, he'll look after Honoria. You will only come into collision with Belinda if you put in an appearance. It is much better for you to leave the affair to your cousin."

He hardly had the patience to hear me through.

"I must go," he said brusquely, and with that he went into the garden, whither I followed.

The scene was a strange and a romantic one. The first flush of the dawn was in the sky, the lights of the lanterns growing dim and sickly, paling before the god of the morning. And in that curious half light, under the shadow of a group of cypress trees, Mark Striven, the Englishman, faced Honoria's lover, El Hamed.

Grouped round them, at a short distance, were their followers. Tall, swarthy Bedouins formed El Hamed's body-guard, splendid-looking men, who gazed in cool contempt at the fellahs whom Mark Striven had enlisted in his cause.

"Mark!" The Duke's voice cut through his cousin's flood of wrath. "What is this?" He stepped between the two men as he spoke.

Instinctively they both fell back.

"This fellow—this ruffian," raved Mark, "has the impudence to say he came to meet Honoria. He——"

With a gesture the Duke stopped him.

"You fool," he whispered, "do you want to make the scandal worse? The whole Palace will hear what you are saying. Go quickly and watch the gates, and see Honoria does not pass through. While you were wasting time in abuse, she and Belinda will most likely have got clear of the place. Go!"

And Mark Striven went, the fellahs accompanying him.

"Now," the Duke turned to the Egyptian, "you have apparently some matter of dispute with that gentleman, my cousin. Can I be of any use in the matter?"

At this the Egyptian stepped forward, and, in a passion of Oriental eloquence, poured out his love and adoration for Honoria.

"He was of good blood, the son of an Egyptian lady and an Arab chief. He had command of a tribe, men such as these," and he pointed to the Bedouins at his back. "He had a palace, he possessed the confidence of his Lord the Khedive. He desired the Frankish maiden. He would pay her brother gold and precious stones for her. He——"

Eastacres interrupted his protestations.

"If he would call at the Continental and explain his intentions to the Duchess of Eastacres she would, perhaps, entertain his proposal for her daughter. In the meantime, the present situation, time, and place, were hardly suitable for the discussion." This with a ceremonious bow, that should have impressed El Hamed, but which appeared to have a contrary effect.

"I love her!" the young man cried, proudly defiant (imagine anyone loving poor Honoria!). "She has come to me of her own will, and I will keep her!" He drew a weapon from his tunic as he spoke, and waved it greatly excited. His followers drew nearer, their faces suddenly grown fierce.

I felt a sudden sickening fear of these wild, strange-looking men. It was like a glimpse into those far-off days when Mehemet Ali ruled Cairo by the sword—Franks and natives alike. Civilisation had cast but a thin veneer on Egypt after all. Under the surface polish there lay the cruel, ruthless nature of the primitive people. Cairo—save the Continental—seemed suddenly grown savage.

The Duke, as I have said, was by no means a coward, but he turned rather pale at El Hamed's menacing attitude, and would, I think, have called out for assistance—it being even more important to insure his safety than to avert scandal—had not Crawley Drummond and a few others of our set made their appearance.

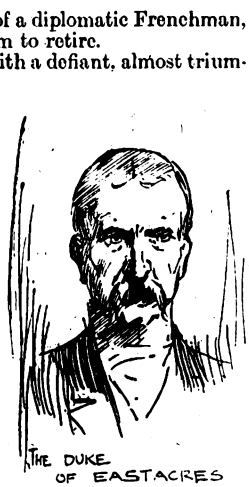
Drummond, with the assistance of a diplomatic Frenchman, quieted El Hamed, and induced him to retire.

He did so with a bad grace, and with a defiant, almost triumphant laugh.

"And now," I cried, "will someone please to find Belinda!"

"My *dear* Peggy," said Crawley, "you don't mean to say that Belinda's been eloping. I thought it was Honoria?"

"Crawley," I cried, "unless you desire to deprive me of my few remaining wits, you will, for once, be sensible. That awful, ungrateful and unmanageable girl, not content with making me the laughing-stock of Cairo, and insulting Eastacres in the presence of the Khedive, that awful girl, I say, has connived at Honoria's misconduct, and has gone off with her—where, I do not know."



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

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Crawley gave a low whistle; the Duke had already gone towards the gates where Mark kept watch; with feelings of foreboding I clutched Crawley's arm, and went there too.

Mark Striven, the picture of rage and annoyance, was explaining volubly that he had not seen sign or token of either of the girls.

"They must have got out some other way," he said. "There are all sorts of dodges for escaping from this place."

His words struck consternation to my heart. If what he said were true, and Honoria and my charge had eluded him and found another means of egress from the grounds, it was evident they were at that moment wandering about the streets of Cairo—in evening dress and unattended.

If not, and the possibility was almost as terrible, they were hiding somewhere in the Palace or gardens. If this were so, the only means of finding them would be to institute a search—and let everybody know what we were searching for!

Crawley and his diplomatic friend suggested appealing to an official of the household, and in my disturbed mental condition I think I should have agreed, when the problem received an unexpected answer.

Lord Davenant, rather breathless, but very smiling, appeared at my elbow.

"I've had an awful chase to find you, Lady Peggy—couldn't think where you'd gone. I've come from Miss North, she's very tired, poor girl, quite fagged out, and wants to know if you're never going home. She's waiting for you in the dressing-room at the Palace."

Belinda at the Palace! All thought or care of Honoria's elopement left me at the news. In the excess of my relief I almost ran the distance from the gardens to where Belinda waited. For the moment my anger at her conduct in repudiating her engagement with the Duke was overshadowed by my thankfulness at finding her.

"Where have you been?" I said. "And where's Honoria?"

"Why do you ask me, Lady Peggy?" she said innocently. "I am so tired. Shall we go home?"

I looked at her suspiciously. I felt convinced that she knew more about Honoria's whereabouts than that weak-minded girl herself.

I was beginning to realise, however, that my fair-headed *protegée* was nearly as determined as myself—that if she did not want to do, or say, or like a thing, nothing would make her.

I silently adjusted my cloak, therefore, and accompanied by Belinda, swept through the already thinning ball room.

"What, going? So early? How disappointing!" Men and women alike gathered round us, prompted by curiosity—the desire to know the true inwardness of Belinda's treatment of the Duke. I frustrated their desires, however, and reached the entrance-hall without delay. There we were stopped by the Duke and Duchess of Eastacres.

"Lady Carstairs," his Grace said earnestly, "may I ask you a favour? My cousin has discovered that Honoria has gone to Boulag with the intention of embarking on a dahabieh there in port. My mother," he glanced at the Duchess, "is not equal to the strain of accompanying me. As her friend and mine, I implore you to take her place. Your presence will shield my unhappy sister from unfavourable comments. Will you come?"

I could not immediately give a reply. The selfishness and want of consideration of the request struck me as monstrous! Why on earth should Eastacres expect me to chase after his sister at three in the morning? Honoria was nothing to me, except an acquaintance—it was unreasonable to a degree to ask me to inconvenience myself on her account.

Belinda seemed to take a similar view.

"Poor Lady Peggy," she said softly, "she is so tired. Can't she go to the hotel and change her frock first? I'm afraid she'll take cold in this thin affair. Besides," she smiled sweetly, "it's quite possible Honoria may be there herself."

The Duke pounced on the words.

"*Is* she there, Miss North?" he said. "Answer me, please. Do you know that Honoria is at the Hotel?"

The Duke, like most people who came in contact with Belinda, was well aware of her extraordinary love of truth. He knew that nothing would make her say the thing that was not. Had she for once lapsed from her high ideal, framed what realists call "a lie," and boldly stated that to her own knowledge Honoria waited for us at the Continental, that young woman's future might have been different. As it was, habit was too strong for the girl. She hesitated, stammered, and at last, with evident embarrassment, suggested that the sooner we reached the Continental the quicker we should discover if Honoria were there.

This transparent diplomacy, needless to say, deceived no one. The Duke bowed and coldly thanked Miss North for her suggestion, remarking that if she and the Duchess would act on it and start forthwith they would be of great assistance.

Without further discussion he conducted his mother and Belinda down the steps and placed them safely in the carriage. Returning to me, he said, with much abruptness, "I don't ask you to excuse me, Lady Peggy; it is imperative that you accompany me."

The next minute I found myself beside the Duke, driving at a rapid rate through old Cairo in the direction of Boulag—a suburb of the city, with a port, and large, well-constructed docks.

For a while the Duke kept silence; then yielding, it would seem, to uncontrollable emotion, he leant forward, his face working with passion.

"You think I am beaten?" he said. "You are sorry for me and yet a little contemptuous? Was it possible to think a girl could find courage to act as Belinda did? But in the long run even her courage will not save her. I will break down her will. I will tame—subdue her! If it costs me my last penny I will cow her, I will risk all and everything to have and hold her for my own. No one has ever yet insulted and defied me with impunity and no one ever shall. I will break her spirit, I will lower her pride—you will not know her for the insolent girl who put such indignity upon me when she is my wife. For she shall be my wife—she shall find herself trapped, with her life and her beauty at my mercy. Then——" he laughed bitterly, "then it shall be for her to plead with me." He paused, exhausted by the outbreak, and throwing himself back upon the cushioned seat relapsed into silence.

His violence of speech did not altogether surprise me. I had long known that his impassive manner was but the cloak assumed to hide strong passions, fierce desires. That he would keep his word in regard to Belinda I felt sure. He would be determined and unscrupulous in his attempts to force her into marriage. The question for me to consider was how far I should assist him?

I decided to remain neutral for the present. I would not press his claims upon Belinda, neither would I ignore them. Failing other plans, it might be necessary to take extreme measures to coerce Belinda into matrimony. For the time being, however, that course did not commend itself. My old friend, the Marquise D'Arteuil, had asked me to spend the month of May at her hotel in Paris. She would, I knew, be quite pleased to see Belinda also. She had a nephew, the Comte de Sonnaz, a charming scapegrace, with an infinite capacity for wasting time and spending money. Belinda might be amenable to the charm of the Comte—his title was old and his family distinguished. I decided he should come next on the list of Belinda's suitors.

By this time we had reached our destination. The carriage stopped, we both alighted and walked towards the quay.

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The sun was up, the glory of the day fell on as curious a scene as I have ever witnessed.

The docks at Boulag are crowded with crafts from every port.

There you may see rafts composed of jars lashed together. Vessels loaded with senna leaves, gathered in the far-off deserts by war-like Abadiehs, with elephants' tusks, rhinoceros horns, skins of jaguars and giraffes from Khartoum. Dahabieh craft, with elevated poops hailing from Osneh, with ivory, ostrich feathers, gum, and nitre transported from distant Abyssinia. Merchants from East and West, from every climate and every nation.

"Honoria was brought here in a litter," explained the Duke. "Belinda had evidently arranged with El Hamed to have a party of Arabs in waiting the other side of the Palace. They slipped out of sight while that fool Mark was arguing. It appears that the Egyptian has a dahabieh of his own, a gorgeous affair, Mark says, all gold and purple. There," the Duke pointed to a cumbersome sort of craft, "that must be the one. We'll go and inspect her."

The vessel appeared to be empty save for a negro and his small black boy. They grinned profusely, but were unable to give us much information, beyond the fact that this was El Hamed's boat and that he was expected that same morning. The Duke seemed at a loss how to act; I gazed round in despair—I was very tired and terribly hungry.

"It's impossible to search all these," I pointed to the innumerable craft crowding the docks, "and unless we search them everyone there's no chance of finding Honoria. After all, Duke, El Hamed may not be such an impossible match."

The Duke interrupted me with a sneering laugh.

"Pray spare me any more philosophy, Lady Peggy. You seem to forget that Honoria is engaged to Mark Striven."

I bit my lip and accepted the snub. At the same time, had I at that moment seen Honoria I should have turned my head the other way. I was angry with the Duke—I was excessively hungry!

As we were standing at the vessel's poop, undecided how to act, a little launch close at hand began to let steam off, shrieking, snorting, and whistling in deafening fashion. With my hands to my ears, I glanced towards the launch. As I did so, I caught a glimpse of a pink dress, a mass of dull brown hair, and the flutter of a soft, white shawl.

"Honoria!" I shrieked, and clasped Eastacres tightly by the arm.

The girl had heard her name, had seen her brother and myself, and, as might have been expected, immediately lost her head. If afterwards transpired that El Hamed had arranged for Honoria to meet him some miles down the river—she was to proceed on board the steam-launch, he following in the dahabieh. The scheme had been carefully thought out, and with any other girl would have succeeded. No one but Honoria, or an idiot, would have shown herself on deck until they were safely out of port. As it was, her liberty paid for the girl's foolishness.

The sight of Eastacres appeared to deprive Honoria of her last remnant of sense. She rushed wildly down the deck, and, seizing the captain with one hand, waved the other towards us. Her gestures told us she was urging him to start at once.

Eastacres acted promptly; springing over the side of the dahabyeh he jumped into the boat waiting to take us back to shore. Then, hauling me after him, he bade the man row for his life to the steam-launch, already, in response to Honoria's appeals, under weigh.

Eastacres excitedly shook his fist. "Stop," he shouted. "stop!"

The captain seemed to hesitate.

He had been paid for Honoria's passage. On the other hand, the girl's excitement, her hysterical outcries and undignified attitude, unfavourably impressed him. The Duke spoke with an air of authority—an air to which the sailor finally succumbed. The vessel slowed, the engines were reversed; we reached the ship, and scrambled up on deck in triumph!

Eastacres placed the facts of the case in a striking light before the captain. The lady, his sister, was unfortunately not strong—not entirely responsible for her actions at times. This explanation, accompanied by significant gestures, entirely satisfied the worthy sailor, who was ready to hand over the poor lady to her brother's care as soon as possible.

THE LADY HONORIA

The girl herself was more difficult to manage; she appealed to the seamen, rushed to the ship's side as if to throw herself into the sea, screamed for help, and generally misbehaved herself. After a while she grew quieter. Her show of spirit over, she was utterly crushed and dazed.

In silence we returned to the Continental. My presence, as Eastacres had foreseen, prevented scandal. Nobody ever knew the true history of Honoria's revolt.

Two days later she was married to Mark Striven at the British Consulate.

The Continental gave an "At Home" in her honour, at which the Duke made quite an affecting speech.

Everyone was charmed both with the speech and the wedding. Everyone except Belinda and the bride.

Of El Hamed, nothing more was heard.

Mark Striven, the Duke's cheque in his pocket, seemed in the best of spirits.

Honoria, silent and cheerless as a statue, stood beside him, until, just at the last, Belinda came towards her.

Then, with a low cry, she flung herself into the girl's arms.

"Promise me," she said wildly, "promise me, you won't be forced into a marriage like mine. You're strong and brave, not like me—they can't frighten *you*. They——" She broke off and began to sob in a fashion distressing to witness.

"I promise, dear," Belinda answered gently. "I will not marry any man except the one I love."

"Eastacres," said I later, as we watched the wedding carriage out of sight, "there'll be trouble yet with Honoria. You'd have done better to keep her single."

"I think not," he replied. "Honoria's likely to prove useful to me in the future; so is Mark."

He glanced towards Belinda as he spoke, and something of the nature of his meaning darted through my mind. I caught my breath, he frightened me.

If only Belinda would prove reasonable and listen to the Comte's proposals, I decided to gradually drop the Duke.

If not, if she still persisted in her obstinate attachment to young Carr—well, I did not care to dwell upon that possibility! At present there was no need. Belinda and I were going to Paris to meet the Comte. Eastacres was returning to England with the Duchess. The rest of our friends at the Continental, Midge, Lady Saxby, and Lord Davenant, were joining us in Paris a few weeks later on.

We left Cairo on an exquisite May morning. I was glad to go; much that was unpleasant had happened since I came there. I was once again on the fashionable treadmill, compelled to chaperon a wilful girl—to find a husband for Belinda!

Arrived in Paris, at the Hotel d'Arteine, we passed up the steps, through the vestibule, and into the marble hall. The Comte de Sonnaz came forward eagerly to receive us. He was a charming person, and Belinda seemed quite willing to be charmed.

They stood talking for a while. Of a sudden the girl's face clouded. She flushed and bit her lip.

The cause of her disturbance was not far to seek. Down the wide staircase came a slight, fair man—a smile upon his lips.

It was—the Duke!

(An intensely exciting instalment appears next Tuesday.)

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Christine's Christmas Carol.

Which Brought Happiness to Two Homes.

SQUIRE ENDERBY sat meditating in his comfortable study. Outside the world was covered with a beautiful white mantle; the first snow had fallen, and though it was only the beginning of December, winter seemed to have fully asserted her sway.

And the Squire felt as though the cold of the outside world had gripped him, and was endeavouring to conquer him, and he shivered.

The memory of other Christmas-tides came before him; one by one the scenes of his life passed in silent pictures. The first showed himself and his young bride, and recalled their home-coming. That had been a white night, and the bells from the village church had first pealed forth a hearty welcome to the young Squire and his bride, and then changed their key to usher in the birthday of the Prince of Peace.

The next picture which flitted before him was a very different one. A dim room with a faint sweet scent, that suggested illness; doctors and nurses with anxious, pitying looks, and lying on the bed, as white as the world outside, his young wife. His for only two years, and then claimed by death.

Many other scenes passed in silent review. His little daughter, Frances, with her happy childhood, her affection and love doing much to heal the open wound her mother's absence had caused. Then another, and alas, the saddest picture of all.

Ambition had ever been his besetting sin, and it was due to it, that Colonel Mahon (his chosen crony, and a widower like himself), and he had decided to join their children's hands as well as their many acres. They agreed that Frances should wed the Colonel's Victor.

On the day, however, that the Squire informed his daughter of his plans for her future; to his great anger she refused to give her consent, and quietly told him she would marry none other than Lionel Chesleigh, a poor artist, known to her through being the brother of her greatest school friend.

Half-beside himself with fury at seeing his cherished castles thus fall, the Squire drove his daughter out of his home, for his violent threats of locking her up until she agreed to marry as he wished, so frightened the girl, that in desperation she ran off to her lover, and as soon as possible they were made man and wife.

That last picture was seven years old, and Squire Enderby's life since then had been bitter and cold; no wonder he shivered for the coming of the merry Christmas-tide meant nothing to him.

If only the old hall could have resounded to the patter of childish feet, the ringing, merry sound of childish voices; if his chosen son-in-law could be sitting with him, talking as man to man, taking the place of the son he had never known, and if his daughter could only have continued to be the Lady Bountiful of the little village, but, instead of that, he was all alone in a dreary and desolate home. And he would never forgive her.

His old friend the Colonel was dead and his son Victor had married a rich American. No one dared speak to him of his daughter except the vicar, the Rev. Wilson, but even his gentle pleading had not availed to touch the Squire's hard heart.

Frances Enderby, now Frances Chesleigh, was dead to her father, and always would be so.

Suddenly he heard a familiar voice, and, shaking off the memory of the past, he greeted his visitor.

"A cold night, vicar, why you look chilled to the bone; have some whisky, man, it'll put new life into you."

"Yes, Squire, I will, we are not growing younger, you and I, and the first breath of winter shows it. But I have come on important business. You know you have ever refused to allow me to tell you anything about Frances, or to read any of her letters, but certain events have happened, which make it imperative for you to know the true facts of the case. Hush! I am determined to speak, after that you can show me the door if you will, but we are old friends, Squire, and somehow I don't think you will."

"Speak, then, but be brief, as the subject does not interest me in the slightest," said the Squire in a bitter tone.

"Your daughter's husband has been very ill, is only now recovering from a bad attack of typhoid fever, and he will be unable to work for some time. As you are aware, he is an artist, and has no private means. His long illness has swallowed up all his hoard of savings. He must have good, strengthening food, if ever he is to become a strong man again, and there is no one but you to help. Frances has been a brick, and has kept the wolf from the door by teaching and doing needlework, but she cannot, much as she tries, do everything. Under the heavy strain, her health too is giving way, and unless you come to the rescue, her little child Christine will suffer cruelly and in all probability she will lose her husband.

"Now, Squire, I want you to do this. Have them here for Christmas, and get to know your son-in-law. You will never regret it, for a braver, more manly, young fellow does not exist; yes, I know, you say he tempted Frances to disobedience, but you must not forget, they were both very young and impetuous, and you frightened them. Let me go home and take them the glad news of your forgiveness, will you Squire? Life cannot be over bright for you now, but with their love, with the affection of their little one, who is the dearest little child you can imagine, with a look of your wife about her, with all this, you would soon become a happy man again."

Then the vicar stopped. He could say nothing further—his heart failed him now, yet he tried to hope for the best for the sake of that trio, whom he had safe for a few days, but unless some one more able than he came to the rescue, they must surely sink. Would the Squire forgive?

"You say, 'let me go home,' Vicar, so I gather you have the brood staying with you; well, keep them there, cherish them, only at *your* expense, not *mine*; not a penny shall go to help them. Take my daughter, Frances, this message from her father—my CURSE; tell her I pray she may never be happy, may never know real happiness again, that is my final answer. I was her father, had been mother and father both, yet at the first whisper from that poor will-of-the-wisp, she left me, and set my cherished wishes at naught, and gave me up to a lonely old age. I will never forgive her,

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and never willingly set eyes on her again. Take this as my last words—Squire Enderby has no Daughter."

* * * * * *

The vicarage was poorly furnished but it was comfortable and cosy, and everything that it was possible to do for their guests had been done by the kind vicar and his wife.

Lionel Chesleigh lay on a couch, anxiously watching the clock, awaiting the Rev. Wilson's return. Very much did he blame himself for persuading his wife to set her father's wishes at defiance, for to see her enduring such sordid poverty, and to be quite unable to help her, was a bitter pill. And unlike his wife, he had no hope that her father would relent, and then what would become of them all, particularly the little one, now sitting on Mrs. Wilson's knee, chatting about her mumsey's father, whom she wanted to see.

Poor Frances Chesleigh, she could not believe that the father who had adored her would remain obdurate for ever; surely he would relent, and once he made Lionel and Christine's acquaintance, he must love them.

The vicar entered, bringing flakes of snow with him, and one glance at his worn face told the answer he brought back.

No one spoke, till little Christine, seeing his eyes fixed on her, ran to him and said:

"Won't mumsey's dada let Christine sing him her carol?"

"What is Christine's carol, darling?"

"'Christ that once amongst us.' Mumsey taught it to me because when she was a little girl like me, she always used to sing it, and when I see her dada, I am to sing it to him."

"Perhaps you will some day, my child, but not just now," said the good man gently. Surely his friend could not continue adamant, if he held this sweet little one in his arms, but how and what could be done?

That night there was a great discussion between the Wilsons and their guests as to ways and means. It was finally settled that Frances must return to London and continue her work, and thus keep together the little home, and while she did that, they would remain in safety at the vicarage with their kind friends.

"And I'll soon get strong, Frances darling, and then I can paint again, and we'll forget all these hard times," said Lionel, bravely striving to hide how physically ill he felt; but she understood and knew also, that however kind the Wilsons were, their scanty means would be quite unable to provide him with the strengthening food he needed.

And when they returned for the night, the Vicar thought and thought, till presently a smile shone on his worn face, and he uttered a glad "Hurrah." He had settled on a plan to win the Squire's forgiveness.

* * * * *

It was Christmas Eve, and in the school-room of Enderby parish the choir boys had collected, ready to start on their annual round to sing their carols and to receive a very hearty and substantial welcome for the messages of love and peace that they brought.

Amongst them was Christine; her little form dancing with excitement, the golden curls roaming over the dainty little face, which seemed brimful of happiness, for she was going to do something to help dada and mumsey.

"Do you quite understand, boys," said the Vicar, rather anxiously, "Lisle, I depend on you, take every care of the child and leave her at the vicarage after you have been to the Hall."

"Trust us, sir, she shan't come to any harm," the boys answered, and with happy hearts they started.

The Hall was their first destination; though most people said the Squire was hard and cold, the youthful population of Enderby knew differently. He was always kind to them, and after their carols had been sung, they were sure of receiving a bountiful supply of cakes, ginger ale, and fruit, while, as they took their leave, each one would be presented with a new shilling.

They all understood who the little girl was, and many of them could remember the Squire's daughter. Their instructions had been, not to tell the Squire who she was, but, if possible, to let her sing her little carol by herself, and thus gain the Squire's attention. And they were all proud of having her with them, and loved to hear her little voice joining in with theirs, and she herself was very happy.

The Squire was expecting his young visitors, and had left his study windows unshuttered, so that he might see them as they stood and sang.

He knew all of their faces, but the presence of a little girl surprised him. She was a stranger, probably a cousin of one of them, he thought, and he laughed as he watched her eager little face and noticed how heartily she seemed to be singing, and all the boys appeared to be regarding her as a little queen. She was a very pretty child, too, he wondered whose child she was, and what brought her there.

But it was very cold for her, standing out there in the snow, what could her mother be thinking about to let a little mite like that go about singing?

Opening his window, he called:

"Come in, all of you, and finish your singing inside. What was her mother doing, Lisle, to send that child out with you?" And before Lisle could answer he had taken Christine and lifted her on his knee.

But the child struggled to get down.

"Please, please let me sing with the boys! Dada said I must or I would not help mumsey," and, seeing her distress, he put her down, and she went back to Lisle, and stood by his side.

It was a pretty picture; the big room with its beautiful black oak furniture, the pictures all wreathed with ivy and holly, and the fine figure of the Squire seated by a fire of enormous proportions, composed chiefly of logs; the boys standing in the centre of the room, sturdy bright specimens of English youth, and the little girl in their midst, endeavouring to sing as loudly as her companions. In the background the servants had formed a group; they all knew who Christine was, and they all fervently hoped that the Squire would forgive Miss Frances and let her come back to them, for she had been a great favourite.

When the carols were exhausted, with the same zeal as they had sung, the boys tucked in at the good cheer provided, and then Christine suffered herself to be taken to the Squire's side and shyly made friends with him, and graciously accepted the biscuits he offered.

But she was troubled. Something was wrong; they had told her she might sing her carol, and she had not done so.

"Please can I sing you my carol?" she asked the Squire anxiously.

"Yes, dear, if you will sit on my knee," which she consented to do; and then there was silence as she commenced to warble in her sweet childish voice, the hymn her mother had taught her. As he heard it the Squire trembled, for it was the very hymn Frances had sang, when she, too, was a tiny child. Every Sunday she would come and sit on his knee and sing to him and recite her simple hymns. He began to wonder where she was, and if things were really as bad as Wilson had said, and he suddenly resolved to walk down to the vicarage, and perhaps, well, he hardly knew what he would say or do, and then the little voice rang through the room.

"Where none thirst or hunger,"

and a remorseful feeling seized him. Frances and her child might be suffering and in want! He would go at once, and he put the child down gently and kissed her, saying:

"Thank you, my dear, for your carol. Boys, I have to go somewhere; eat as much as you like"; but as he got to the door, he remembered their shillings, and called to the butler to distribute them.

And when he was gone, the old servants took the little girl and made a great fuss of her. They had all been surprised at the Squire's abrupt departure, and all hoped that his heart had been touched by the childish voice.

Down through the snow Squire Enderby went, straight to his old friend. What if he were too late, and Frances' husband had died! But, no, he would not think of that! His forgiveness should be complete; they should all come

(*Concluded at foot of next page.*)

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TEN MORE GRAMOPHONES.

Here is an Excellent Chance for You.

After reading our opening instalments of "The Albert Gate Mystery," you ought to be imbued with the detective spirit.

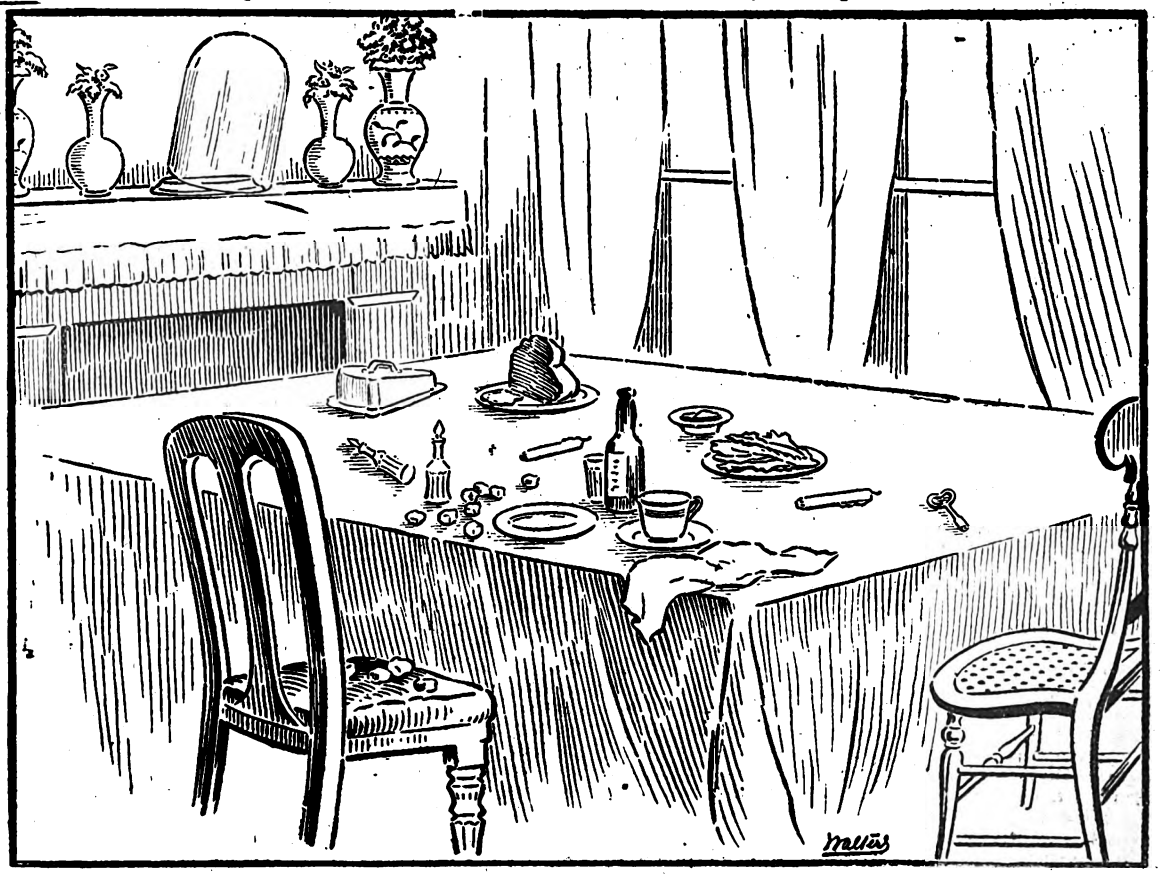
Here is an Opportunity for You to Test Yourself.

Below you will find a picture of a room which has been entered by burglars, who have not gone away empty-handed. Carefully study the picture, and find out what has been stolen.

For instance, the disarranged glass shade on the mantelpiece points obviously to the fact that something has been taken from under it. Other evidences of theft will help you in detecting what is missing. Write on the back of a postcard a list of the stolen articles, and send it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C., marking your postcard, in the top left-hand corner, "Burglar."

A handsome Gramophone will be presented to each of the ten competitors who send in the most complete list.

All attempts must reach us not later than *first post* on Tuesday morning, December 23rd.



back with him to the Hall, and in their happiness he would be young again.

The touch of Christine's baby fingers had loosened the hard crust that had settled on his heart, and he thought with tears in his eyes of the days long ago, when Frances had nestled against him in the same way.

The vicar and his wife were out, but he was shown into the drawing-room to wait and there on the couch he saw someone lying; someone, who surprised at seeing him, started up and said:

"Where is Christine? What have you done with my child?"

And then the Squire understood it all.

The little girl who sang her carol and sat on his knee must be his own grandchild, and this gaunt-looking man must be his son-in-law. In a few minutes everything was explained, and the proud old Squire was doing his utmost to cheer the invalid.

And the family party was soon complete, for the Vicar brought in Christine, who was delighted to find that her big friend was really mumsey's dada, and was quite content to be made love to by him; and Frances, who arrived shortly after, expecting only to be able to stay just for Christmas and then to return to work, was overcome with thankfulness.

And very soon the Hall resounded with cheerful voices and the patter of childish feet was heard, and there was always the heartiest welcome for the village choir boys, for through hearing Christine's carol, happiness had been won.

And the good Vicar was not the least content at having conceived the little plot.

Robert Murray.

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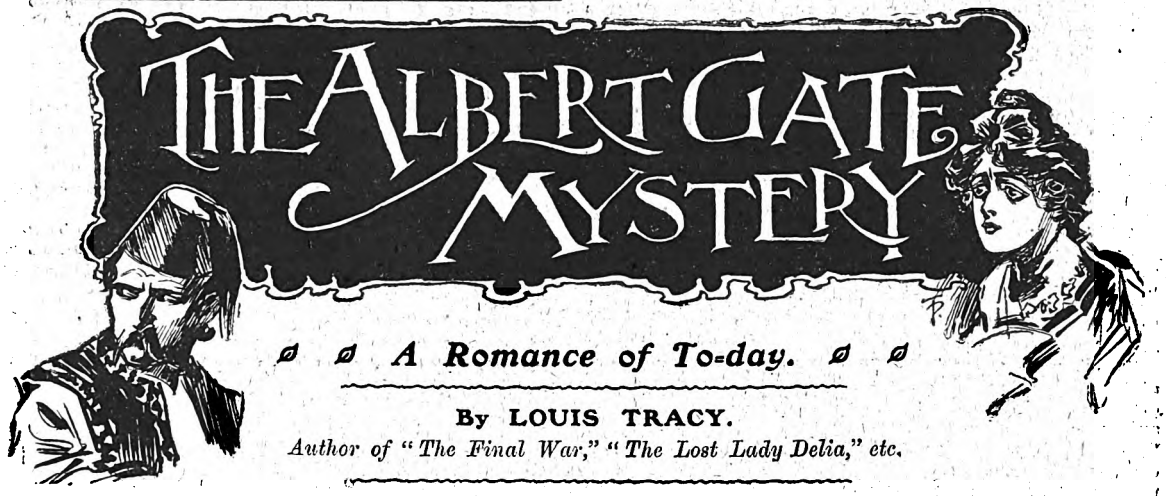
OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.



A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE IN THE WEST END.

An affair of some magnitude—perhaps a remarkable crime—has taken place in an Albert Gate Mansion.

Owing to the reticence of the authorities, it is at present impossible to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the nature or extent of the incident, but it is quite certain that public interest will be much excited when details are forthcoming. All sorts of rumours attain credence in the locality, the murder of several prominent persons being not the least persistent of these. Without, however, giving currency to idle speculation, several authentic statements may be grouped into a connected form.

Four weeks ago a party of Turkish gentlemen of high rank in Constantinople, arrived in London and took up their abode in the house in question, after some structural alterations pointing at great security within and without, had been planned and executed.

Attending these Turkish gentlemen, or officials, was a numerous suite of Moslem guards and servants, whilst, immediately following their arrival, came from Amsterdam, some dozen noted experts in the diamond-cutting industry. These were lodged in a neighbouring private hotel, where they were extremely uncommunicative as to their business in London. They were employed during the day at the Albert Gate house. The presence in the mansion, both day and night, of a strong force of Metropolitan police, tended to excite local curiosity to an intense degree, but no clear conception of the business of the occupants was allowed to reach the public.

Whatever it was that took place, the full particulars were not only well-known to the authorities—the presence of the police hints even at Governmental sanction—but matters proceeded on normal lines until yesterday morning.

Then it became clear that a remarkable development must have occurred during the preceding night, as the whole of the Dutch workmen and the Turkish attendants were taken off in cabs by the police, not to Morton Street Police Station, but to Scotland Yard, this in itself being a most unusual course to adopt. They are unquestionably detained in custody, but they have not yet been charged before a magistrate.

The police, later in the day, carried off some of these men's personal belongings, from both hotel and mansion.

A sinister aspect was given to the foregoing mysterious proceedings by the presence at Albert Gate, early in the day, of two police surgeons, who were followed, about twelve o'clock, by Dr. Tennyson Coke, the greatest living authority on toxicology.

Dr. Coke and the other medical gentlemen subsequently refused to impart the slightest information as to the reasons that led the police to seek their services, and the Scotland Yard authorities are adamant in the matter.

The representative of a news agency was threatened with arrest for trespass when he endeavoured to gain admission to the Albert Gate house, and it is quite evident that the police are determined to prevent the facts from leaking out at present—if they can by any means accomplish their wishes.

Such is the statement which Mr. Brett, barrister and detective, reads in the morning paper.

He has hardly finished its perusal when the Earl of Fairholme is announced.

He states that he has called regarding the Albert Gate crime. He is engaged, as he explains, to Miss Talbot, the niece of the late Admiral Talbot, at present living with her uncle, General Sir Hubert Fitz-James.

The Sultan, he continues, recently sent over to England some priceless diamonds in the charge of a special envoy. The diamonds being of political importance, the British Foreign Office places the envoy under the care of Mr. Jack Talbot, Miss Talbot's brother. The envoy is lodged in the Albert Gate Mansion, under police surveillance.

One morning the chief of the Turkish mission, his two secretaries, and a confidential servant are found murdered, the diamonds stolen and Mr. Jack Talbot vanished, though the police are on the premises at the time.

The Earl wants Brett to find Jack Talbot.

In conjunction with the Scotland Yard officials Brett commences operations. A search is first made of the Albert Gate Mansion, Mr. Winter the detective, and two inspectors assisting.

The Piece in the Screen.

During the inspector's running comments Brett had carefully scrutinised each of the windows. He at once came to the conclusion, by a simple analysis of the possibilities, that by no other means than through the barrier of iron wire had the diamonds passed out of the house; but the most thorough examination failed to reveal any loophole by which

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this achievement had been accomplished. He opened each of the windows, tested every iron bar, and saw that the fastenings of the external blind were undisturbed, whilst the fine wire mesh showed no irregularities in its hexagonal pattern, wherein any defect would at once be visible.

"We have done all that long since, sir," said the second police-officer, smiling at the obviousness of an amateur's method of inspection, for it happened that he had never met the barrister before, though he had often heard of him.

"You have?" said Brett, with the slightest tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "Did you do this?" and he commenced to thump with a clenched fist upon every portion of the external screen that he could reach.

"No, we did not," said the policeman, "and I don't see that it is going to accomplish anything except hurt your hand."

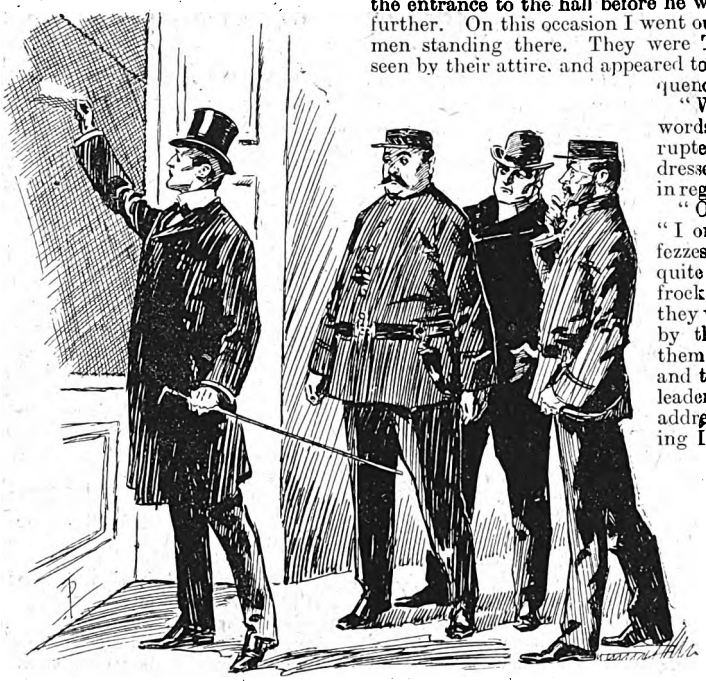
"That may be so," said Brett, "but the diamonds went this way and none other." He tested every portion of one window screen in this manner without effect. Then he approached the second window, and, beginning at the left-hand top corner, did the same thing. Suddenly an exclamation came from the three interested watchers. In the centre of the lower part of the screen Brett's hand made a visible impression upon the iron wire. Using no more force than had been applied to other portions, the blow served to tear a section of the blind about eight inches across. Instantly the barrister ceased operations and, producing a pocket-microscope, minutely examined the rent.

"I expected as much," he said, taking hold of the torn part of the screen and giving it a vigorous pull, with the result that a small piece, measuring about eight inches by six, came bodily out. "This has been cut away, as you will see, by some instrument which did not even bend the wire. It was subsequently replaced, whilst the fractured parts were sufficiently cemented by some composition to retain this section in its place, and practically defy observation. There was nothing for it but force to reveal it thus early. No doubt in time the composition would have dried, or been washed away, and then this bit of the screen would have fallen out by the action of wind and weather. Here, at any rate, is a hole in your defensive armour."

He held out the convicting piece to the discomfited Sharpe, who surveyed it in silence.

It was no part of Brett's business in life, however, to snatch plaudits from astounded policemen.

"This is a mere nothing," he continued. "Of course there must have been some such means of getting the diamonds off the premises. Let us return to the ante-room, and there you can tell me the exact history of events on Monday evening."



Suddenly an exclamation broke from the watchers. The wire screen had been opened.

The Murders.

In less confident tones Inspector Walters resumed his narrative—

"On Monday evening, sir," he said, "about eight o'clock, his Excellency and the two secretaries were dining downstairs, and matters had, thus far, gone on with the same routine as was observed every preceding day. The workmen quitted work at six o'clock. The three gentlemen went out for a drive as soon as everything was locked up, and came in again at a quarter to eight. They did not change their clothes for dinner, so there was no occasion to search them, as no one had gone upstairs since they had descended soon after six. They had barely started dinner when someone called at the front door, and I was sent for. The door bell, I may explain, was always answered by one of the house servants, and he, if necessary, admitted any person who came, closing the door, but the visitor had to be examined by the policeman stationed at the entrance to the hall before he was permitted to come any further. On this occasion I went out and found three gentlemen standing there. They were Turks, as could be easily seen by their attire, and appeared to be persons of some consequence."

"What do you mean by the words 'their attire'?" interrupted Brett. "Were they dressed in European clothes or in regular Turkish Garments?"

"Oh," said the inspector, "I only meant that they wore fezzes; otherwise they were quite accurately dressed in frock coats and the rest, but they were unmistakably Turks by their appearance. Two of them could speak no English, and the third, who acted as the leader of the party, first of all addressed me in French. Finding I did not understand him, he used very broken, but fairly intelligible English. What he wanted was to be taken at once to his Excellency, Mehemet Ali Pasha.

"I said that his Excellency was dining, and that perhaps he had better call in the morning, but he replied that his business was very urgent, and he could not wait. He made me understand that if I sent in the cards of himself and his companions they would certainly be admitted at once. I did not see any harm in this, so I took the three cards and gave them to Hussein, who was crossing the hall at the moment."

"As the cards were printed in Turkish characters, you could not, of course, tell what the names were," said Brett.

A look of blank astonishment crossed the inspector's face as he replied: "That is a very clever guess, but it is so. The hieroglyphics on the piece of pasteboard were worse than Greek. However, Hussein glanced at them. He appeared to be surprised; then at once went into the dining-room, returning with the message that the gentlemen were to be admitted. Of course I had nothing else to do but to let them in, which I did, accompanying them myself to the door of the dining-room, and making sure, before the door was closed, that their presence was expected."

"How did you do that?" said Brett.

"Well, although they spoke in what I suppose was Turkish, it is not very difficult to distinguish by a man's tones whether his reception of unexpected visitors is cordial or not, and there could be no doubt that the visiting cards had conveyed such

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names to His Excellency as warranted the introduction of the party into the house. The six gentlemen remained in the dining-room until 9.17 (I have the time noted here in my pocket-book). They then came out and went upstairs in a body to the ante-room, where they all sat down, as I could tell by the movement of chairs overhead, and in a few minutes Hussein was rung for to bring cigarettes and coffee. This was at 9.21. Hussein was searched as he came downstairs after receiving the order, and again at 9.30 when he returned after executing it. I was relieved at ten o'clock, and beyond describing the three gentlemen, I know nothing more about the business."

"They were well dressed?" said Brett; "they impressed you as Turkish gentlemen by their features, and they wore fezzes?"

"Yes," said the policeman, with a smile; "but there was a little more than that."

"It is of no importance," said Brett.

"But really it must be," urged the inspector. "One of them, the man who spoke to me, had had a bad sword cut across his right cheek, whilst another squinted horribly; besides, they were all elderly men."

"Pardon me, inspector," said Brett, "but you admit, no doubt, that this is a very remarkable crime I am investigating."

"I should just think it is, sir," was the answer.

"Well, now, does it not strike you that the perpetrators thereof, who were not afraid to be scrutinised by yourself and by several other policemen, and to be searched and further scrutinised by a different set of officers when they came out again, would be very unlikely persons to bear about them such distinguishing characteristics as would lead to their arrest by the first youthful police-constable who encountered them. I do not want to be rude, or to indicate any lack of discretion on your part, but, from my point of view, I would vastly prefer not to be furnished with any description of these three persons, nor would I care to have seen them as they entered or left the house."

"Well, that is very curious," said Inspector Walters, dropping his hands on his knees in sheer amazement at such an extraordinary statement from a man whose clearness and accuracy of perception had been so fully justified by the incident of the window-blind.

"And now, Mr. Sharpe," said Brett, turning to the other officer, "what did you observe?"

"I came on duty at ten o'clock, sir; posted my guards, and received from Inspector Walters an exact account of what had taken place before my arrival. Inspector Walters had hardly quitted the house, when one of the junior members of the mission came downstairs with a note which he asked me to send by a constable at once to Mr. Talbot."

"You are quite sure he was one of the members of the mission?" said Brett.

"Perfectly certain. I have seen him every previous night for nearly a month, as the gentleman often went out late to the Turkish Embassy, and elsewhere. I sent the note, as requested, and Mr. Talbot came back with the constable in about twenty minutes. Mr. Talbot went upstairs accompanied by Hussein; Hussein came down, was searched, went down to the kitchen, brought up more coffee, and never appeared again. The next time I saw him was about noon yesterday, when we broke open the door, and found his dead body. At 11.25, Mr. Talbot, accompanied by the one whom my friend has described as the spokesman of the strangers, came down the stairs. Mr. Talbot looked somewhat puzzled, but not specially worried, and submitted himself to the searching operation as usual. The other man seemed to be surprised at this proceeding, but offered no objection when his turn came, and said something laughingly in French to Mr. Talbot, when he had to take his boots off. The two gentlemen went outside and called a cab. Mr. Talbot got in, and the constable at the door heard the foreigner say, 'Tell the driver to go to the Carlton Hotel.' He repeated it twice, so as to make sure the man would make no mistake.

"Then they drove off, and there was no further incident to report until five minutes past twelve, when the other two foreigners came downstairs. Then we had a bit of a job as they knew no English, and one of our men, who could speak French, found that they did not understand that language. However, at last in dumb show, we got them to perceive that everybody who came downstairs had to be searched. They submitted at once, and I took special care that the investigation was complete. There was nothing upon them to arouse the slightest suspicion, no weapons of any sort beyond a small pocket-knife carried by one man, and not much in the way of either papers or money. Before going out one of them produced a small card on which was written 'Carlton Hotel.'

"I took it that this was their residence, so I instructed a constable to see them into a cab and tell the driver where to take them. I also showed them how much money to give the cabman. None of the gentlemen upstairs put in an appearance, nor did I hear them retire to rest. To make quite sure that all was right, I and a sergeant, who looked in a little later, went upstairs and tried the door of the ante-room. This was locked, and everything was quiet within, so we returned to the hall, and the night was passed in the usual manner. Hussein always made his appearance about eight o'clock in the morning, when he came down to procure coffee for his Excellency and the others. As he did not show up I wondered what had become of him. When nine o'clock came, I determined to investigate matters. By that time the diamond-cutters had put in an appearance, and were gathered in the hall, undergoing a slight search preparatory to their day's work."

"How many of these men were there?" said Brett.

"Fourteen exactly. They were mostly Dutchmen, with, I think, three Belgians. Taking a constable with me I went upstairs and ascended to the second storey, where I knew his Excellency's suite was situated, and where I expected to find Hussein asleep on a mat in front of the bedroom door. The mat was there, but no Hussein.

"Then I went higher up to the rooms occupied by the two assistants. Here I knocked, but received no answer. One door was locked, the other was open, so I went in, but the room was empty and the bed had not been slept upon. This seemed to me so strange that I knocked loudly at the other door, with no result. I then returned to his Excellency's floor and hammered at the door, which was locked, sufficiently to wake the soundest sleeper that ever lived. This again was useless, so I returned downstairs and sent off two messengers post haste—one to Mr. Talbot, and the other to the Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard.

"The man who went to Mr. Talbot's house returned first, bringing the startling information that Mr. Talbot had not been home all night, and that his uncle and sister were anxious to know where he was, as they had received no message from him since he quitted the house the previous night at 10.15.

"The Commissioner of Police came himself a little later. By that time Inspector Walters had reached here for his turn of day duty, and after a hasty consultation we decided to break in all the doors that were locked, commencing with that of the second assistant. His room was empty, and so was his Excellency's, neither apartment having been occupied during the night.

"We then returned to the first-floor and forced the door of the ante-room which, we discovered, was only secured by a spring latch, the lower lock not having been used. As soon as we entered the room, we found the four dead men. Hussein, the servant, was nearest the door and was lying in a crumpled-up position. He had been stabbed twice through the back and once through the spinal column at the base of the neck. His Excellency and the two assistants were seated

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in chairs, but had been stabbed through the heart. The instrument used must have been a long, thin dagger or stiletto. There was no sign of it anywhere in the room, and most certainly none of the men who came out the previous night had such a weapon concealed upon him.

"Doctors were at once sent for and the first medical gentlemen to arrive said that each of the four had been dead for many hours, but they also imagined that the coffee, the remains of which we found in some cups on the table, had been drugged. So, before disturbing the room and its contents in any way, the Commissioner sent for Dr. Tennyson Coke.

"After careful investigation Dr. Coke came to the same conclusion as the other gentlemen. He believes that his Excellency and the two assistants were first stupefied by the drug and then murdered as they sat in their chairs, whilst the appearance of Hussein and the nature of his wounds seemed to indicate that he had been unexpectedly attacked and killed before he could struggle effectually or even call for assistance.

"Of course the diamonds had vanished, whilst in the safes or on the table we found the keys which had evidently been taken from his Excellency's pockets. We were all puzzled to account for the disappearance of the diamonds and the dagger, but you have effectually shown the means whereby they were conveyed off the premises. Dr. Coke took away the coffee for the purpose of analysis. The four bodies were carried to the mortuary in Chapel Place, and the fourteen workmen were conveyed to Scotland Yard, not because we have any charge against them, but the Commissioner thought it best to keep them under surveillance until the Turkish Embassy had settled what was to be done with them, in the matter of paying such wages as were due and sending them back to Amsterdam. The men themselves, I may add, were quite satisfied with our action in the matter. That is really all I have to tell you."

"It is quite clear, then," said Brett, "that two men succeeded in murdering four and in getting away with their plunder and arms without creating the slightest noise or exciting any suspicion in your mind."

"That is so," said Inspector Sharpe ruefully.

"Then," said Brett, "there is nothing else to be done here. Will you come with me, Mr. Winter?"

"Where to, sir?" said the detective.

"To find Mr. Talbot, of course."

"Easier said than done," remarked Inspector Walters, as the door closed behind them.

Inspector Sharpe was less sceptical.

"He's a very smart chap is Brett," he said. "Neither you nor I thought about punching that wire-screen, did we?"

A Startling Clue.

Once clear of the Albert Gate mansion, the barrister was bound to confess to a sense of indefiniteness, a feeling of uncertainty, which seldom characterised either his thoughts or his actions. He admitted as much to his companion, for Brett was a man who would not consent to pose under any circumstances.

"It is quite true," he explained, "that our first duty must be to find Mr. Talbot, and it is still more certain that we will be able to accomplish this part of our task, but there are elements in this inquiry which baffle me at present."

"And what are they, sir?" said the detective.

"I fail to see," replied Brett thoughtfully, "why Mr. Talbot was dragged into the matter at all. On the straightforward assumption that Turks were engaged in the pleasant occupation of taking other Turks' lives—an assumption to which, by the way, I attach no great amount of credence—why did they not allow Mr. Talbot to go quietly to his own home? It was not that they feared more speedy discovery of their crime. The hour was then late; it was tolerably certain that he would make no move which might prove injurious to them until next morning, and then the whole affair was bound to be discovered by the police in the ordinary course of events."

"I don't quite follow you, sir," said Winter, with a puzzled tone in his voice. They had, for the sake of quietude, turned into the Park, and were now walking towards Hyde Park Corner. "What do you mean by saying that Mr. Talbot would make no move in the matter until next morning?"

"Oh, I forgot," said Brett. "Of course you don't know why the diamonds were stolen?"

"For the same reason that all other diamonds are stolen, I suppose."

"Oh, dear no," laughed the barrister. "This is a political crime."

"Political!" said the amazed policeman.

"Well, we won't quarrel about words, and as there are perhaps no politics in Turkey, we will call it dynastic or any other loud-voiced adjective which serves to take it out of the realm of simple felony. Why? I cannot at this moment tell you, but you may be perfectly certain that the disappearance of those diamonds from the custody of Mehemet Ali Pasha will not cause the Sultan to sleep any more sound of nights."

"What beats me, Mr. Brett," said the detective, viciously prodding the gravel path with his stick, "is how you ferret out these queer facts—fancies some people would call them, and that is what I myself used to do until I knew you better."

"When we burst open the door we found four dead men."

"In this case it is simple enough. By mere chance I happened to read this morning that there had been some little domestic squabble in Royal circles at Constantinople. I don't know whether you are acquainted with Turkish history, Mr. Winter, but it is a well-recognised principle that any Sultan is liable to die of diseases which are weird and painfully sudden; for instance, the last one is popularly supposed to have plunged a long pair of scissors into his jugular vein; others have drunk coffee that has disagreed with them, or smoked cigarettes that were too highly perfumed. In any case, the invariable result of these

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eccentricities has been that a fresh Sultan occupied the throne. Now, don't forget that I am simply theorising, for I know no more of this business than you do at this moment, but I still think that you will find some connection between my theory and that which has actually occurred. At any rate, I have said sufficient to prove to you the importance of not being too ready to make arrests."

"I quite see that," was the thoughtful rejoinder. "But you must not forget, sir, that we in Scotland Yard are bound by rules of procedure. Perhaps you will not mind my suggesting that a word from you to the Foreign Office might induce the authorities to communciate officially with the Home Department, and then instructions could be issued to the police, which would leave the matter a little more open than we are able to regard it under the existing conditions."

"I will see to that," said the barrister. "When does the inquest take place?"

"This evening at six."

"It will be adjourned, of course?"

"Oh, yes; no evidence will be given beyond what is necessary for purposes of identification, and this can be supplied by the police themselves and an official from the Turkish Embassy."

"Very well. You will mention to no one the theory I have just explained to you?"

"Not if you wish it, sir."

"I do wish it at present. Which way are you going?"

"Straight to the Yard."

"In that case I will accompany you a portion of the distance."

They had now reached Hyde Park Corner, and, hailing a hansom, Brett told the driver to stop outside the Carlton Hotel. The man whipped up his horse and drove in the direction of Constitution Hill, evidently intending to avoid the congested traffic of Piccadilly and take the longer, but more pleasant, route through the Green Park and the Mall.

"By the way," said Brett, "did the driver of the hansom which conveyed Mr. Talbot and his companion from Albert Gate on Monday night tell you which road he followed?"

"Yes," said the detective, "he followed the same road that this chap is taking."

Brett rubbed his hands, with a queer expression of thoughtful pleasure on his keen face.

"Ah," he said, "I like that. It is well to be on the scent."

"You mean," laughed the other, "that we are acting as sleuth hounds, because that is what the American novel-writer generally calls detectives."

"The simile will suffice," said Brett. He did not explain to his professional *confrère* that it was a positive stimulant to his abounding energy and highly-strung nerves to find that he was actually following the path taken by the criminal whom he was pursuing. The mere fact lent reality to the chase. For a mile, at any rate, there could be no mistake, though he might expect a check at the Carlton. Arrived there, Brett alighted.

"Are you going to make any inquiries in the hotel, sir?" said Mr. Winter.

"Why should I?" said Brett. "You have already ascertained from the management that no person, even remotely resembling any of the parties concerned, is staying at the hotel."

"Yes, confound it, I know I did," cried the other, "but I never told you so."

"That is all right," laughed Brett. "Come and see me at my chambers this evening when the inquest is finished. Perhaps by that time we may be able to determine our plan of action."

(A further long instalment of this splendid tale will be published next Tuesday.)

Why they Were Glad.

Tommy: "So glad you've come, Mr. Bowlegs!" Mr. Bowlegs (fishing for compliments): "And why are you so glad I've come, my little man?" Tommy: "Ethel and I are playing at trains, and you'll make such a lovely bridge."

YOUR EDITOR CHATS.

I must first of all say that I sincerely hope that you feel you have got full value for the twopence which you have laid out on this number of Short Stories. I may say that many busy brains have been at work on it for months past. Your favourite authors have been thinking out their best ideas and putting them to paper; the Sub-Editors have been busily reading the thousands of stories that have come into this office and selecting the best; while your Editor has been busy choosing the cream of the cream of these stories and in planning the number itself. If you are pleased with the result, then we, on our side, shall feel that the enormous amount of work, time and money expended in producing the copy you hold in your hands have not been wasted.

One special feature which I have made in this number is the offer of a greatly increased number of prizes. The Gramophones, which have been going out for several weeks past at the rate of ten a week, have been so much appreciated that I feel constrained to increase the number in order that those who have not already secured the instruments may have a greater opportunity of doing so.

I have received a remarkable letter from an anonymous reader of Short Stories. It is one of the most curious letters that I have ever had. It will be found on page 815. The writer, as you will see, received a prize of £10 from Short Stories about eight years ago, and this £10 proved the foundation of a big fortune. He now writes over from America inclosing dollar bills to the value of £50, and asks that this money may be distributed amongst readers in sums of £10 under conditions which he leaves to me. The letter has only just come to hand, and I therefore hasten to publish it at once. By next week I shall have thought out some satisfactory manner in which to distribute the money.

You will doubtless notice that on page 798 I have started the promised "Love Problem Series." I should be glad to know what you think of the first one, and if you have any problem of this kind you would like solved, let me know, and if I think the subject suitable, a story with its solution will be given you.

Before finishing up this week I would like to say that one of the stories in this number was written under very pathetic circumstances. There is no space to give you particulars of the case here, but I have had the permission of the author to tell you the whole story next week. It is one in which payment for the tale was the means of keeping a home together this Christmas.

TO NEW READERS, GREETING!

There are doubtless several thousands of people who have been attracted to buy this number of *Short Stories* for the first time in their lives. It is to such new readers that I would like to say something about the paper.

This is, as you are already aware, a double number of the ordinary issue, which usually consists of half a dozen or more complete tales and an instalment of a powerful serial story. *Every* issue bears a coloured illustrated cover, and is just as daintily and as choicely got up as the copy you hold in your hands. All the fiction is carefully selected, and is written by authors who have made names for themselves in the world of popular literature.

It is not for me to try and influence you in any way in your opinion of the stories which appear in this number, but I would ask you very specially to read the article entitled "How I Chaperoned Belinda." It is one of a series of articles revealing the secrets of life in High Society at home and abroad—the most remarkable series ever published.

I sincerely hope that the little paper will commend itself sufficiently to you to induce you to continue taking it in every week in future.

Your Editor.

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Love Problem No. 1.

BEHIND THE SCREEN.

Ought a Man to Give Up All His Bachelor Pursuits Upon Marriage?

"What is it, Mary?"

"Mr. Hunt and another gentleman to see master, please."

"Didn't you tell them Mr. Mowbray hasn't come home yet?"

"Yes'm, and they said they'd wait. I've shown them into the drawing-room."

"Very well; I shall be down in a moment."

"The gentlemen told me not to disturb you, but I thought you would like to know they were here."

"Thank you, Mary."

"Will the gentlemen stay to dinner?"

"No, I hope—I mean, I think not. You may sound the gong at the usual time. Don't forget, please."

"No'm, I won't forgot." And Mary smiled significantly to herself as she retired to the kitchen. This would not be the first time she had been called upon to sound the dinner gong at Holly Lodge as a gentle hint to visitors that it was time for them to go.

Mary had discovered long ago that hospitality to "master's friends" was not one of her young mistress' virtues.

"And I don't blame her, neither," said Mary to herself; "it's only natural she shouldn't want them always hanging around and taking master's attention off of herself, and she only married six months."

Mrs. Mowbray gave a little petulant sigh.

"I suppose I must," she murmured, addressing her looking glass with a frown. And then she began to smile, half reluctantly, at the face she saw reflected there.

It was a pretty face. The frown clouded the prettiness, but the smile made it bewitching. Yet Mrs. Mowbray frowned almost as often as she smiled. But then so many things happened to annoy her.

Harry was a dear boy, of course, but—well, he certainly had his faults. What made him so late to-night, for instance? Surely he hadn't gone off again to play chess with that horrid Bob Jollibois, as he did only the other week.

But, no, he wouldn't be so selfish and horrid when he knew perfectly well how unhappy it would make her. She had told him so when he came home at half-past eight that other night, and he had vowed never to do it again.

Harry was a man of his word; she would say that for him. He had promised before they were married, to give up that hateful volunteering and football that always took up so much of his time, and he had kept his promise so far, though she was quite sure Bob Jollibois and the others were doing their best to tempt him to break it.

What was keeping him this evening? She had never felt quite easy in her mind since she found out that Harry was still a member of the Jackdaw's Club. He had quite agreed with her when she declared that a married man with a comfortable home of his own, had no business to go to a club, but, all the same, he had not resigned his membership. He had explained to her that it would be shabby to do so and that paying a subscription to a club was a mere matter of form. He had never been near the place since, it is true. Still, she would have been happier had he severed his connection with the Jackdaws altogether.

The club was a link with his bachelor days, in which she had had no part, and she resented it as such.

The two men waiting downstairs were links of the same sort. They had known Harry when he was still a stranger to her, and they could talk to him of things that had happened before he had ever met *her*. It made her feel vaguely aggrieved. She would not have admitted it in so many words, but it always pained her a little to think that Harry could ever have had any absorbing interests and thoughts outside herself.

Though she laughed to herself she liked to cherish a delusion which Harry's friends always seemed to destroy—to wit, that Harry's life had been a dead and dreary blank before *she* came into it.

Mrs. Mowbray seized her silver-backed hair-brush—Harry's latest present—and administered half a dozen impatient and quite unnecessary dabs to her pretty, fluffy hair.

"I suppose I must," she sighed again, and tripped lightly downstairs prepared to be civil to her husband's visitors.

"Poor old Mowbray! Take warning by him, Bundy, and don't get married."

"I don't mean to. But how about yourself, eh?"

"Oh Nell's one in a thousand she's not like Mrs. Mow—but, I say, I suppose one mustn't abuse a man's wife in his own house. And I daresay she's a charming little woman, really—but a bit jealous. Anyway, he adores her."

"Evidently. A man must be pretty far gone to give up everything, as Mowbray has done. You don't think he'll come to the smoker?"

"No—I'm afraid he won't. Since he's been married he can't be induced to spend an evening away from her."

"Poor old Mowbray. He's bound to get tired of it."

"Yes, a man wants a little change, even if he's married an angel. Human nature can't stand monotony."

"Adam's relying on Mowbray to sing. The fellows will be horribly disappointed if he doesn't."

"So will Mowbray himself. He used to be uncommonly keen on it. Of course, he'll refuse, simply because he's afraid of hurting his wife's feelings."

"It strikes me he's carrying devotion a bit too far. Why, he seems to have thrown over every blessed thing he ever cared for. The Growlers are furious at his desertion. They've lost their best half-back. And old Harding was grumbling to me, only last night, because Mowbray hasn't put his nose inside the School of Arms for months."

"That must have been a blow to Mowbray, to give up those bayonet competitions. He was a dead certainty for at least one prize."

"It's the same with everything. He's losing his form all round. It's a sin that such a good sportsman should be allowed to run to seed; and a woman who makes her husband sacrifice all his pet hobbies must be——"

The speaker paused expressively.

"Well, of course, we don't *know* that it's her fault. He never so much as hinted at it. Pretends he's dropping out of things to please himself."

"But who believes that?"

"Nobody! Oh, you're quite right. It *is* my fault!"

It was not Jack Hunt's voice that answered his friend, Bundy's question.

The two men turned to the speaker with startled faces.

It was Mrs. Mowbray, who detached herself from the shadow of the screen at the door, and came towards them with outstretched hands.

"It was mean to listen," she said, flushing all over her pretty face, "but I couldn't help it. You didn't hear me come in, and—something you said—made me wait, and so I—I overheard. Oh, please don't think me a—a cat," she added hurriedly, "but when you said that about taking warning by Harry, and not getting married, it—it wasn't in human nature not to listen. I've been thoughtless and selfish. It's done me good to hear the truth. Won't you shake hands?"

Ten minutes later, when Harry Mowbray came home, he was amazed to find that his wife had set her heart on his singing at the Jackdaws' Smoker, and when she insisted on his spending the entire following evening at the club, it dawned upon him that something extraordinary had happened.

Grete Hahn.

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MY CLIENT.

The Tale of a Will.

"COME in," I mumbled.

Another knock.

"Come in," I shouted with irritation at the repeated summons, oblivious of the fact that a heavy dray passing drowned all except top note utterances.

But the vision which did enter was a most unexpected one. Young, beautiful, carrying in one little gloved hand a great bundle of frills and lace which could not be allowed to do the charwoman's work over my office floor. She was streaming with chains and charms, and nodding with plumes, like a lawyer's visitor on the stage, perhaps, but not such as usually climbs the narrow, bare staircase to a genuine solicitor's office in a city bye-way.

Of course I bounded to my feet like an indiarubber ball, feeling a worm in my working coat, and, as I politely placed the one spare chair in a new, but no more convenient position, I had a terrible fear that good Mrs. Smith might have overlooked its dusting on that particular morning.

"You are surprised to see me?" my visitor said with a little smile, which had a good deal of amusement in it as well as graciousness, no doubt from perceiving the embarrassment with which I had received her.

"Well, madam," I said gallantly, "these dingy chambers are not often honoured by visits from the fair sex, but things which are rare are always most highly prized."

She looked at me calmly through her big grey eyes, and I felt I must stand or fall in her estimation by the scrutiny.

"I have come to consult you," she said, removing her eyes from me to the circle she was describing on the table with her finger, "about—about my husband."

How had I been fool enough to imagine she had not been snared before she was out of the nursery?

"Yes?" I murmured dubiously.

"I haven't got one," she said, looking up quickly.

"Oh!" I replied. "The two statements require reconciliation."

"No," she replied, "that is just it—I don't want to marry. All boys are savages, and all men are brutes."

It was an insult, of course, but there was nothing one would not have borne from those smiling lips, revealing a shimmering row of pearls. I bowed.

"You agree," she laughed. "I am glad. Well, the next thing to tell you is that I am very poor."

I knew that costly jewels, priceless lace, Worth's gowns, and Paris millinery often did represent extreme poverty, so I again inclined my head.

"It is very hard to talk while you are so silent," she said pettishly. "I suppose I had better begin at the beginning and tell you the whole long story, and then I won't notice your silence."

"Yes," I assented. "That would be the best way."

"Well," she resumed, knitting her brows together with a delightful piquancy, "my name is Mildred Leslie, and my father and mother dying when I was quite a child, I was adopted and brought up by a brother of my mother's. He was immensely wealthy, and I always had everything I wished for. Upon one point only we differed, or rather agreed, and that was marriage. I shared his horror of it, but he had a theory that all women should marry, and all men should not, though how he suggested this plan should be carried out he never explained. Well, a few months ago, he died, leaving me all he possessed as I was his only near relation, but—ah, this is the dreadful part," she interjected quizzically, "only on condition that I was married within a year after his death. I was to be given a thousand pounds as an income for the year, and if I was not married by the end of it, the whole of his property was to be sold and go to pay off the National Debt!"

"I think the conditions are such as few young ladies would grumble at," I said guardedly.

"Well, I am one of the few, then," she answered snappishly, "and that is not the kind of opinion I have come to ask you for."

I bowed and waited.

It was evident that my fair client had to be treated with caution.

"The case is this—I am the only near relative he had, so if we can only break the will by proving he was not right in his mind, I will come in as heir-at-law, and no one will be a bit the worse."

"You cannot abide by the conditions? Breaking a will is not an easy matter!"

"No, I should not have consulted you if I had meant to do so. He was very eccentric, and there will be no one to oppose us. I went to his solicitors, but they were shocked at the suggestion, and refused to act for me, so then I asked the Clares, whom you know, and Mrs. Clare gave me your address."

"It was very kind of her to mention me," I said, with a glow of professional gratitude to my friend's wife.

Miss Leslie looked at me steadily for a moment, as if gauging my vanity, and then, with amusement creeping again into her grey eyes she added—

"She said you were so good-looking. If you had been a woman I should not have told you, but a man it could only aggravate."

She looked at me with a most whimsical expression, and, though I longed to avenge the wound to my professional vanity, I could not find it in my heart to be annoyed with my tormentor.

I did the best thing that remained for me to do under the circumstances, I laughed, and she joined me.

"That is right," she said. "I think you will do. Get me through this, and I shall be everlastingly grateful."

With a few more necessary details she gathered her purse and frills again into her tiny hand and swept away, taking my sunshine with her.

I worked hard to earn that gratitude, poor reward though it was in compensation for the heart that she so quickly took into her possession. No one brought into daily contact with Miss Leslie could help loving her. She had the winsome waywardness of a spoilt child, with the imperiousness of an empress, but now and again traits of what is best and noblest in woman would suddenly appear at unexpected moments, and be as quickly hidden out of sight again, as if the owner was ashamed of possessing any of the softer feminine qualities.

It was a tedious and endlessly technical case, but it was pulled through at last, adding not a little to my own reputation.

Mr. Biddulph having certainly been a man of eccentric habits it was not hard to bring in a verdict of an unsound mind, no one being particularly interested in proving he was sane.

But my success was as nothing to the greyness of the future when my heart's darling should have passed out of

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my life, and at most I should be privileged with an occasional call as her legal adviser. It was the morning after we had won that I sat in my dreary office awaiting the woman who had so frequently brightened it of late.

The case had made a tremendous sensation. Columns of the morning papers were devoted to the beautiful heiress and her mad uncle, while the evening placards had contained nothing else, and one enterprising journal advertised an interview with Miss Leslie herself.

I knew so well how she was revelling in her notoriety, and I—well, I was just the solicitor of the case!

A knock came to disturb my somewhat morose meditations, but it was far too loud to be mistaken for the gentle tap which always preceded my fair client's entry.

In answer to my summons an elderly man came in, leaning heavily upon a gold nobbed stick. He was unmistakably a retired military man, so that I was not surprised when he announced himself as Colonel Wyatt.

"Mr. Mervyn Ray, I believe?" he queried.

"That is my name, sir," I said, "will you take a chair?"

Having seated himself with some apparent difficulty upon the one to which I waved him, he fixed on me a somewhat eagle eye, and began.

"Sir, I have come to perform a duty."

This, of course, could herald nothing but an unpleasant communication, so I merely bowed and waited.

"You are, I believe, the solicitor who acted for Miss Leslie in yesterday's will case?"

My heart beat faster, in spite of my professional calm as I assented.

"The will having been broken, the young lady inherits as heir-at-law?"

"That is so," I said, shuffling some papers on the table to cover the growing uneasiness I felt at these preliminary remarks.

"I have come to you first, Mr. Ray, as a matter of form, but, of course, the interests of your client will very properly be your first consideration. I see, however, by reading the account of the proceedings yesterday, it was stated that Mr. Biddulph was a bachelor. That, however, is not correct. He was a widower, and, at one time of his life, there was a son of his marriage living. Now, if that boy is alive, or has left heirs, for he would be thirty-five or six if alive, they would be the inheritors of Mr. Biddulph's estate!"

He said it all so quietly, and seemed so sure of his facts, that I felt the blood leaving my face. I had more than a legal interest in the case. It was a terrifying thought to me that I should have helped this girl to compass her own ruin, while some nameless outcast was to inherit the fortune which became her so well. I rose from my chair and walked over to the window. The action cleared my brain. I turned again to Colonel Wyatt.

"I cannot, of course, combat the truth of what you have stated, for I am entirely ignorant of the whole matter as you know, but if you will be good enough to furnish me with the details of the case, I shall then be in a better position to judge the best course to pursue."

"In the interests of Miss Leslie?"

"I have the honour to represent her!"

"Quite so," he said. "Well, I am afraid I do not remember all the names as I ought to. I had a touch of the sun in India, and my memory is not as good as it might be, but no doubt others will be able to fill up the blanks. What I am going to tell you happened about thirty-four years ago, when I was stationed at Halifax with my regiment. It was here I first met Mr. Biddulph and his lovely young wife. But that was not his name then, for he took that some years later, from the great property he inherited from a distant relation, and at this time he was miserably poor. She was a most beautiful creature, and he treated her like the bear he was. Used actually to beat her, I believe, and was madly, insanely jealous. They had one little son about a year old, and, when the regiment moved to Bermuda, she and the kid came too, under the protection of Captain Goldie, one of our fellows, who was desperately in love with her. We naturally concluded her husband would get a separation, but this he refused to do, merely washing his hands finally of both wife and child. A few months later, Goldie and the woman he adored took fever, and were both dead within a week, leaving the child in a perfectly destitute condition. The father was written to, but never replied, and, in the meantime, a missionary and his wife took the boy in. Goldie had been exceedingly popular, and there was a general reluctance to cast the child off for his sake, so it ended by our subscribing about a hundred pounds to maintain him until the clergyman could get him into some home. Shortly after that I came back to England, and I heard no more of the matter until seeing the account of yesterday's trial, in this morning's paper, brought the matter to my mind."

I had leant my head on my hand while he was speaking, and I now looked up.

"This happened a long time ago. Colonel Wyatt. This boy has, no doubt, been well provided for and started in life, does it not seem a pity to rake up old scandals to provide an able-bodied man with wealth he does not expect, and to turn out a beautiful girl into the world totally unfitted for battle, and with absolutely no means of earning a livelihood?"

"Oh, of course, I expected you would plead for your client," he said, with a short laugh, "but she has only herself to blame, why did she not accept her uncle's conditions? You refuse, then, to help in the search for Mr. Biddulph's son? It is what I anticipated!"

"On the contrary," I said quietly, "he shall be made aware of his position."

He looked at me with grave doubt, trying to fathom the legal depth of my assertion. He passed his hand over his forehead.

"I wish I could remember that missionary's name," he said, "but it has gone. I think it began with B."

"Bradley," I suggested.

"Bradley—Bradley, by Jove it was! Rev. something Bradley."

"Samuel," again I put in.

"Rev. Samuel Bradley—the very name! I see, sir, I have brought you no news," he said sternly.

"On the contrary," I replied, "you have supplied me with the most astonishing piece of intelligence that I have ever heard in my life."

"Perhaps," he asked, with a sneer, "since you know so much, you may be able to inform me of the name of Mr. Biddulph's son, since I suppose he went by his father's first name?"

"He did," I said, looking straight into my visitor's face, "His name is Mervyn Ray!"

The old man drew himself up as if the information were too great to grasp except at its full height. Profound silence reigned for a minute.

"Then I shall wish you good-morning, Mr. Ray," he said with military dignity, and, according me a stately bow, he left the room.

I buried my face in both my hands in a whirl of conflicting thoughts. I may have sat so for five minutes or an hour without my impressions crystallising themselves into actual thought, when I was interrupted by the light tap on my door which I had been so eagerly awaiting before the arrival of my military visitor.

She did not wait for me to reply, but burst into the room radiant, triumphant, regal.

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"Oh, it's splendid!" she cried, running forward impulsively to take my hand, "everyone says you have handled it in masterly fashion, and you can't think what a sensation it has made. Why, I have had three proposals this morning already," she laughed, shaking the envelopes at me, "and I think my solicitor had better reply to them.

"You are dreadfully official this morning," she said, retaining her hold of the letters she was handing me, and looking up at me with a bewitching appeal, "and I thought I should never get here, I wanted someone to share my joy with so badly."

I took papers, little hand and all, into my clasp, and with ever such a slight pressure I said gently—

"Miss Leslie could not come to anyone who would sympathise more in all her joys and sorrows."

She laughed, blushed a little, and busied herself with the pile of newspapers she had brought with her.

"Miss Leslie," I began, assuming again my most legal air, "we have, it is true, won our case, but in law it is necessary to be prepared for every sort of contingency arising, so that we may be ahead of our adversaries should such appear."

"Yes," she said, with mock severity, "now you look as you did yesterday in court. One paper said you were so handsome, and I am inclined to agree with Mrs. Clare, that you have some good looks," she laughed. "I am really very pleased. It adds so to the picturesqueness of our case."

I laughed too. How could one be serious with such a child?

"Miss Leslie, will you try to give me your attention for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, when you cease to be legal in your aspect. It is aggravatingly becoming."

I went over to the window. It was impossible to say what I had to with those dancing eyes upon my face. Fixing my gaze on an unresponsive lamp post outside, I pointed out that she, having inherited as heir-at-law, must inform me how she wished to act in case another claimant on the same grounds should come forward.

She was grave enough now.

"Oh, it is impossible," she cried. "My uncle never married, and I am the only child of his only sister, and he had no brothers!"

"Shall we say 'improbable?' In law we find so many things possible that certainly ought not to be so. I only asked in case of such a contingency arising, how would you wish me to act? We will suppose, for the sake of argument, that your uncle had married and left an heir, but, for some reason of his own, had kept the matter secret. If this child should now come forward to claim the inheritance, our wisest course would be to deny the legality of the marriage, which is often hard to prove when witnesses have died. If such an offspring existed, he would, no doubt, be poor, and so would be willing to resign his claim to the estate for a consideration rather than enter upon a lengthy and costly law suit."

She sat with her eyes bent upon the ground, while I spoke, but she now got up and faced me across my office desk.

"Do you think," she asked, her eyes big with a sad wonderment, "that I would keep for one moment what was not mine by right, if once convinced that such was not the case?"

It was well for us both, perhaps, that my desk was between us. She sat down again, her child's face getting old with the possibility of want, and her blue eyes filling with tears.

"Oh, what should I do?" she cried, "I am no use for anything, I would starve."

My face must have betrayed my feelings, for she added, with an attempt at her former gaiety—

"I should ask you to take me on as a typist."

"Would you not let me provide for you as my wife?" I said, leaning tenderly over her.

"How could I give you such a promise if I were penniless, when I don't want to marry at all while I am rich?"

"I will be content with the conditional consent, and, at the same time do all in my power to try to prevent the contingency arising."

"It would be nice to be loved just for one's own self," she said, looking up at me. "I will promise just—just to please you," and I bent over her and sealed the contract by a kiss on her sweet lips.

Then she left me with a nod and a smile, but there was a soft expression in her beautiful eyes that gave me a dream of happiness.

I had no time to enjoy my meditation, however, and I sent my office-boy flying for a cab before Miss Leslie's carriage had well left the street. I must bind Colonel Wyatt to silence regarding the revelations of the morning.

I drove to his club, but he had not yet returned. I left a note for him asking him to telephone to my office as soon as he did, and that I should come round, as I wished to see him most urgently. I then returned and sent for lunch.

The telephone bell rang in the outer office.

"Miss Leslie would be glad if you could call to see her as soon as possible," my clerk announced when the message at last came through.

I stood for a moment with a sudden doubt rising in my mind, and as quickly dispelled. She could not have heard. My toilet required a few minutes extra now, and then I was off, without a second thought of the Colonel, or the message I had been waiting for.

Miss Leslie had taken a dainty flat in London, where she had resided during the pending of the proceedings, with an old governess as companion.

As I entered the drawing-room she was standing at the window, looking out into the garden.

Her figure looked exquisitely girlish in a long, clinging black robe, but there was something pathetic in the attitude that did not suggest the elation of the morning.

"Mr. Ray," she said, coming towards me with a grave little smile, "I asked you to come round because I want you to do something for me."

"You know I could not have a greater pleasure in life," I said gently.

She did not reply for a minute, while she nervously twisted her gold chain into a knot and undid it again.

"This morning I made you a promise under very foolish circumstances. Terrified by the mere thought of possible want I consented to marry you if I lost my wealth. It was a very mean proceeding, and I want you to release me."

"Don't you think it will be time enough to think about it when the contingency arises?" I asked.

"No, please," she intreated, "I want to be free now."

"Would it add yet another terror to poverty to think you would have to share it with me?" I asked.

"Oh, no," she cried, "it is not that——"

"Then, my darling," I said, gathering her into my arms, "I am very sorry, but I cannot release you!"

She burst into tears and hid her face on my shoulder.

"Oh, Mervyn, you must!" she sobbed. "You knew this morning that you were the heir, and not I, and—and oh, you had no right to make me promise!"

"So Colonel Wyatt has been to see you, has he? Interfering old fool! Why can't he mind his own business, I'd like to know?" I cried angrily.

"He is not, he's a dear old man!" she said hotly. "He suspected you of treachery, and so he came to me, as was proper," and she smiled through her tears with just a touch of her old imperiousness.

It was very late in the afternoon when I called on Colonel Wyatt, and was not surprised to find he was somewhat testy at having been kept waiting for me all the afternoon. But he was really a kind old chap, and when he heard that Mildred and I had agreed to settle the heirship by becoming one, he forgot his own annoyance and consented to come to our wedding.

I am still looked upon as the lucky fellow who married Mr. Biddulph's beautiful heiress, as I insisted upon our cousinship remaining a secret. I considered that the *rôle* of the great lady suited her too well for me to pass it to her second hand, and as she queens it with consummate grace in all the small things of life, so she submits to my will in the larger issues, as she did by becoming my wife.

Peers Hervey.

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As Fate Would Have It.

The Romance of an Autumn Day.

PART THE FIRST: Morning.

FATE IS APPEALED TO.

"FLO, Flo! Now, you'll just have to let me tell her, dear, she will be so interested—Flo, such fun! Are you asleep; can we come in? It's only Hilda and I.!"

The eager questioner put a pink ear, almost covered by her loose and rippling chestnut tresses, to a panel of the closed entrance by which she stood, and listened impatiently, holding meanwhile aloft out of her companion's reach some sheets of note-paper, written upon and creased. The ruffled silken sleeve of her dainty dressing-jacket had slipped to the rounded shoulder of a white arm, at which a pair of girlish hands were catching desperately in the hope of drawing down the inaccessible documents.

From an open door across the passage a flood of electric light fell upon the two women—one a ruddy blonde, one that brown-haired, grey-eyed type which is between the blonde and the brunette. The latter was still fully dressed, her dinner-gown simple, almost severe, her only ornament the string of pearls about her slender neck.

"Please—please, Miss Beresford!" begged the younger, in a whisper. "I didn't want anybody but you to know, and—and Lady Florence is—is so——"

Hilda Vane's protest was left uncompleted—the entrance near which it had been uttered had yawned suddenly, and on the threshold there appeared a supple, golden-locked figure, a queenly vision in lace and cambric. Lady Florence Coppinger—as many a masculine compliment had reminded her—was a true "daughter of the gods," being, indeed, "divinely tall and most divinely fair." But the violet pupils under her finely-pencilled brows had in them habitually more than a trifle of haughty discontent, and her scarlet lips were superciliously thin and scornful. Something in her expression seemed to supply a key to the missing portion of Hilda Vane's interrupted sentence.

"My dear Pattie," she said, regarding the elder of her visitors with a cynical tolerance, "what is your latest freak? They usually afflict you in the small hours, I believe, and this is no exception to the rule. Are you aware that it is nearly three o'clock in the morning? If I had not had to write some letters for the morning collection I should have been in the arms of Morpheus long ago!"

Pattie Beresford slipped past the speaker into a handsome boudoir, gained the neighbourhood of a glowing fire, sank into a cushioned lounge beside it, and flourished the sheets of note-paper that she carried.

"Say, Flo!" she exclaimed, and both the phrase and her accent betrayed her to be an American, "talking about letters, what do you think?—Our little Hilda has actually received two offers of marriage, both in writing, and both by post! Here are the letters, they turned up this evening, Hilda says. After worrying over them for hours the poor child consulted me, and I really had to share the joke with you. Fancy, two formal offers, and some poor creatures can't even get one!"

Florence Coppinger re-closed the door of the room—the action served to disguise a sneer—before glancing at the person referred to by the voluble Pattie. Hilda, abashed by Miss Pattie's headlong frankness, and, on the whole, inclined to be indignant, was fingering the pearls at her throat, and gazing listlessly from a window of the boudoir. Without was the clear, cold, October dark, silvered by a waning moon.

"My congratulations, dear!" remarked Lady Florence, patronisingly, "And may—may I ask by whom these flattering propositions have been made?"

"That's just the amazing part of it," put in Miss Beresford, with a ripple of shrill, yet genuine laughter, "what do you say, for a beginning, to the Honourable Augustine Chesney, and ten thousand a year? Augustine, the precise and bilious, who, with half the matrimonial prizes of the county dancing after him, plumps for a pretty face and a sweet temper instead of a dowry!"

A sigh escaped from Florence Coppinger—a sigh that might have been one of relief. Then she knitted her brows.

"Not bad," she replied, absently, "not at all bad, Hilda. You would be Lady Chesney some day, if he were to outlive his uncle, the Viscount. But the other—what about the other?"

Pattie Beresford stole a glimpse at the querist's countenance.

"Mr. Quaritch," she answered briefly.

Lady Florence started.

"Ah!" was the cold retort. "I almost fancied he had been taking a sentimental interest in Hilda, but then it might only have been a paternal one. However, he can't be more than forty, I suppose, and though his practice at the Bar is a mere fiction, he has quite eight hundred a year after his mother's settlement."

"And is no end of a good fellow," added Pattie. "While Chesney is a confirmed invalid and as irritable as a caged bear. Still, he has ten thousand per annum, and Hilda says she isn't certain she cares for either of them. In that case, how is she to decide? I should get chance—that is, Fate—to decide it, and so I have told her!"

Hilda stole to the back of the lounge where her vivacious adviser was sitting.

"And I said, dear Miss Beresford," she observed gently, "that I believed I ought to refuse them both!"

Pattie Beresford stared at her aghast.

"My dear soul!" cried the young American, "and what would your blessed auntie say when she learnt that you had rejected not one, but two offers of marriage from men who are neither of them penniless. Doesn't she go about as it is telling every matron of her acquaintance how badly your dad's estate panned out, and how much your education and maintenance have left her out of pocket? No, you must take either Chesney or Quaritch, that's flat. You wouldn't have the life of a dog with her after refusing them both."

"How absurd you are, Pattie," said Florence Coppinger sharply, "Hilda mustn't dream of rejecting Chesney, any other girl would think it a marvellous piece of luck that he had happened to take a fancy to her. Ten thousand a year

and the possibility of a coronet! Heavens, what more can she want!"

"H'm!" rejoined Miss Beresford. "Well, I'm not as positive as you are about it. Remember, she'd have to live with Chesney and the income and the coronet might be dear at the price. Still, though Quaritch is nice, eight hundred, especially in this set, is genteel poverty for a married couple. If only Quaritch would wake up and do something! He's clever enough. Oh, the problem's too much for me—we'll have to get Fate to decide."

Hilda Vane had been oblivious to the last few phrases of the discussion, she had wandered into a profound reverie. The words of her downright American acquaintance were but too correct. Her life would not, in very truth, be worth living if the mean and not over-wealthy relative by whom, after her parents' death, she had been reluctantly reared, were to discover that a couple of eligible suitors had been dismissed by her charge.

At present the existence of Hilda Vane was that of an unwelcome hanger-on upon a penurious household. Clothes, boots, millinery, gloves, pocket-money, railway fares, all were grudged her. In the great country house where she was now staying with her aunt, she had but a single real friend, the rich little American, Pattie Beresford, whose pronounced fancy for her, everybody, and especially Lady Florence Coppinger—herself a privileged and exclusive member of the house-party—regarded with a kind of bored amusement. But Pattie was to marry Lady Florence's eldest brother, and re-establish the fortunes of a famous English title, and so her protegée was favoured by a sort of chilly intimacy with the blue-blooded, golden-locked beauty.

A medley of troubled thoughts were chasing one another through Hilda's aching head as she leant on the high back of the settee near the shrewd yet flighty Pattie. Reviewing swiftly her bitter girlhood, she realised that any opportunity of escape from a no less bitter future was a thing to be coveted. Yet, involuntarily, she found herself contrasting Robert Quaritch, the reserved, chivalrous barrister, whose passion for rare folios had kept him poor, as his grave kindliness and quiet sagacity had made him popular, with Augustine Chesney, the wealthy, ailing, irritable aristocrat, who had been struck by her gentle ways and unfailing tact. She had seen both men but seldom—occasionally in town, more frequently out of it. They had written to her now from neighbouring country-houses, where she had re-encountered them a day or two earlier.

Yet, though Robert Quaritch had always seemed to seek, and to enjoy her society, it was his offer that had surprised her most. There had, indeed, been moments when she had heard coupled, in the idle gossip of Society, the names of Lady Florence Coppinger and Robert Quaritch.

Pattie Beresford's voice aroused her from her reflections.

"I must read you their letters, Flo," the young American was saying, "and then I will tell you my scheme for consulting Fate. The letters are short, and the scheme is simple. So here goes."

Hilda put out a protesting hand, but Pattie evaded her merrily.

"First, the Honourable Augustine," she pursued, opening out one of the letters she held.

"'Dear Miss Vane,'" she read, "'I think you will appreciate the feeling of embarrassment which compels me to make a somewhat momentous communication to you in this, instead of the more usual form. Knowing the delicacy of my constitution as you do, you will, I am sure, see that it is best for me to avoid the excitement of a verbal discussion. My object in writing is to confess that the feelings of regard and admiration which I have long entertained for you, have become too warm for me to mistake their nature. Before consulting your esteemed aunt on the subject, I should be grateful for some hint of your own attitude towards me. With my sensitive disposition I should suffer too shockingly under anything like a formal rebuff. I must, however, assure you that my heart and my fortune are unreservedly at the disposal of the most charming of her sex. Devotedly yours,

"'Augustine Chesney.'"

"Isn't he prim?" exclaimed Pattie, delightedly. "And now for Mr. Quaritch!"

"Please, Miss Beresford!" pleaded Hilda, more pathetically than ever. But Pattie shook her chestnut tresses and laughed.

"Nonsense, poppet!" she said. "It isn't as if you loved either of them." And she began forthwith upon the second letter.

"'My Dear Little Hilda,—(For so I always think of you, and so I must call you at least once in my life), I am afraid you will be very much surprised when you get this letter, and realise that its object is to ask you to be the writer's wife. What excuse has Robert Quaritch for his presumption—what has he to offer a young and lovely woman in exchange for herself? Nothing that he dare speak of to her face, and so he needs must write. A heartache that your eyes have given me, that is my excuse, a trifle more of friendship and tenderness, even of comfort, than you are permitted to enjoy at present, these exhaust my humble offerings.

"'Consider me carefully, dear child, and ask yourself if I could not make you just a little trifle happier. I am grey, thirty-seven, and I can only promise my wife a moderate competence. But I should be so grateful always for the priceless boon of a little love from your loyal, innocent heart, that I think I should make you a good husband. I fear you are very lonely always, and you have given me a selfish heartache, so I write this, yet almost against my better judgment. But you will decide wisely, remembering that even if you cannot let me be your lover, I shall always be your affectionate friend,

'Robert Quaritch.'"

"Say, Flo, little Hilda has received two offers of marriage this evening. Here are the letters!

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Florence Coppinger's lips set and her nostrils contracted as she listened, and a red spot glowed hotly on either of her pale cheeks.

"I guess that's real sweet," ejaculated Pattie warmly; "but, of course, he's nearly forty, and a bookworm at that, and they do say his income dies with him, too, while Chesney's widow would be a wealthy woman and perhaps a peeress dowager. If only the Honourable Augustine wasn't such an owl!"

She allowed Hilda to repossess herself of the letters and clasped her own jewelled hands about her knees.

"We must leave it to Fate," she observed, "the poor old nice one or the rich young niminy-piminy one. Hilda must write to both of them accepting, and then we will burn one letter and post the other, without looking at the envelopes and wait to see whom Fate has chosen. Won't it be exciting! Give us pen and ink, Flo."

Florence Coppinger hesitated, then smiled strangely, and brought from an escritoire the writing materials she had herself been using. The youthful American set them before her *protégée*.

"The same wording will do for both," she intimated, "and I understand just the sort of shy, girly thing that you ought to put, Hilda—it would take you a day to hammer out a reply.

"Begin 'Dear Mr. Quaritch or Chesney'—you can make a copy for the other fellow. Now, 'I wish I knew what to say in answer to your very, very kind letter. Perhaps I must confess that it made me feel very happy—happy enough to sit down and cry.'

"That's more or less true, Hilda," she interpolated, "you had been shedding tears over them when you came to me, you tender-hearted creature. Go on! 'Of course I don't deserve the great honour you have done me, but I can't be selfish enough to think about that, though I am sure I oughtn't for your sake to say: Yes.'

"Always flatter the brutes!" commented Pattie shrewdly.

"And now sign it just 'Hilda,' and add: 'P.S.—I shall be in the conservatory here—near the side entrance—about four o'clock to-day. As you see, I am writing this in the small hours.'

"That will do very nicely," she concluded, "now make a copy for the other one, and put them in envelopes and address, and stamp them. Then we will let Fate choose, and at tea-time to-morrow you—and we—will know whom she has chosen. Afterwards you can write a nice refusal to the unlucky one."

Hilda looked from the little American to Lady Florence; her expression had become thoughtful, even amused.

"I don't see that you can do better," said the latter, with a shrug of her shoulders, "if you choose for yourself you are sure to regret it, one way or another. It will be a comfort to be able to blame somebody, if it is only Fate."

Pattie was setting a chair to an escritoire near the fire. A grave young figure in her dark dinner-gown, Hilda sat down and took up a pen. The others threw themselves into the adjacent lounge and chatted while she worked.

Twenty minutes later a sealed, stamped, and addressed envelope was dropped by Miss Pattie Beresford into the post-box in the dusky hall below. Another envelope at the moment was just flickering into ashes among the embers of Lady Florence's boudoir fire. The appeal to Fate had been made.

Part the Second: Afternoon.

Fate is Challenged.

"Don't lean so far out, Pattie, you—you will be seen."

"Rubbish, Flo," was the retort; "do you suppose the lucky one will have eyes for anything but his lady-love? Great Scott!"

Pattie Beresford's ejaculation was more suggestive of excitement than alarm. Yet she drew herself quickly into the curtained alcove from whose shelter she had been peering. In its deeper recesses Florence Coppinger was standing, statuesque and cynical in a classical tea-gown.

"Flo," whispered her companion, "I believe I'm glad—it's—it's Quaritch."

Florence Coppinger paled, but her expression became a strange mingling of amazement and incredulity.

"'Quaritch!" she repeated; "impossible."

Pattie stared. "Not at all," she responded; "it was an even chance. I don't expect, in her heart, that Hilda will be sorry."

She peered round the curtain again, and Florence Coppinger imitated her. From the recess they could see down the staircase and across the wide hall to the glass doors of a species of conservatory. A vigorous, square-shouldered, masculine form in riding-costume was just entering them. Florence started and drew back with a suppressed cry. Pattie glanced at her keenly, and noticed that on her regular white teeth was a tiny smear of crimson. She had bitten her lip till the blood came.

Ignorant alike of his feminine spies and their singular scrap of conversation, the subject of their scrutiny had stridden into the softly-lighted interior of the huge temperate palm-house which was one of the glories of the great country place.

"Hilda!" was all he said, and he held out his hand to a girlish figure that had risen from an antique marble seat. Hilda Vane looked at him doubtfully, but her fingers stole towards his, and were folded in a strong grasp.

Robert Quaritch was dark-haired and blue-eyed, with a firm, well-moulded chin, and fine, sensitive nostrils. The grey of which he had written was but a sprinkling on his temples, and his face was lined only by a grave good-humour. As Hilda gazed at him, she felt herself thrilled with a novel emotion. He had stooped and kissed her hand.

"My darling," he said and his voice was husky and broken. "I—I scarcely dared to hope that you could even give me a chance to teach you to care for me and yet, all the time, you loved me."

He drew her into his arms and Hilda yielded herself, not unhappily, to his embrace. Her head dropped on his shoulder, and she felt his moustache touch her cheek.

"How blind I was!" he murmured. "Hilda, my Hilda, let me hear you say that you love me."

The brown head on his shoulder raised itself and Hilda Vane saw that most wonderful of all sights to a woman's eyes, the lovelight in a strong man's face. Something seemed to burn in her own heart and the tears sprang to her lashes.

"Oh, I do," she sobbed. "I didn't know it, really, but I do."

Robert Quaritch bent and kissed her on the lips. "Thank Heaven," he murmured, "that I did not tear up my letter at the last. I—I nearly did."

He led her back to the seat from which she had risen, and they sat down together. The intoxication of deep joy had seized upon Robert Quaritch, and he talked excitedly, almost boyishly. His years of bookworm bachelorhood had left him, in reality, a young and ardent man, though his habitual reserve and affectation of middle age had earned for him socially the reputation of an old fogey.

Hilda listened to him with growing comprehension as he told her of his plans for the future—their future!—of his determination to earn her a fortune by the exercise of his profession, of the little flat in town and the tiny place in the country he had already projected for her. A feeling of alarm took possession of Hilda Vane. Surely such wonderful happiness could not be for her—she must be dreaming—

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a dream from which she will wake with a start to find her life as lonely and sunless as before.

Suddenly a clock in the neighbouring hall sounded the hour. The silver strokes penetrated faintly to them and Robert Quaritch, glancing at his watch, sprang to his feet.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "six—and I dine here to-night. I must get back and change. Fortunately, no one saw me come in, so I shall take the liberty of omitting a visit to the drawing-room."

He held her hands in his for a moment and looked at her with glowing, tender eyes.

"I can scarcely believe it, even yet," he said; "when I get outside into the darkness and turn my horse's head away from this precious corner of the earth I believe I shall feel my old, grey, sober self again. But I daresay I shall get used to my happiness in time. For an hour or so, good-bye."

Once more Hilda's hands, her forehead, her mouth, felt the thrilling, unfamiliar contact of a crisp moustache and burning lips, and then the doors of the palm-house closed between her and her newly-found and passionate lover.

Robert Quaritch hurried down the corridor his pulses beating, his head in the clouds.

"I am a fool," he observed, half aloud; "one would think me a raw lad. And yet, I am a lucky fool—the luckiest fool in all broad England."

A step at his side and the rustle of feminine skirts arrested him. He halted, turned, and saw Florence Coppinger.

"Ah! Lady Florence," he said, bowing, "you find me trying to slip out in a hurry. I paid a passing call and recollected abruptly that I am to dine here to-night, and that I must rush home to dress."

Florence Coppinger smiled. In the subdued light of the corridor Robert Quaritch noticed, despite his abstraction, the bitterness of the smile.

"I know all about your call," she informed him; "Mr. Quaritch, we have been friends for years. Let me confess to you my share in a foolish freak, designed, if the truth must be told, by that wild little American *fiancée* of my brother's, and of which I am now heartily ashamed. You received this morning a letter from Miss Vane, accepting a certain proposal with which you had honoured her."

"Y-yes," stammered Robert Quaritch. Lady Florence drew a sharp breath and continued determinedly:

"A similar letter," she pursued, encountering his glance significantly, "was written to Augustine Chesney, who had also proposed to Hilda—to Miss Vane in writing. The letter to him and that to you were sealed and stamped. One was taken at random and burnt, one posted. Till you entered the palm-house just now, Miss Vane did not know which of her two suitors Fate had chosen for her. She owned that she loved neither of you, and Pattie Beresford easily persuaded her to submit the matter to the arbitrament of chance. But I could not let your life be spoilt by it all. Forgive me my part in the folly, and be warned against an engagement to a woman, nay, a child, who is absolutely indifferent to you."

A groan burst from Robert Quaritch, and he would have spoken. But Florence Coppinger had turned abruptly and vanished up a steep and winding staircase.

He took a step in the direction of the palm-house entrance as if to return to Hilda herself. Then he stopped and, passing a hand over his forehead, hurried on down the corridor, crossed the hall, and gained the open air. A groom was holding his horse—he mounted and rode off mechanically.

His own prophecy had been fulfilled — once more he felt himself old and grey. His new-found youth had passed out of his heart and mind like the evaporating fumes of some powerful wine. And in its place were shame and wretchedness.

"Hilda, Hilda, why did you tell me you loved me?"

Part Three: Evening.

Fate Is Made Manifest.

"I CONGRATULATE you, dear, I do, indeed. He is ever so much nicer than the Honourable Augustine, and you can always feel that it wasn't you who rejected ten thousand a year, it was Fate, consulted by my specially-patented method. If only the two poor creatures knew!"

And Miss Pattie Beresford chuckled behind her fan as she sat in the arched doorway that led from the palm-house to her hostess' splendid drawing-room. Near her Hilda Vane was moving restlessly to and fro, hardly heeding her companion's chatter, but glancing from time to time across the brightly-lighted apartment beyond.

"You should have seen Flo's face though," went on Miss Beresford, "when she saw who had come to acknowledge the receipt of the all-important letter. I believe she muttered something about 'impossible'—they say she has been sweet on Quaritch herself for ages. She didn't want me to marry into the great Coppinger family, the stuck-up thing! And so I've owed her one a long time—that's why I wanted her to know he'd proposed to you."

Miss Pattie interrupted herself. "Gracious!" she cried, "here he comes—two's company and three's none. I'll be off. If he makes love as nicely as he writes it, you won't want me hanging about."

She swept her rustling skirts down the aisle between the palms as Robert Quaritch came into the space under the glass dome, and paused by the little figure in the dark dinner-gown. He was very pale, and there were dusky hollows under his eyes. Without a word he offered her his arm, and they moved on through the palm-house together. The change in his demeanour had alarmed Hilda at dinner; his silence now disturbed her still more.

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"I'm afraid you—you are not well," she stammered at last. Robert Quaritch sighed heavily.

"I have been stricken to the heart," he said. "Hilda, Hilda, why did you tell me you loved me? I—I believed you, and all the while it was a mere chance and not your love that had given you to me."

Hilda Vane's hand loosed itself slowly from his arm, to be pressed to her side. She was trembling, and her face had grown almost bloodless. Robert Quaritch had not vouchsafed her the slightest warning of the thunder-bolt he had chosen to hurl at her. She could not even wonder who had played the traitor. Her mind was a pathetic blank. She sank down upon the very marble seat where they had talked a few hours earlier.

"It—it was very foolish," she faltered, "unwomanly—contemptible. But I hadn't time to think when it was first suggested to me, and then——" She broke off, unable to continue.

Robert Quaritch gazed at her, not unkindly. "I would have taken you on any terms, Hil—Miss Vane," he said. "I would have tried to win your love, to deserve it. It seemed incredible that, as it was, you actually loved me. If you had only not chosen between—between Chesney and me as though by the spin of a coin! I could have borne to lose you, but to think badly of you, to feel myself shamed in your shame and humiliation, that I cannot bear. If—if, above all, you had not said you loved me."

Hilda put her brown head on one slender arm and leant it upon the antique marble at her back. The sound of a sob reached Robert Quaritch's ear, and he stooped over her impulsively, all his native chivalry touched by her grief.

"Forgive me," he said, "perhaps I judged a girlish caprice too harshly—let us think no more of it. We can—we can be friends; you would not, of course—that is—I could not—"

An icy clutch seemed to be laid on Hilda's heart—love, happiness, all the opening beauty of the future were snatched from her by those broken phrases. They meant that she could not ever try to be the wife of Robert Quaritch.

"I'm—I'm sorry," she gasped. "You—you're wrong, quite wrong. But I couldn't explain—I—I've no proof. Please go away; I am a miserable girl!"

Robert Quaritch moved a pace or two away and then returned. "Tell me," he said, "what you mean by 'proof.' I love you still. Heaven help me! If there is any explanation possible, you owe it to me. Why, for instance, do I find on returning to home late this afternoon, a duplicate of the letter which I received from you at mid-day?"

A thrill shook the little figure on the marble seat, and Hilda sat up, her eyes wide and wet. Robert Quaritch held out to her a sheet of note-paper, covered with her own handwriting. Hilda snatched at it.

"It—it wasn't burnt?" she cried. "You will believe me then. See, see, both the letters I wrote were to you. The envelope to Mr. Chesney was empty, and I substituted for it this duplicate, addressed to you, after Lady Flo and Miss Beresford had looked at the original envelopes. So whichever one was burnt, the other was for you. They only thought it—it was Fate."

Robert Quaritch stared at her for a moment, then took her in his arms and folded her there. He was laughing, but there were tears in his eyes.

"My poor, ingenious darling," he murmured, "and so you really wanted me after all." And Hilda sobbed out something that could not have been "No," for Robert Quaritch kissed and kissed again the lips that had uttered it.

"But if one of your letters was—that is if one ought to have been burnt," Hilda was asked at length, "where did this momentous duplicate come from?"

Hilda looked at the document and shivered, almost superstitiously. "It's—it's very strange," she said, "it must be Fate, after all. But it *is* my letter, there is the C turned into a Q—I was writing 'Dear Mr. Chesney,' when the idea came to me. Before that I didn't mean to go on with the nonsense, really. And there's a blot I made and was in two minds to write the letter over again, only there wasn't time."

Hilda leant towards him tremulously. "Won't you tell me," she begged, "how you got to know about—about——"

Robert Quaritch folded up the mysteriously-preserved duplicate, and pocketed it.

"Some day you shall know," he replied; "doubtless we are the victims of some foolish trick—a trick that Fate has turned to our advantage, since, had this duplicate been destroyed, you would not have risked my believing the truth. And yet, I almost think I would have accepted your word for it."

Robert Quaritch was right. Fate had taken a part in the game. But not for some months did they learn in what way the part had been played, and then it was the amused and inquisitive Pattie who fathomed the mystery.

Lady Florence, it seemed, had had her own reasons for assenting to the proposed appeal to Fate, and during the shuffling of the addressed envelopes—a task deputed to her by the ironical Pattie—had substituted for a letter addressed to Robert Quaritch, one of the sealed and stamped envelopes forming part of her completed correspondence. This letter she had, for its easy identification, turned up at one corner and contrived to have it condemned to the flames. The other, she made sure, was addressed to Augustine Chesney. In point of fact it also was directed to Robert Quaritch.

As for the means by which the abstracted envelope and its inclosure had reached Quaritch in time to soften his indignation with a little masculine curiosity, they were simple enough. Lady Flo had left the stolen envelope among her letters on the escritoire, and early the following morning, her maid had posted it with them.

So Hilda's secret manipulation of her own fortune found an unexpected corroboration, and Fate had, after all, to be thanked for a marriage whose romantic happiness has not ceased to be a marvel among the masculine acquaintances of Robert Quaritch and the feminine critics of his charming little wife.

R. Norman Silver.

SHE: "Cupid is not in it as a marksman, Goosey." He "Why not, Angel?" She: "He's always making Mrs."

"WHEN he saw the enemy coming he turned and ran. I call that cowardice." "Not at all. He remembered that the earth is round, and he intended to run round and attack the enemy from the rear."

SERGEANT, to new cavalry recruit: "Never approach the horses from behind without speaking. If you do they'll kick you on that thick head of yours, and the end of it will be we'll have nothing but lame horses in the squadron."

LANDLADY: "Poor Mr. Lightweight died last week and if anyone deserved to go to Heaven he did." Mr. Heavygaul (who is slightly in arrears): "Why?" Landlady (weeping): "He always paid his board in advance, never complained if his bed wasn't made up, and, oh, such a delicate appetite as that poor saint had!"

LITTLE EDITH had the habit of eating out the soft part of her bread, and tucking the crust under the edge of her plate. The other evening Edith was detected in this, and her mother said: "Edith, how often have I told you about leaving your crusts? There may be a day when you will be glad to get them." "Yes, mamma," replied Edith, "that's what I'm saving 'em for."

YOU know that cheeky fellow Smith. Have you heard his latest trick? He goes and consults a solicitor, and, having received advice, coolly places on the table a three-penny bit. "What is this for?" "Your fee, sir; hope it is right." "Excuse me, no; my fee is, of course, six-and-eightpence." "Well," says Smith, "all right. Six-and-eightpence are fourteen pence; fourteen pence are one-and-twopence: one and twopence are three pence, and there you are!" Solicitor rises in his chair. Exit Smith.

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The Disappearance of Captain Overend.

The Tale of an Ocean Tragedy.

"I *can't* sleep," growled Captain Overend, of the Silver Star liner *Illwarra*, as he rolled over for the fifth time. "She's making bad weather of it anyway, and Dickson won't be sorry to get relief."

He tumbled out and put on his things. It wanted another half hour before his watch was due, but in his present frame of mind it mattered little to him whether he took charge now or later on.

As he stood there in his state-room, Captain William John Overend was a supremely happy man. He had but just been appointed captain of the *Illwarra*, and this was his maiden voyage as her skipper. That was one reason for his happiness, but there was another almost as weighty. Among the saloon passengers was a certain Miss Nellie Burns, now on a voyage from Australia to the Old Country—his Nellie, Nellie whom he had loved since they were children together; Nellie who had been so proud of him when he first appeared in the brass buttons and jaunty cap of his apprentice days; Nellie whom he, out of his scanty earnings, had sent to a good school, for her parents were miserably poor. And now the dream was about to be realised. He had £250 in the bank, his pay had increased with a bound, and the one obstacle to their earlier marriage—want of means—was removed.

True, he could not see much of her on the journey, for the directors of the Silver Star Line were martinets of the sternest type, and did not hold with their officers carrying wives or sweethearts at all, let alone squiring them during the voyage. And so it came about that poor Overend and his *fiancée* had to be content with meaning glances and commonplace chats at long intervals, for there was a director of the company among the passengers, and it would never have done for the new commander to have given cause for offence on his maiden trip in his own ship.

Buttoning up his pilot jacket, the skipper left his cosy state-room, still full of fond thoughts of the future. The wind was rising momentarily, and he paused for a second to get his breath ere climbing to the dizzy altitude of the bridge.

Suddenly he became aware of a man and woman standing sheltered in an alleyway to leeward, deep in earnest conversation, and the strangeness of their presence there at such an hour made him curious. Presently the voice of the woman came to his ears, every word clear and distinct in the comparative shelter of the great funnel.

"It *can't* be," she said, pitifully. "Oh, it can't be! I am bound to him by every tie it is possible to think of. Ever since childhood we've been sweethearts, and till I met you I loved him dearly—and he's worked so hard to be able to marry me! He even paid for my schooling and bought my passage! Oh, I know I ought to love him, but I *don't*, not now! It's dead, as though it had never existed! Dick, darling, tell me——"

But Overend had heard enough, more than enough. Like a man in a dream he walked back to his room and shut himself in. He could not think; his brain was in a whirl, and presently he appeared on the bridge with a curt intimation to the first officer that he could go below and turn in.

"Old man seems queer to-night," was the first officer's mental comment, as he made for his quarters. "Thinking about his marriage, I suppose. And me best man, great Scott!"

* * *

Alone on the windswept bridge, with nothing but the heaving waste of black and troubled waters around him, Overend's thoughts grew gradually calmer.

His cherished ideal was shattered; his golden idol had feet of clay. The woman whose words had come to his ears with such cruel distinctness was Nellie—his affianced wife, his sweetheart since childhood, and the man with her was none other than Lieutenant Dick Hazely, of the Light Horse, nephew of one of his own directors, and one of the biggest blackguards in Sydney!

In one brief month on shipboard Nell had learnt to forget the long hard struggle Overend had made for her sake, the countless sacrifices, the patient waiting.

And now—now she had flung him over for the sake of a man who had come into her life but yesterday, and who she knew by repute to be a scoundrel! He gripped the wet rail savagely and looked out ahead, where the turmoil of the billows seemed to harmonise with his mood.

He realised now, dimly, that for him life had lost its savour; there was nothing left to live for. This woman had been all in all to him, and now the simple, trustful sailor's heart was broken.

He looked at his watch. In ten minutes the second officer would be on deck to relieve him. Then he walked up and down the bridge—once, twice—with agitated steps, thinking over the step he was about to take. Should he leave a letter for her? No, better to go to his death without a word. She had no doubt been tempted; she had fallen; and he could not find it in his heart to reproach her. "But as for him," he said aloud, though none but the moaning wind heard him, "may my curse be upon him!"

Then a mass of storm-scud obscured the moon, and when the quartermaster at the wheel glanced over the bridge it was vacant.

* * * * *

A week later *The Times* had the following paragraph:

The Silver Star liner Illwarra, *which arrived in London yesterday from Australia, reported the mysterious disappearance in mid-ocean of her commander, Captain William John Overend. He was last seen on the bridge about* 10 *p.m. last Monday night. This sad fatality was followed next morning, by the suicide of a saloon passenger, a Miss Nellie Burns, who deliberately jumped overboard, sinking before a boat could be launched. From inquiries made by our representative, we learn that Captain Overend and Miss Burns were engaged, and that their marriage was to have taken place at the conclusion of the voyage. No motive can be assigned for this double suicide, and the whole affair wears an aspect of mystery.*

But there is a man living in Sydney to-day—one Dick Hazely, a gambler and loose liver—who, even in the midst of headlong dissipation, can never banish the ugly memory of a certain shipboard intrigue which he carried too far.

Victor Pitt-Kethley.

AGATHA: "What are you standing there and gazing up at that window for?" Marie (agitated): "Willie has gone up to ask papa to consent to our engagement, and I want to stand under to break his fall."

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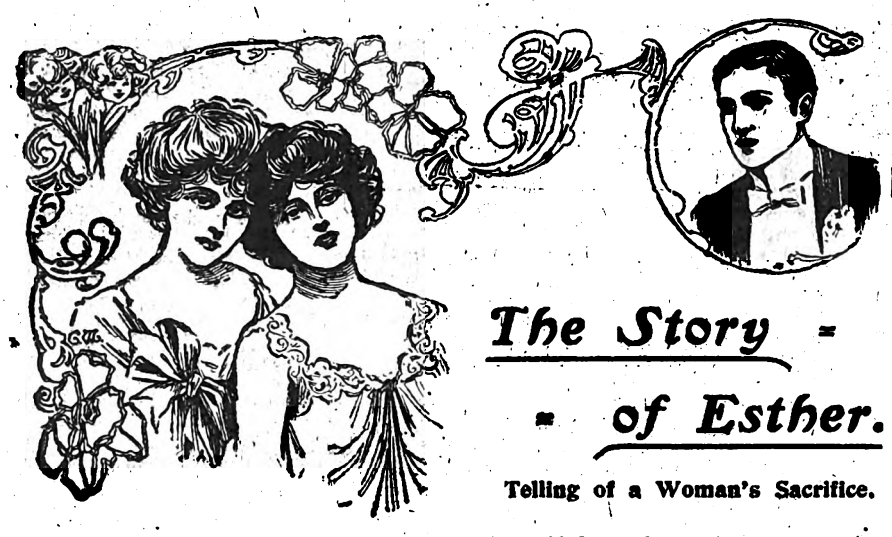

The Story of Esther.

Telling of a Woman's Sacrifice.

The wind rustled among the corn, and the poppies nodded coquettishly as the breeze swept over them. Overhead the sun shone in golden splendour, until the air seemed to quiver with the heat. Too hot for anything but to lounge idly in a hammock, or rest under the shade of green trees.

And yet, for the past half hour a young girl had been waiting in the full glare of the sun, on the roadside by the turnpike gates.

"You're sure the carriage hasn't passed?" she asked anxiously, scanning the long white road that wound like a ribbon, in and out the green hill sides.

"You'd do better to come in and rest," returned the woman. "Nothing has passed since twelve save the carrier's cart. Why not sit down a bit, Esther? You can watch the road as well from the window as the gate."

The girl sighed, and half unwillingly went towards the house. She was tall and well built, with a certain dignity of carriage out of keeping with the plain print gown and faded sun-bonnet.

"Is your sister worse to-day?" questioned the turnpike woman curiously.

Esther nodded, but made no attempt at further answer, and after a prolonged inquisitive stare, Mrs. Jordan gave up the attempt to "draw" her visitor, and set about her household duties.

The neighbourhood in general did not regard Esther Arnold and her sister Nerette with a marked degree of approbation. To commence with Nerette was a foreign, new-fangled sort of name for a Christian person; further, it was "stuck up," not to say presumptuous, on Esther's part to reject deliberately the advice of persons older and wiser than herself in regard to the management of the same Nerette.

Plenty of work, that is what *she* wants," the busy housewives would declare, pointing emphatically to the fair, slight girl, who never did anything more laborious than pick flowers, and occasionally arrange them.

But to all their protestations the elder sister turned a deaf ear. Nerette was all she had in the world, and if she could make her darling's lot ever so little easier, by her own hard work and self-denial, why it was her pleasure and her pride to do so. The two girls lived on a moorside farm, a lonely, deserted spot, where, so the wiseacres declared, nothing would grow but thistles. Despite the wiseacres, however, Esther managed to wrest a livelihood for herself and her sister out of a sandy soil, and what was more, contrived to lay up for a rainy day.

"Here's the carriage, Esther," called out Mrs. Jordan. "Look alive, my girl, the Castle horses don't like waiting."

The occupant of the carriage, a tall, square-shouldered man, with keen eyes and an incisive manner, glanced up impatiently from his book as Esther somewhat falteringly addressed him.

"What is it?" he asked sharply. "What do you want?"

She drew herself up, and her hesitation suddenly disappeared.

"I think," she said slowly, "you are Doctor Martin, are you not?"

"Yes," he returned, regarding the dark face, with its flashing teeth and deep set eyes with some attention.

"My sister is ill," she said. "I heard you were coming down from London to see Lady Lester at the Castle, and so I determined to wait here and speak to you. I want you to come and see my sister."

The physician leant back and regarded his questioner with interest. Not a village girl, nor yet the ordinary type of farmer's wife or daughter. Something out of the common, he decided, and the uncommon, having an attraction even for a fashionable medical man, somewhat affected his manner.

"Has not the local doctor seen your sister?" he questioned.

A shade of contempt lurked for an instant in her eyes.

"Yes," she said simply. "Doctor Barton has seen her—many times."

The physician smiled to himself. Evidently Doctor Barton did not stand very high in the rustic estimation—as personified by this girl at all events. He had not been much impressed himself by his village coadjutor, Barton being one of those eminently annoying persons, who, having no mind of their own, borrow that of the person to whom they may be talking.

"Will you come?" she said quietly.

She betrayed not the slightest sign of anxiety or eagerness, but stood quite still with none of the little gestures characteristic of your modern city women.

For a second he hesitated. It was important he should be back in town that afternoon. If he visited the sick girl it would delay him hours on his journey. He would miss the train; have an age to wait at a sleepy little sun-baked station; and arrive too late for an appointment that meant much to him. An appointment that he had taken infinite pains and trouble to bring about.

No, it was impossible to upset all his arrangements simply to see an ailing rustic. Viola Percival had so persistently ignored his attentions, so chilled his admiration, so skilfully evaded his most artfully-contrived *tête-à-tête*, that to throw away the opportunity she had at last vouchsafed him of seeing her that afternoon would be madness indeed. Viola lived with her aunt in an old-fashioned house in Fulham.

The doctor thought it dull for her, and hinted that Cavendish Square was considerably brighter. But she never responded in the least.

"My brother Laurie will settle down some time," she always said, "and then we shall live together somewhere nearer town. I shall keep house for him, and it will be altogether delightful."

But at present the prospect of Laurie's "settling" seemed very vague. He was a brilliant, extravagant, not to say rackety young man, of no profession, possessed of a small income and expensive tastes. He was not a favourite with the doctor—by reputation at all events—for the two men had met but once, and then only for a minute.

The physician sighed softly at the dainty picture his

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thoughts conjured up. Viola with her grey eyes and soft brown hair—Viola! He turned abruptly to Esther.

"I am afraid," he commenced.

The immobility of the woman vanished as he spoke. She leant over the carriage side, and brought her face close to his own. The sun-bonnet had slipped back, the doctor noticed that the hair fell in soft curls and clinging tendrils round her temples, and that it was a nutty brown with a touch of gold, as though a ray of sunshine were imprisoned there.

Under her dusky skin the warm blood flushed Esther's cheek, her eyes flashed, and her fingers, long and nervous, bit into her palms.

"You *must* come," she said. "I say you must!"

And against his will, by reason of the woman's strength of purpose, he consented.

"I can spare you half an hour," he said abruptly. "You had better get in and tell the coachman where to drive."

"Thank you," she said gravely in her former level tones. "You follow the road till you come to the mill, then turn off across the moor. The road is bad just there, I'm afraid you'll have to walk the rest of the way."

He felt aggrieved at the cool manner in which she received his consent.

"Doubtless we shall manage," he said stiffly. "Are you not coming?" opening the carriage door as he spoke.

Conventionality in the wilds of the country could not, in the doctor's estimation, count for much. Print gown and sun-bonnet notwithstanding, he felt somehow the girl would not be out of place in a carriage, and he was unaccountably chagrined when she refused.

"I shall be there sooner than you are," she said. "There's a short cut off the road." And with a bend of her head, she turned off, walking with the swift long strides that marked her out, no less than her height, from other women.

She received him half an hour later at the door of the moorside farm. Upstairs, in a sunny room overlooking the wide expanse of purple heather, a slight, fragile looking girl was waiting.

"This is my sister Nerette," said Esther quietly, and stood gravely regarding the two, doctor and patient.

A very slight examination convinced the doctor that there was little the matter with the girl beyond a latent delicacy of constitution. He glanced keenly at Esther. Was it possible that he had been mistaken in his estimate of her? Was she merely a nervous, excitable woman, ready to take fright at straws, and imagine that her sister's capricious appetite and loss of colour denoted serious illness? He was puzzled—and angry.

He bade his young patient "Good-bye," and followed Esther down the stairs with a look of determination about his mouth that augured ill for somebody.

The girl paused when they reached the hall, and stood, as if irresolute, outside the sitting-room.

Doctor Martin seized the opportunity. With a quick movement he threw the door wide open.

"I want to speak to you," he said, a trifle grimly.

With colour slightly heightened, and eyes that would not meet his own, she entered. He closed the door and followed.

"Miss Arnold," he said slowly, but with a certain intonation that stung—as he meant it should sting—"why did you bring me here, cause me to give up valuable time, and throw out my arrangements on a frivolous pretext?"

She did not meet the accusation with a quibble or evasion, but answered, her head thrown back, and her face set.

"You think it frivolous?"

"Undoubtedly. Moreover, you know it to be so. You are a woman of some intelligence, not likely to be deceived in ordinary matters, or every day occurrences. You do not need me nor anyone to tell you there is nothing much the matter with your sister. Why then trouble me to this extent? Unless," with a sudden lowering of the voice, "unless you had some other and more urgent need for my assistance?"

For a while there was silence. In the old-fashioned parlour, sweet with lavender, mignonette, and other scents of bygone times, the ticking of the clock sounded curiously loud. The doctor watched her face intently. Why had she brought him to this lonely place? What secret had this curiously self-contained woman in her life? What strange confession was he about to hear?

With a swift gesture she turned to him. "You are right," she said, "I was deceiving you. I brought you here, as you say, under false pretences. Excuse, I offer none; explanation, there is none to give you. But," and she laid her hand upon his arm, "deception is not always a cloak for evil. Sometimes circumstances are too strong for us, too strong even for men, how much more for women? I have brought you here in an hour of danger, distress. I ask you—having no claim, no right to ask it—for help!"

"Well?" he said. "Well?"

She paused and her breath came quickly. "There is a man here ill—dying. I want you to help me save his life. But you must promise secrecy, promise no one shall ever know, or hear, who or what you see."

An odd situation truly for a West-end physician—a lonely farmhouse, miles from any habitation, and a woman with a strange and dangerous secret for company!

Yet something in the woman appealed strongly to Paul Martin. Her strength, her courage, her daring drew him towards her.

"Will you promise?" she asked, and in the dimly-lighted room her face, glowing with life, held his eyes.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I will!"

She fell back a little and ran her fingers through the short, dark curls that fell over her forehead. It seemed a gesture of relief.

"Come," she said, and strangely stirred, he followed her into an adjoining room.

A man was lying half unconscious upon the bed. His head was bound up, and there had been some attempt at bandaging his shoulder.

He was young—about five-and-twenty—and when in health must have been good-looking in a boyish sort of way. The face reminded the doctor of somebody, but of whom he could not think.

"Is this man your brother, or related to you?" he asked sharply.

"No," she said; "no relative."

The doctor frowned and his manner grew a shade more distant.

"How long since he met with his—accident?" with ever so slight a sneer on the last word.

Esther shook her head. "I can tell you nothing—nothing," she said. "If you are going to help us you must deal with things as they are now."

"Draw up the blind," he told her sharply, "and fetch some brandy."

She obeyed, and stood watching the skilful fingers until he spoke again.

"The man has been shot," he said gravely, "in two places; the arm and the shoulder. He is in a critical condition!"

"Yes."

"His head is badly injured," he went on. "He seems to have struck it on something sharp."

She shivered, and her fingers twined round the rail of the bed.

"The wound is quite recent." Then, turning upon her. "How far is the nearest town from here?"

"Leeminster — some fourteen miles."

He looked at the face upon the pillow and surveyed it curiously.

"Too far to remove him, I'm afraid."

TWENTY SPLENDID GRAMOPHONES are offered for competition in this number.

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THE LOVE PROBLEM SERIES commences on Page 798.

"*Move him!*" said Esther hoarsely. "What do you mean?"

Before the doctor could reply the sick man stirred, moaned a little and opened his eyes. And as he met their glance the doctor did, for him, a strange and unprofessional thing.

He showed surprise.

For as the man opened his eyes, there flashed into the doctor's mind the conviction that somewhere he had seen the face before. Time and place were a blank, but that it had been in very different surroundings from the present he was convinced.

"His name?" he asked sharply, laying his hand on Esther's arm.

But the sick man himself gave the answer.

"Jack Hazeldean—much at your service!" he cried in the high-pitched voice of delirium.

Doctor Martin of Cavendish Square, and of much reputation, felt himself turn pale. He had consented to do his best for the man's recovery, had pledged himself to secresy concerning the man's whereabouts, not knowing who he was.

Truly, the fashionable physician had done a nice thing for himself. Jack Hazeldean was the name of a notorious thief!

* * * * *

All the way up to town Paul Martin strove to discover the identity under which he had previously seen the wounded man at the farm. Jack Hazeldean, albeit all too well known to the proprietors of family jewels, not to mention the detective force in general, and one or two bright and shining lights of Scotland Yard in particular, had never yet been upon trial. Not for lack of evidence against him, but for lack of ability to take or keep him. Twice he had been arrested, sent on trial, twice he had escaped before the day of trial arrived. This being so the doctor could not—he reasoned—have been made familiar with his features from the pages of an illustrated paper. Where then, had he met the man?

As for the particular undertaking in which "Jack" had received his injuries, the evening papers cast a lurid light upon the subject. Lord Neswell's house had been broken into with the object of stealing the famous Neswell diamonds. Luckily the thief had been discovered, and the jewels saved. "Jack," however, had escaped, but not before one of the house party had fired at, and to the best of his belief, wounded him. From the description of the man the police believed it to be the work of Jack Hazeldean, but where that notorious person had hidden himself could not be discovered.

Doctor Martin groaned in spirit. *He* knew—and raged at his knowledge. Why the thief should have taken shelter at the farm was a more difficult problem. Paul Martin was not often wrong in his estimate of men and women, and Esther had struck him as being a particularly strong-willed, self-reliant young woman, not likely to be carried away in her judgment by good looks or a fluent tongue. How then had the wily Jack gained such an influence over her?

Unless—the doctor stirred uneasily and half repressed a sigh.

"A pity!" he said. "A pity! All women are fools, I suppose, where a lover is concerned."

Circumstances stood in the way of his seeing Viola Percival for the next week or two. The moorside farm and the sick man took hold of his imagination to the exclusion of other things. He would not admit that the dark-browed Esther entered into his thoughts somewhat considerably, but put his interest down to professional anxiety for his patient. He had received two or three notes from Esther—curt, business-like communications that amused yet piqued him. The patient was getting on rapidly, nearly well, in fact. No necessity evidently for him to run down again, and yet, for no good reason he could give, the doctor found himself one evening outside the farm.

Esther looked worn and thin, and her eyes did not meet his glance so fearlessly. He learnt the reason later. The neighbours, in the inscrutable manner known and practised among inhabitants of a country place, had found out that a stranger was staying at the farm. Evilmongers seized on the rumour, and tossed it one from the other, till Esther herself was shunned, and the farmhouse given a wide berth.

Something of this Paul gathered at the inn where he had put up for the night. And, moved by indignation and a host of strange and complex emotions, he wrote and asked, or rather, commanded Esther to come and see him in town.

"You're a young girl," he said, standing severely before her, "and don't know how the world talks, or the things it says. I have kept the pledge of secresy I gave you, but the time has now come when, failing other things, that pledge must be broken. The fellow is well enough to be moved by this time. Indeed, he ought to have left without being told. Now, understand me, either he is gone from your house by this day week, or I take such steps as will effectually remove him. I mean what I say, Esther."

Unconsciously he had used her name, but if she noticed it she made no sign.

"If you mean you will tell the police," she said, slowly, "they know already. He would have got away by this time only they watch the house night and day. There's only one chance to save him, only one." She paused and then turned to him with the eloquent gesture of appeal she used when greatly moved. "You must save him," she said—"*You!*"

Once more he felt the woman's fascination strong upon him. He leant and took her hands—well-formed and slender, for all that they were roughened with hard work.

"And *then*, Esther," he said hoarsely—"then——"

Her face flushed a dark, deep red, for a second she stood with lowered eyes, then, drawing her hands from his, she spoke—

"He——" she commenced.

The doctor interrupted with a sneering laugh.

"Don't trouble," he said bitterly. "I understand—he is your lover. That, I suppose, is why I am to save him."

Something seemed to choke her. She raised her hands to her throat, as though she were being suffocated.

"This fellow," he went on savagely, "This mean-spirited cur who seeks protection from two women, why am I to help him escape justice, why am I to shelter Jack Hazeldean, the thief?"

Esther, standing by the table, saw a woman pausing in the doorway. A tall, slight figure came quickly into the room, and turned to the doctor with a passionate appeal.

"You will save him because I ask you, I, the woman that you love!"

"Viola!" he cried. "Viola!"

"Oh, Paul, Paul," she said, "forgive him, help him, and take pity upon me. Jack Hazeldean is my only brother Laurie!"

* * * * *

It is an axiom that character, not circumstances, makes or mars a life. At times, however, the strongest personality is as wax in the grasp of circumstances. For three years it had been the strongest desire of Paul Martin's heart to gain the love of Viola Percival. And now, now that the fruit so long withheld was within his reach, aye, within touch of his hand, the joy of possession seemed to have lost its edge.

And yet he would not have had things otherwise. He loved Viola with the quiet strength of a deep-seated affection. The strange interest that Esther had roused in him was unworthy of his better nature—so, at least, he told himself. It was glamour, he decided, and felt scornful that he should feel attracted by a woman who had so little self-respect as to love a thief.

Strangely enough the fact that the aforesaid thief was Viola's brother never affected his attitude of mind towards her.

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He was only conscious of a great pity for Viola, and a resolution to shield her as far as possible from the consequences of her brother's evil-doing.

Laurie had written to Viola from the farm, intreating her aid and assistance. She had never had the slightest suspicion as to his mode of life, and the revelation had stunned her. She had gone instinctively to Paul, and arrived just in the middle of his interview with Esther.

Paul was glad in his heart that for some reason Viola never asked for an explanation of that interview. Esther had quietly slipped away, and Viola had been too much occupied to note she had gone. Later she did nothing but contrive impossible schemes for Laurie's escape, and racked her brain—and Paul's—to hit on some way to save him.

But, as Paul had foreseen, the way was made plain, not by himself or Viola, but through Esther.

"Have a trap with a fast horse waiting by the turnpike gate on the road to Leeminster Monday afternoon at five," she wrote. "Let the driver have two railway tickets from Leeminster to London in readiness, and arrange for two persons to be met at the terminus in town." Nothing more, not a word as to whom one, at least, of the two persons was to be. Paul smiled in a cynical fashion as he read, and his mind conjured up the boyish-looking figure of Hazeldean side by side with Esther, tall and dark, with her glowing face and deep-set eyes.

Well, so be it. In two days at most he would see the last of this dusky-browed woman. He could look forward to a future with Viola. Viola of the calm eyes and gentle smile.

He arrived at Leeminster on the day appointed about two o'clock, dispatched a trusty messenger with a horse and trap and the all-important tickets to the turnpike road, and then waited with what patience he could command for the arrival of Esther and her companion. He judged it wiser not to be seen in their company, and accordingly took up a position in the waiting-room of the station, where he commanded a view of the platform without being observed.

The up train was due at 5.30. At 5.15 he commenced to grow anxious. Could they have missed the trap, had the police been too many for them, was all his care and trouble to go for naught? He bit his lips and stared hungrily at the crowd of loiterers on the platform.

A long-drawn whistle in the distance proclaimed the approaching train. Nearer and nearer it came, and gradually slowed down. With brain on fire Paul Martin scanned the faces of the people. The hurry and fuss of belated passengers struck chill to his heart. So late, so late, and yet they had not come!

The guards began to shut the doors, the engine snorts in complaining fashion, preparatory to a final shriek. Paul turns sick with apprehension. Suddenly two figures come in sight, urging their way among protesting porters and insisting newsboys. Paul strains his eyes as they pass the waiting-room, and falls back with a start. A tall, broad-shouldered woman—he had been prepared for that, but the sight of her companion comes upon him with a shock.

He had expected Hazeldean, or rather Percival, with Esther. Instead, he saw Nerette, her sister.

A thousand fears and strange forebodings shot through his mind. It was so unlike Esther to have left Hazeldean to his fate, that at first he thought he had misread her letter. No, there it was—"have two tickets in readiness—arrange for two people to be met in town." Two people—herself and Nerette!

So much for woman's devotion! Instead of saving her lover, Esther had merely removed herself and sister from the scene of his arrest. Paul felt sick with revulsion of feeling against her.

But there might yet be time for him to save Viola's brother. With all possible speed he made his way to the Moorside Farm, hoping against hope that he might not be too late.

A moment's glance as he neared the house showed him the game was up.

A knot of men were grouped a little distance from the gate, farther up the road—somewhat conscious of their own importance—two village constables were waiting, while a fringe of idlers lounged within easy hail.

A short, stout man advanced to meet the doctor. Paul had seen him once or twice before, and knew him for the local inspector of police.

"It's a bad business, sir!" he said, with a nod in the direction of the farm house. "Reckon it's hard on Esther, but——" and he shook his head portentously. He was evidently primed with information, and bursting to impart it.

"You knew the man was here?" asked Paul.

The inspector nodded.

"For the last week," he said, "we have only been waiting for him to get well. One doesn't like to nab a man but half alive, so to speak. Besides"—he discreetly lowered his voice—"I had a bit of sympathy with Esther. It wasn't quite professional, I know, but I like the girl, and I'm sorry for her. So I promised her to wait till he was better. She and her sister went out of the way this afternoon, poor things, and now"—he paused and nodded towards the house.

"I don't want any violence if it can be done without," he went on loftily. "By-and-bye he'll sneak out—thinks the coast's clear, you know, and then we'll drop on him. If we went indoors like enough he'd show fight. One of my men might get shot, and there'd be trouble."

"How long shall you wait?" asked Paul, with dry lips.

"Not after eight, it grows darkish about then, so if he don't come out we'll have to go for him."

The doctor gazed round helplessly. It had gone seven already, there was but an hour remaining. An hour in which to get this hunted wretch away from his pursuers!

Bribery? One glance at the inspector showed him the futility of attempting such a thing. Fight? What could one man do against twenty? And there was only an hour in which to make a plan. The peaceful summer evening, the sky primrose-tinted, save where the heather cast its purple shadow on the horizon, maddened him. The far-off song of a wild bird sounded in his ears like a scream of agony.

Eight o'clock—by that time Esther and Nerette would have arrived in London. By that time——

The inspector drew out his watch, and waited with phlegmatic calm for the hands to point the hour.

At that moment Paul's quick eye saw the creepers at the side of the house farthest from where they stood vibrate. Something was clinging to the long, tough tendrils, swaying nearer and ever nearer to the ground. Paul caught his breath and waited.

The figure touched earth, crept softly to the hedge—crawled through, and——

A shout went up, the cruel, exultant shout men give when the thing they hunt comes within sight. In a minute inspector, policemen, idlers, were after the fugitive full cry. Along the moor, over the hillocks, fragrant with gorse, he fled, panting and straining for that which men fight for, die for—liberty!

The tall, lithe figure of the man was seen to be making in the direction of a wood some half mile distant. There the undergrowth was so thick, and the paths so many, that it was possible, could he once gain its sanctuary, he might escape.

The inspector saw the danger, and balanced the chances. He could not afford to let the man slip through his fingers; but, on the other hand, being a humane person first and a policeman after, he did not want to fire. Possibly distrust of his own powers as a marksman had something to do with it.

Be that as it may, the decision was suddenly taken from his hands. Among the group of idlers who had joined the chase was a young fellow who had

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shown even more anxiety for the capture of Hazeldean than the inspector himself. He was dressed in the regulation velveteen of a gamekeeper, and carried a gun. Whether, as he stated, excitement got the better of him, or whether, as some say, he owed the thief a grudge for love of Esther, none ever knew. But as the flying figure gained the entrance to the wood, he caught the musket to his shoulder and took aim. A report rang out upon the quiet air—a report and then a thud, and a scream startled the echoes far and wide—a scream like a shot plover gives among the wind-swept marshes.

A great dread of what he should behold under the shadow of the trees possessed Paul Martin. He ran with heavy dragging feet like a blind man along an unknown road. The others followed, hushed into silence.

The quarry was run to earth at last; the thing that they had hunted with such fierce delight, such savage zest, lay crushed at their feet.

"Laurie!" cried Paul, in a broken voice. "Laurie!"

But when he reached the figure, and saw the face in the fair light of the early moon, a cry of exceeding bitterness broke from his lips.

Not the thief, not the man on whose liberty a price was set, lay there before him, but Esther—dark-browed and beautiful Esther—the woman whom he loved!

She raised herself eagerly and clung to his arm.

"Safe?" she questioned. "Safe?"

He answered her, his keen eyes watching her face the while, his fingers, infinitely tender, seeking to staunch her wound.

She smiled at him in her old, swift fashion as he knelt beside her. "I look like a boy, don't I?" she asked. "I'm glad I saved poor Jack. I wish——"

She broke off suddenly, fixing her large eyes earnestly upon him. "It's no good!" she said softly; "it's no good! You can do nothing for me. And you know it."

And when he stammeringly denied it, begging her brokenly to try to live for him, she shook her head and told him she was "quite content!"

"Send them all away," she asked. "I want to speak to you—alone."

"Paul," her fingers slid into his own, "Jack never cared for me."

"What did it matter?" he asked. "What did anything matter now?"

"You thought I loved him, but I never did. It was Nerette he cared for. But I was afraid the gossips might say things about her, so I let them think it was to see me he came. I never knew him as other than Jack Hazeldean, nor did I ever guess the sort of life he led. Not until the night he came to the farm half-dying. Then I had suspicions, the next day I understood."

"Why had she not told him? How much bitterness of suffering might have been spared them both?"

"Best as it is!" she said. And then, "My love could never have brought you happiness. Best as it is!"

She did not speak again, but lay quite still, while his arms clasped her jealously, as though to hold her as his own even against the King of Terrors.

In the hush of the quiet night Paul knelt beside her. The shadows of the trees—touched here and there with silver—fell like a veil upon the earth.

"Dear heart," she murmured, "it grows cold!"

Closer he clasps her, raining kisses on her hair, her eyes, her lips.

At last she stirred, and with some difficulty raised herself level with his face. Resting her hands upon his shoulders, she gazed into his eyes with a look of infinite longing, a look that bridged the gulf that lies between this life and eternity. [illegible] as she gazed she stood upon the other side. Esther [illegible]at—and the remembrance brought his solace [illegible] come—she had died happy—died in his arms, [illegible]oved most dearly in the world. She who was

[illegible]? Well, not altogether. For love is stronger [illegible]airer than life; and in that other world, Esther [illegible]loves still.

Orme Lewis.

REGARDING OUR SOCIETY REVELATIONS.

Since Short Stories introduced the new form of article, of which "The Confessions of Cynthia" was the first, I have received hundreds of letters from readers who cast a doubt on many points in the stories. These readers I have, I am pleased to say, been able to convince, and to remove any doubts from their minds.

One point raised concerned the absurd pet names used in Society. The truth of Cynthia's statements is now borne out by the newspaper reports of a great Society law-suit at the moment of writing being tried. In this law-suit one of the litigants supplied the court with a list of the names of her personal friends (many of whom were titled people) together with their pet names. This list was as follows:—

Real Name.	Pet Name.
Lord C.	"Toby," or "Bobs."
Mr. L.	"Pickles."
Lady H.	"Hydey."
Mrs. G.	"Midget."
Mrs. B.	"Aggie."
Lord A.	"Pater."
Sir C. H.	"Topps," or "Bundle."
Mr. B.	"Buck."
Lord H.	"Warrior."
Mr. O.	"D.S.O."
Lord C.	"Rock."
Capt. B. H.	"Tommy."

Reference to the morning papers of December 3rd last, will bear out this statement.

After this I am sure doubting readers will have no hesitation in believing that the pet names which appeared in "The Confessions of Cynthia," and which will be found in "How I Chaperoned Belinda," are in no way exaggerated.

Result of the "Title" Competition.

The Gramophones have been awarded as follows:

F. H. England, 30 Grafton Street, C-on-M, Manchester.
J. Foster, care of J. Love, 63 Dufferin Avenue, Dublin.
R. Jones, 27 Latimer Street, Liverpool.
Reed Ison, 73 Dartmouth Park Road, N.W.
Miss E. Skerry, Clifden Lodge, New Road, Ascot.
F. Wright, 13 Richmond Terrace, Aberdeen.
J. W. Ryder, 233 Spa Road, Bolton, near Manchester.
Thos. Wragg, Edensor, Bakewell, Derbyshire.
Mrs. Stanley, 30 Garturk Street, Govanhill, Glasgow.
C. Barlow, 3 Victoria Avenue, Alma Park, Levenshulme.

Result of the Madge Morris Wedding Cake Competition.

An Edinburgh girl wins the centre ornament.

Her name is: Miss M. Humphrey, 24 Castle Street, Edinburgh. The list of the hundred competitors who won pieces of the wedding cake is too long to publish here but can be had on application.

What He Would Propose.

"This year if any mistletoe within her 'old oak hall' is found, I'm going to propose to her—to leave it there the whole year round."

He Didn't Like It.

"What was the trouble between you and young Mr. Softy?" "Why, he said his brain was on fire, and I broke a hand grenade over his head."

Swellington's Mistake.

Swellington (at the ball): "I wonder if that plain woman over there is really trying to flirt with me?" Cooler (politely): "I can easily find out, sir, by asking her. She's my wife."

Altogether Too Good.

Mrs. Hicks: "Bear in mind, young man, that Santa Claus brings presents only to good little boys." Dick Hicks: "That just hits me. I've been so good for a month that none of the boys will play with me."

He Looked Ahead.

Garry: "As you intend to marry her, why did you consent to her riding a bicycle, when you are so opposed to them?" Merritt: "Well, I knew she would have her way in the end, and I calculated that by giving in now her father would have to pay for the machine."

Poor Artist!

Wealthy Amateur: "Since you spoke to Jones and myself about this Christmas scene, Cadmium, we have arranged that one of us shall have it." Cadmium (brightening): "I am glad of that, very glad; glad on your account, too. Which of you has it?" Wealthy Amateur: "Well, we are going to toss up for it, and the one that loses takes the picture."

Warm Affection.

They skated one Christmas, but little they said, for they'd just been made known to each other, but he wished as they over the bright surface sped, that they thus might through life be together. A crash—they went through! "Oh, how awkward!" cried she. "'Tisn't deep; but has anyone seen us?" "Never mind—let me tell you—I love you," said he, "since the ice is now broken between us."

Sacrifice the First.

He had been working all the winter to get a place in the brass band as a cornet player, and just as his hopes seemed to be on the verge of fulfilment, she met him on his way home from the post-office. "George, I wish you wouldn't play the cornet in the new band." "Why not?" said he, in surprise. "It is the place of honour, and I get a great deal of attention by it, dear." "Yes, I know," she said coaxingly. "It is so nice to have you noticed by everyone, and all that, dear, but——" She paused and hung her curly head a little lower. "But what?" said he sharply. "Blowing the cornet makes—makes——" Her voice sank to a pouting whisper. "Makes the lips so stiff and hard?" George has decided not to be the cornet player in the band.

Christmas License.

Stern Father of the Girl: "I saw you kiss my daughter at our party last night, and I want you to know I don't like it." Young Man: "You may not; but I do."

An Appropriate Keepsake.

"I presume you carry a memento of some sort in that locket of yours?" "Precisely, it is a lock of my husband's hair." "But your husband is still alive!" "Yes, sir; but his hair is all gone."

Tit for Tat.

He.: "When will you learn that razors are not the things to sharpen slate pencils with?" She: "I don't know. I suppose as soon as you've learnt that hairpins are not intended to clean out pipes!"

And He Did.

She: "Don't you feel a draught over there near the window?" He (taking the hint): "I don't know that I do. What would you advise me to do: pull the blind down, or move over nearer to you?" She: "Both."

The Actor's Farewell.

Physician: "You cannot possibly follow your profession more than five or six years longer. I have known it for a long time." Star Actor (wrathfully): "Then you ought to have told me before this. You have cheated me out of several farewell seasons."

How a Girl Catches a Ball.

When a girl tries to catch a ball she throws her arms wide apart, waits until the ball hits her on the nose, turns her hands with a windmill motion, runs after the ball, picks it up, brushes her hair out of her eyes, and smiles, as though her way of doing it cannot be improved upon.

The Uses of Friends.

Jinks: "I tell you what it is, there is nothing like having lots of friends." Winks: "I presume not." Jinks: "No, sir. Just as quick as I lose a situation, my friends all rush round hunting for a new place for me, so as to save me the trouble of borrowing money from them."

Adding Insult to Injury.

She (just kissed): "How dare you, sir?" He: "I hope you will pardon me. I didn't think." She: "Think! Of course you didn't think. But your inability to think is no excuse for your conduct. I suppose you mean to tell me that if you had stopped to think you would not have wanted to kiss me."

All Men are Fools.

Old Friend: "Well, how is your flying machine getting on?" Inventor: "Getting along? I finished that twenty years ago. Every detail is complete. There it stands, ready to go." "Why don't you show it to the world?" "Can't. All men are fools." "What's the matter?" "Can't find a man anywhere with sense enough to climb up a steeple and try it."

A Christmas Terror.

The stout man with a large package beneath his arm hurried through the crowded thoroughfare, closely pursued by a small man of haggard aspect, with a thick stick in his hand. On and on, relentless as the ticking of a clock, the forlorn man dogged the other, and those who passed him heard an occasional word drop from his lips, indicative of despair, of awful terror. Finally some of the crowd turned and followed the pair, determined not to miss the fun. The crowd grew larger, and finally a bold man went up to the person of haggard countenance. "What's the matter?" he asked. The little man turned. "Matter?" he echoed. "See that man with a bundle? He is my next-door neighbour, and in that bundle he has a drum which he has bought for his small son to play upon." But the crowd waited no longer. It surged ahead with relentless fury and left him to work out his own vengeance, and when peace had been restored the remains of a battered man and a battered drum lay upon the pavement.

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A Modern Cinderella.

And of the Prince Who Won Her.

"Mamma, mamma, what do you think?" cried Lyda Stuart, as she rushed into the room where her mother sat, with flushed cheeks and dishevelled hair. "I have found two tickets for the ball to-morrow night—no name or anything on them by which I could trace the owner—and oh, mamma, I want to use them; I want to go!"

"But, my dear," espostulated Mrs. Stuart, as Lyda paused breathlessly, "how——"

"Why, you kept one or two of my evening gowns, you know, mother, and I am sure the white one would do beautifully, and Tom is still quite presentable in his dress suit even if it is a bit tight—and here are the tickets, so why not? The only thing is that I want you to go too, darling," with an emphatic kiss on her mother's cheek.

"I should not care in the least about it, dear, and am afraid you will be disappointed."

"Oh, I know I shall be *in* it, and not *of* it, but that does not matter. I shall enjoy just watching it all, and hearing the music. I may combine business with pleasure, too, mamma, by getting some new ideas for my sketches."

"We will see what your brother says, dear," Mrs. Stuart answered.

She would have been loth indeed to deprive this daughter of hers of any pleasure that might come in her way, for in the reverses that had fallen on the family since Mr. Stuart's death, his wife's greatest grief had been for Lyda. The disaster had come on the very eve of her coming out, and ever since they left their beautiful English home and came to this big, seething, lonely American city, Lyda had worked steadily at illustrating.

Now she was making a success at it, and there was also beginning to be quite a demand for her dainty water-colour work.

When Tom came home, Lyda immediately pounced upon him, and related her wonderful news. He readily agreed to take her, but he warned her that they would not be likely to meet any of their few acquaintances, and that therefore she would have to be satisfied to dance with him, or be simply a spectator at her first ball.

The next day they scanned the papers for some mention of the tickets, but none appeared, so they felt justified in using them.

That night Lyda was all excitement. The white gown had required very little alteration, and as Mrs. Stuart put the finishing touches to her daughter's toilet, she felt very pardonable motherly pride in her.

"How do you like me, Tom?" Lyda asked, as she entered the little sitting-room.

Tom whistled. "By Jove!" he ejaculated, as he gazed at the picture framed in the doorway. She laughed happily, taking innocent pleasure in his astonished admiration.

"I knew you were good-looking, Lyda, but you're quite too stunning to-night; isn't she, mother?"

"She does look pretty, but we mustn't turn this bright little head with too much flattery. Remember it is only for one night," Mrs. Stuart answered a little sadly.

Tom wished that his own head were a trifle steadier. It had been aching most fearfully all day, but he would not say a word to mar Lyda's pleasure or to cause his mother any anxiety.

He felt rewarded for the effort he had made when he saw how much Lyda enjoyed her novel experience, and in listening to her bright comments on the glittering panorama.

Tom feared that dancing might tax his powers of endurance too far, and was wondering what excuse to make to Lyda, when a hearty voice exclaimed: "Why, if it isn't Tom Stuart!" And a friend from their native land shook him vigorously by the hand.

Lyda was soon gliding round with this friend of her childhood. She naïvely explained to him how they happened to be at the ball, so he took great pains to introduce his friends, and after that she did not lack for partners.

Flushed and happy, she finally went to prepare for her home-going. When she emerged from the cloak-room, she expected to find Tom waiting for her, but he was nowhere to be seen, and she stood rather nervously watching for him.

As she looked rather anxiously about for her brother, she happened to encounter the gaze of a man who stood near. He was distinguished looking, and Lyda had noticed him several times during the evening, secretly wishing that she might have met him.

As she looked up, he seemed to realise that he had been staring at her, for he started a little and turned away.

Lyda did not know what to do. Where could Tom be? If only one of the men she had met would pass that way. Her trepidation increased. Noticing this, the man who was still covertly watching her approached.

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" he asked courteously, "perhaps I could find the person you are looking for?"

"It is my brother," Lyda half gasped, raising a pair of very frightened blue eyes. Meeting his kindly, encouraging look, she hurried on.

"I thought he would be here, and cannot understand what keeps him. Ah, there he is! Thank you so much," as Tom hurried to her, looking very white.

"Why, Tom, what is the matter?" she questioned anxiously, noting his pallor.

Hugh Thurston stepped aside, wishing devoutly that "Tom" had not appeared quite so soon. Of course, he was glad that the sister's anxiety was relieved, but he very much wanted to know who she was.

"Why, I had a sort of giddy faint spell, little girl," Tom explained hastily. "My head has bothered me all day. Awfully sorry—hope you have not been frightened."

"I was rather, but it's no matter. I am so sorry you are ill; why didn't you say so, and we could have gone home sooner? This gentleman"—nodding towards Thurston—"had just offered to go in search of you."

Tom turned to Thurston and thanked him briefly, explaining his own delay. Lyda bowed a slight acknowledgment as they passed, but something in his eyes as they met hers made her heart give a sudden bound and brought a deeper flush to her cheeks.

"Who on earth can she be?" Thurston wondered. Evidently they had not come in a carriage, for she wore a hat, and a dark ulster hid her ball gown, and he knew from her accent that she was English.

Looking down, he saw a little gold pin lying in the corner where she had stood while waiting for her brother. Picking it up, he hurried downstairs and searched the corridor for her, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Thurston started to take the pin to the desk, but he changed his mind, and tucked it away in his card case. Then he went back to the ballroom and tried to find out who she was. But no one seemed to recognise his description. In such a crowd, in fact, there were many who might have answered to it, so

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Thurston was forced to leave without obtaining any clue to her identity.

He marvelled at the depth of the impression that this girl's face had made upon him. His wealth and good looks won him so much favour among women, that he had come to regard them with great indifference.

He inserted an advertisement concerning the pin, but no answer ever came, and he strove to forget the owner, but many times the blue eyes seemed to look at him through the smoke rings, or come unbidden between him and a printed page.

The day after the ball, poor Tom was in a raging fever, and the weeks which followed were anxious ones indeed in the Stuart's little home, for Tom had a bad case of typhoid.

Their small savings dwindled rapidly, and Lyda worked incessantly to renew resources. Mrs. Stuart became so worn by her vigil at the sick boy's side, that the doctor feared that she too would be attacked by the disease.

Lyda, worrying about her mother, grieving because she thought that she had aggravated Tom's illness by taking him to the ball, and working even harder than usual, had grown thin and pale, and there were heavy circles under the blue eyes.

One afternoon, as she was doggedly putting the finishing touches to some dinner cards that were to be called for that day, the bell rang.

"Come in," Lyda called softly, thinking it was the doctor. "Go right in, doctor," she added, without turning her head. She was not willing that he should see the traces of tears that *would* brim over occasionally and impede her progress.

"I beg pardon, but my sister sent me for the cards," said a voice that was certainly not the doctor's. She rose quickly.

"Oh, pardon me," she exclaimed, then stopped short as she recognised her "ball man," as she had mentally termed him.

Hugh Thurston started eagerly forward.

"You!" he cried, with a glad ring in his voice, "you!"—I have so often tried to find you since the ball. But child," taking her hand gently in his as he saw her pale cheeks and tired eyes, "what have they done to you?"

The cheeks became so crimson and the eyes so wide with astonishment that he came suddenly to himself and dropped her hands.

"Of course, you don't understand," he explained rather lamely. "You've probably never given me a thought." The blue eyes were suddenly veiled. "You didn't leave any slipper behind that I might know of but—I found your pin after you had gone and I wanted to find the owner." He had pulled out his card case while he was speaking and now he handed the pin—a lover's knot with a diamond centre—to her.

"But it is not mine," she said, looking up with a demure little smile.

"Isn't it?" he asked surprisedly. "It doesn't matter though"—somewhat irrelevantly—"for I've done better than find the 'owner'—I've found the princess," and as their eyes met, the princess knew that the prince had come.

Winifred Alan.

CRITIC (who has dropped in for a little talk): "And what are your views on marriage?" Artist (in no humour for argument): "Oh, I am wedded to my art." Critic: "And I suppose you, too, consider marriage a failure?"

"GREAT thing—presence of mind," said Gooding; "I might have been a rich man to-day if my presence of mind had not failed me one time." "Indeed! When was that?" asked a friend. "You remember my uncle George—rich old duffer? You know I am his heir. Well, sir, I was with him one day when he was taken with a fit. I was so frightened that I lost my presence of mind and called in a doctor, and uncle George is living yet."

A REMARKABLE LETTER.

GIFT OF £50 FROM ONE READER TO THE REST.

We have received the following communication from an anonymous correspondent living in America:

DAYTON, OHIO, U.S.A.
NOVEMBER 25th, 1902.

DEAR EDITOR AND FRIEND,

IN February, 1894, I received from you a cheque for £10 as a prize in connection with a competition that ran in SHORT STORIES.

That £10 was the foundation of a fortune which I have now, thank God, accumulated. I was a single young man at the time, and could find no employment in England. So, with the help of the £10, I emigrated to America, and, after knocking about New York for a few months, found my way to Dayton. Here I started in the cycle business and, when the boom came in 1897 and 1898, I made a lot of money. This money I speculated with and have now turned into a fortune.

My reason for writing you is to express my gratitude to you for having offered the £10, and to say that I have now decided to give to the readers of SHORT STORIES through the medium of your paper five times this amount every year I am spared.

I therefore inclose you bills for two hundred and fifty dollars, and ask you to distribute these in five sums of £10 each amongst the readers of SHORT STORIES in a competition the nature of which I leave to yourself. All I ask is that the announcement may be made and the competition closed in time for the prize money to reach the winners during February, which is the month in which I received my first £10.

You are of course at liberty to publish this letter, but I do not append my name as I have no desire for notoriety and simply make this offer out of pure gratitude in the hope that those who receive the £10 prizes will turn them to as good account as I was able to turn my £10.

Your Obedient Servant,

DAYTON.

(Next week, the competition in which the five prizes of £10 each are offered will appear.—Ed. S.S.)

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A Dangerous Test.

Which Nearly Ended in Disaster.

"Miss Anstey, allow me to introduce Mr. Gurden," said the actor-manager to his principal lady in the green room, between the acts.

She smiled, bent her head, and at once made him feel at home in her society.

From the stalls of that provincial theatre Gurden had watched her during five nights of the company's fortnight's stay in the town, had watched her with growing interest, as she displayed her talent in a characteristically unaffected manner. He was not a hanger-on of actresses, but a bank cashier with a serious outlook in life, although still in his early thirties. Having been introduced to the manager, Gurden had openly expressed a wish to know Miss Anstey, hence his introduction. Their talk was not made up of the usual platitudes of such occasions; it was more like that of an interview by a journalist in search of "copy." His few frank compliments charmed her, they were so natural, so much of the man himself. At the outset he was plainly an admirer, but not one of the common sort, and this fact there and then put him into favour.

Her interval was a long one. When it ended he left the green room with an encouraging invitation to drop in any evening during the company's stay in Illchester; as he did so, he was followed by the intent gaze of the "juvenile lead," the one who is popularly known as the hero of the play. He (described on the bills as Mr. Henry Montgomery), from an unobserved corner, had narrowly watched the interview; but not more narrowly than Betty Scarsdale, the low comedy actress. A young man of fine physique and a good-looking face, his admiration of Miss Anstey was an open secret to every member of the company. To her he had declared love—"an undying, ardent passion," had been his avowal; to which she had given a quiet negative, kept the affair private, and maintained the even tenor of her way as though such an occurrence had never come about.

"A new admirer," mused Montgomery, as he gave some fresh touches to his "make-up" before the green room mirror whilst awaiting his turn to go on, "and a serious one—that I can see by the cut of his face. Well, it will go hard with him or me if he makes Alice Anstey his wife; for, by Heaven, if he does, there will be a real tragedy for some of us to play. He's not one of the common or garden hangers-on at stage-doors, that's evident. At any rate, I'm going to watch them, if she remains here, when we break up next week; thanks to the powers that be, I can find somewhere to stay here, if she does."

With that he went out to take his turn before the audience.

As he passed out, Betty Scarsdale entered from the stage. "M'm," ran her thoughts, "I am keeping an eye on you, Mr. Smith. You think yourself safe here, that no one knows your past, and you can do as you like; but what about poor May Brander, whom you left in the States, and the scandalous trick you played her brother? Of course, you don't think that I know these things; and you would be equally surprised to hear that May and I were at school together and that I met her after you had left her across the Atlantic, and was given a message to you, one that would soften the heart of any but a wretch like you. But I shall not deliver it, now that I know what you are—I think that May is better off without you, or any of your kind. Ten to one you have somehow got to know that Alice has a private fortune of her own; if you didn't I'll bet that you would not be so keen on making her think that you love her. But I'm going to see a happy 'curtain' to this drama in real life, so far as Alice has a part in it, if it costs me every penny of my savings to lie by and watch the play."

On the following night Gurden took advantage of Miss Anstey's invitation to drop into the green-room for a few minutes between the acts. The company of which she formed a member was a repertoire one, giving a fresh play every other evening; so that to his friends his new and violent liking for a theatre seemed more for a play than for its leading actress. But had they known of his nightly visits to the green-room they would probably have felt some alarm that so eminently respectable and serious-minded a bank cashier was becoming the regular companion of strolling players.

One visit led to another. Then, at Gurden's cost, came a supper party at an adjacent hotel—the members being himself, the manager, Miss Anstey and Betty, the latter having thus far kept the whole secret of what she knew relative to Montgomery's doings in America. On the succeeding Sunday evening (the day after the company broke up), these four sat down to a tastefully arranged little dinner at Miss Anstey's rooms. Here it was that Gurden had his first experience of her society in private life. He had been charmed with her as an actress. As a lady far removed from all stage matters, in which light he now saw her, he was enchanted. Up to this he had, to himself only, frankly and wholly admired her. Now he was deeply in love with her. That night he went away thinking her perfect, the first of her sex. Hitherto his life had been spent in work, without a thought of womankind. Motherless and with no sisters, he had grown to manhood altogether outside the influence of woman. Eight years in a town many miles from his native place, and all the time in lonely "diggings," had made him something of a recluse. Now the whole strength of his deep, reserved natura was stirred. He loved as few men love; loved to such an extent that he could not hide it.

And she—the dullest of women, could not but see his bent. To him she was no more than a poor actress dependent on her talent for a living. What wonder then that she respected his passion, was touched by it, and decided to remain a while in Illchester? This last item was told to Betty, with whom Miss Anstey was on very friendly terms. Betty said that she had already determined to take a "rest" in the place (as theatrical people term a spell of idleness), for which fib it is to be hoped that the recording angel forgave her.

Towards the end of that week Gurden called to spend an evening by appointment with Miss Anstey. After some music they sat talking a while. Then he rose to go. The coldness of the night necessitated an overcoat, and when he was about to put it on she stepped forward to help him. That was the crisis, the psychological moment when his love was too great to withstand.

"Alice!—Miss Anstey!" he murmured in a low, deep passionate tone, "I——may I?" He had refaced her. His right hand was half round her waist. In his left hand hers was gripped in a manner that gave a pleasurable pain. Abashed at his own abruptness, fearful of giving offence or of speaking too soon, he stopped as suddenly as he had commenced to declare his love. They stood almost facing each other, her large grey eyes looking up in an inquiring, half-shy, half-encouraging way at his earnest face.

Her quietude and open gaze gave him new assurance.

"Miss Anstey," he began again, "I should like to tell you something, to ask you something; but——"

Had he been more accustomed to women he would have known that her warm passivity was proof of how ready and willing she was to hear what he had to say. "Perhaps I

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ought not to—I may be trespassing on your kindness. I——" Was the opportunity to slip by? Would he drift from the subject, leaving it merely suggested? Would she have to wait for another occasion, never hear what he really had to say, or help him to say it now? And yet was there truly any need of it being said? On his part, was not that arm about her waist sufficient? On hers, the quiet bearing, and the passive happiness on her face were surely satisfactory pledges that she both knew and accepted what he wished to say. They had known each other only a fortnight. They were standing in the position of acknowledged lovers, he to her and she to him. What need could there be for more declaration? Only that, in view of what might be inferred this way or that, a few words would prevent misunderstandings. He seemed unlikely to say them as matters stood. Hence she saved the situation by remarking:

"Yes, you have something to tell me. What?"

"That I love you!"

"Why," she smilingly answered, "I knew that, you silly. I thought it was some news you had."

"And I want you to marry me—to be my wife."

"Well, that is the natural conclusion—isn't it?—although not always arrived at." She was inclined to a pleasantly jocular mood, but made not the slightest effort to free herself from his half-embrace. There was between them an affinity that sent reserve far into the background and was quickly making them feel at home under each other's touch; yet he scarcely knew how to take her mood.

"But you, Alice?" he said, anxiety marking his voice; "I may call you Alice—may I not?"

"Of course you may. What else should you call me?" was her sweetly tantalising reply.

"But you?" he repeated interrogatively.

"Ah, me?" She turned away from him, naturally and gently, not as if wishful to be from his side. "I am afraid I don't understand myself and shall never be satisfied." He watched her movements tenderly, as she partially crossed the room. "Do you know," she added, with a winning smile, turning and pausing by a table on which she rested one hand, "I have registered a vow never to marry any man, though he be a prince, a hero, or a genius, unless he first proves his love by some very great sacrifice. Am I not quixotic? I know I am romantic. But there, men are so light in their love; and I have made my vow and must keep it. In fact, I *shall* keep it, no matter how I love; for I could not believe in his love if I did not test it in some uncommon way. Is it not foolish of me? But then, you know, we are all foolish in some way or other at some time or other."

Here she returned slowly and smilingly to him. He took her gently in his arms, kissed her, said that he was ready to make any sacrifice she could suggest and went his way, feeling that he had suddenly entered on a new life.

* * * * *

"Is the manager in?" It was Montgomery who put this question to the first clerk he saw behind the counter of the branch bank where Gurden was cashier.

"I think so. What name, please?" was the answer.

Montgomery took out his card-case, drew one from it, wrote a few words on the pasteboard, then handed it to the clerk, who proceeded with it to an inner office, reading the written message *en route*. In a couple of minutes he returned and ushered Montgomery into the manager's private room.

"Good day, Mr. Montgomery," said the bald-headed manager, as his clerk disappeared. "Take a seat. I see by your card that you have a letter of introduction from our chief secretary."

"I have," answered Montgomery, handing forward the letter.

"So you wish to become a bank clerk, Mr. Montgomery?" the manager said, looking up from his perusal of the missive.

"Yes, I should be very glad of an opportunity in that way," he replied; "and Mr. Davies" (the secretary), "who was a friend of my mother's family, thought you were in need of one."

"Well, I am, and as Mr. Davies so strongly recommends you, I shall be pleased to give you a start. You have, I see," (referring to the letter) "worked in a bank before, although it is some years ago." He went on to talk of the vacant post, salary and promotion: then Montgomery departed, to begin his new duties on the following morning, muttering to himself—"Now, Mr. Gurden, it's you or me for the prize, and if my ingenuity cannot get you disgraced here, it won't be for the want of trying."

* * * * *

"How late she is!" Gurden murmured under his breath, as he produced his watch, gave it a glance, and returned it. The pointers indicated ten minutes past nine. "She promised to be here at eight-forty-five, and I don't see anything of her yet." His eyes searched the street to right and left.

There was an anxious, troubled look in his intelligent blue eyes, and about his mouth a drawn expression, accompanied by a nervous twitching of the brows. It was the night of the shopman's holiday; few people were about, and he was pacing to and fro outside an arcade in Illchester.

"Isn't she coming, I wonder?" And again he paused, examined his watch, replaced it, and resumed his slow march from about twenty yards on one side of the arcade to the same distance on the other.

Fifteen minutes past nine—nine thirty-five—a quarter to ten, and yet she came not. Still more anxious grew his expression, more troubled the look in his eyes, and more restless his movements. Again and again he peered into the arcade and round the long, street-like square in which he walked. The look of a condemned man for a reprieve could not be more full of expectant anxiety than was Gurden's; but his eyes were still unrewarded, and his heart increased its beating.

"What *can* be the matter?" he, in his strained condition, muttered half-aloud; and a passing newsboy gave him a questioning glance. "What has kept her, I wonder? Surely she has not made a mistake! I told her plain enough to meet me here, and she knows the place," he noiselessly continued. "Can she have suddenly been taken ill, or some accident have happened to her? Something *must* have gone wrong, or she would be here, I know." Another five minutes of terrible suspense passed away, five minutes which seemed five hours to the conscience-stricken man.

"My God!" he at last cried within himself, "I can't stand this any longer. I *must* know what is the matter. After the horror I have gone through, I'm not going to let the thing slip now." He abruptly turned on his heel, and hurried away to a thoroughfare on the opposite side of that busy centre of the town. Presently he opened the front gate of the house where he had spent some very happy evenings (though the succeeding nights had been followed by a hot conflict between love and conscience). He bounded up the six stone steps and gave a spasmodic knock at the door, which was quickly opened by a prim little servant maid.

"Is Miss Anstey in?" he eagerly asked.

"No, sir. She left early this mornin', and took all 'er luggage away with 'er."

"Did she say anything about coming back?"

"No — she said she shouldn't be comin' back no more."

"Has she left any message for me?"

"No, sir, not as I knows of. Wait a minute, please, an' I'll see." She disappeared within. Soon the girl returned with the message that Miss Anstey had left no message of any kind for anyone.

"Thank you." He sprang down the steps and made all possible haste in

Turn to pages 792 and 819 and win a Gramophone.

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TWENTY SPLENDID GRAMOPHONES are offered for Competition in this Number.

the direction of the town. Again he entered the square, fully expecting to see her whom he sought waiting for him. But his intense gaze failed to find her. During the next three or four minutes he stood in doubt. He was weighing the advisability of what best to do. Then the look of troubled irresolution passed away. He turned up his coat collar (for the nights had grown colder than the one when a lift at his overcoat had brought about a declaration of love), buttoned the garment, meanwhile saying to himself, "I suppose I must get out of this; there's nothing else for it now," and strode off in the direction of Fleetthorpe, a village four miles away.

On some rising ground just without the town he paused, and looked back at the wide group of lights below him, which he expected he was leaving for the last time—and leaving a disgraced name behind him. But self-accusing retrospection was then useless. He had cast the die—the hazard was his, and he had taken it, though certainly not without much thought, and as the last desperate thing to win her.

Like many another good, and many a better, man, he had bartered away his fair prospects and the well-earned reputation of fifteen years of honest dealing in business and private matters—all to please and win a woman.

He turned his face once more towards the darkness where lay Fleetthorpe. A lump rose in his throat. He smothered a sigh, muttering, "Yes, that will be the best thing to do now; go on, and stop there to-night; then catch the first train in the morning. I mustn't be seen to leave Illchester by rail—a cabman might recognise me; and if I get to Liverpool by three to-morrow afternoon, I shall be soon enough. Yes, that's what I'll do; probably she has gone on ahead. She must have made some mistake and will put it right." He stepped forward at a brisk pace, his head drooped in conscious shame.

When he had walked about a mile he checked his speed somewhat; then, as if acting on a sudden impulse, he came to an abrupt halt at a bend in the road. For the space of a minute or so he stood quite still. His face was turned towards the town again. "I might put it back and make things all right," he said, under his breath. "I should be glad to, if I were sure of not seeing Alice again." With her name her image rose in his mind. A sigh fully escaped him, and he muttered, "But if she has gone on to Liverpool—she is surely awaiting me there."

Again he swung round and began to increase the distance between himself and Illchester. At that juncture, just as the curve in the road was fully rounded, he thought he heard a scuffle; then a faint cry reached his ears. "Heavens!" he whispered, "there's something wrong going on here, surely." His head was slightly drooped and turned aside, with one ear in the direction whence the sound had come. Again he distinctly heard a muffled cry, and with a couple of bounds he passed through a gap in the hedge between the road and the woodland that skirted it. Here he paused and listened. Now he was sure he heard a struggle going on, and he rushed forward amongst the trees—his feet scattering and crunching the dry leaves and twigs as he went. Other footsteps sounded on the still night air. He doubled round a huge cluster of bramble bushes and paused at the sight of a woman motionless on the ground.

"Merciful powers, there *is* something wrong!" burst from him. Then he leapt forward, casting a hurried glance round; but seeing no one, he stooped, raised the still form, and, half-dragging, half-carrying her, he bore her to where the ghostly light of the rising moon made the woman's features look ghastly in their whiteness. The instant he reached an open space he laid the burden down and bent his gaze on her face.

"Oh, horrors, it is Alice!" hesoried out, dropping on his knees by her side. In an instant her head was on his arm. He called her name eagerly, and wildly ran his hand over her head in search of possible injuries, and was greatly relieved when he found none. Now he chafed her hands and now her temples, white and almost pulseless; now he passionately kissed her, and again repeatedly called her by name. But there was still no sign of returning consciousness. He sprang to his feet and stood irresolute. He knew not what to do. Again he dropped on his knees. Once more he chafed her hands and face; again he kissed her and spoke her name in her ear, while his frame trembled with anxiety, and he grew impotently frantic at his helplessness. At last her eyelids slowly lifted, and her eyes—as her thoughts assumed a less chaotic taste—put on a frightened look.

"Oh, please let me go!" she faintly murmured; and, turning away, she endeavoured to rise.

"Alice! Alice!" he eagerly and gladly exclaimed. "Don't you know me? I'm Fred! Don't you know me, Alice?"

At the sound of his voice she made a move towards him, tremulously gazed at him for a moment, then murmuring, "Fred, Fred," she nestled to him like a frightened child to its mother.

When she had fully regained her self-possession, and he had led her on to the roadway, he asked her how she came to be in such a predicament.

"I was coming to meet you, when a hand suddenly covered my mouth, and I was dragged in there before I could cry out or do anything," she replied, indicating the place where he had found her.

"But however did you get here, Alice?"

"You said last night that it would be best to book from Fleetthorpe to Manchester and then re-book to Liverpool; so, when I sent my luggage on this morning (as you told me to) I thought I would come out here and spend the day at Fleetthorpe for a change, instead of remaining in Illchester. And I did so; and when the evening came, and it was time to come to meet you, I thought I would walk—the weather was so fine; but I think I started late and lost my way; then he (the man who had decamped) molested me."

"Has he hurt you much?" Fred anxiously inquired.

"No, dear," she answered, smiling to reassure him.

"You feel quite all right now?"

"Yes, but for the shock and a little rough shaking, I am no worse."

"I should like a chance of shaking him," Fred growled, as their conversation brought the molester back to his mind.

"Don't heed the unpleasant affair, dear; it isn't worth while to look for him, although he did seem familiar in the one glance I had of him."

"I don't know about the worth of the matter; but I should take good care to find him if we had time to spare. As it is we must be moving, Alice. We *must* catch the *Teutonic* to-morrow afternoon."

"But you haven't got the money, Fred, have you?" she asked, giving him a look wherein anxiety, incredulity, and fear struggled for the mastery. Now that the climax was reached her joy at proving her power over him was lost in her horror of what he had done to satisfy her.

"Yes, came the low, slow reply; and he turned away his shame-flushed, guilt-paled face. "I promised you I would, and I've done it," he added, in a voice full of bitter resignation

For a moment she looked at him with eyes full of a chaos of expressions, the predominant one being loving trust; then she instinctively poised herself on her toes, reached up her arms, clasped them round his neck, and breathlessly exclaimed:

"Oh, Fred, there's no need for it! I was only trying you, and I didn't think you would do it. I thought you would come at the last minute and say that you could not do it; then I would tell you all, and we would go away as we have arranged. Oh, what shall we do?" The enormity of the crime into which she had led him, in her foolish desire to test the strength of his affection for her, now flashed upon her

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with such force as to put all other thoughts and feelings completely in the background, and made her tremble at the probable consequence of her rash act.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"There is no need of it. I have plenty. I was only testing you!" She tearfully rejoined, her eyes drooping, at the consciousness of her shame. "Oh, why did I induce you to do such a thing?"

"Do you really mean what you say?"

"Yes, dear. I have a private fortune—enough for us both. I was with the Gaiety Comedy Company only because I was fond of the stage. But, because of what I've seen with others, although I love you so, I wanted to see if yours was only a passing fancy; and that is why I proposed you should rob the bank, and we should go to South America with the money. I never thought you would do it, really. Oh, forgive me, Fred!"

"Thank God!" he devoutly murmured. "Don't cry, Alice," he gently said after they had stood some minutes in a contemplative embrace. "You know now that mine is no fleeting fancy; and the wrong that has been done can be undone, thank Heaven."

Footsteps were heard down the road behind them, coming their way—townwards. They moved slowly forward, on a strip of greensward by the side of the turnpike and overshadowed by the high thorn hedge. A dark form appeared, and was soon abreast of them.

"That's him!" involuntary whispered Alice.

Fred sprang into the middle of the road at a leap. "And Montgomery!" he cried. Whereat the other fled as if death were at his heels. After him went Gurden, at the spur of instinct; but Alice's voice crying, "Oh, Fred, Fred, don't leave me here alone!" caused him to give up the chase at once. He returned to her, and together they walked back to Illchester—she persuading him to take no further notice of Montgomery (if the runaway were indeed her late fellow-actor), but to put the money back on the following morning, resign his post, and accept half her fortune by an immediate private marriage.

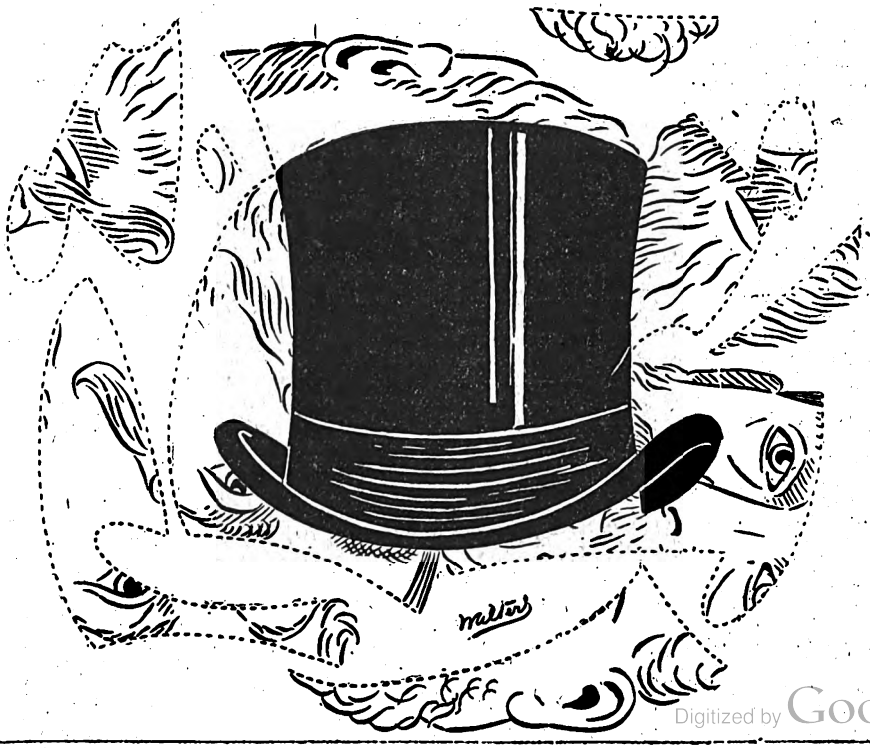
Early next day Gurden was at his desk, but not so soon as was Montgomery, who at once informed him (with a vengeful delight that could not be hidden), that the manager was waiting to see him "inside," meaning in the private room.

Gurden fully surmised that his sin had already been discovered, and rightly attributed that fact to Montgomery, who, late on the previous night, had called at the manager's house and so far assured him of Gurden's theft as to cause a very early attendance at the bank and an examination of his cashier's books.

When Gurden entered he saw his books on the manager's table and a severe look on the latter's face. Before his superior could speak he cut the matter short by confessing, in very few words, what he had done, putting the money on the table as he spoke, then verbally tendered his resignation, and expressed a hope that in view of his past, the matter would go no further. He had, he said, come to the bank before his usual time in order to replace what he had taken.

Whilst the manager spoke of his sorrow at the slip of so trusted a servant, his pleasure at the turn the affair was taking, and examined the money to see that all was right, a commotion began in the bank itself. The manager rose to ascertain the cause of this, and through the open door Gurden saw a detective arresting Montgomery on a charge, as the officer said, of embezzlement in the United States—a crime that was being paid for by the imprisonment of a partially-innocent man, the brother of the girl whom Montgomery had secretly married there and then left to work or starve, the affair on which Betty had mused when Gurden was introduced to Alice at the theatre. This was the last that Gurden ever saw of his criminal rival, of whose past he and Alice now heard from Betty. His resignation was accepted, and Betty told him at the wedding that he had merely exchanged an arduous post for a loving wife and ample means—whom she would have helped him to win had her services been needful.

J. E. Patterson.



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SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER to readers of "Short Stories" who would like to have a Gramophone with which to amuse their friends at Christmas parties.

The accompanying picture is composed of the various sections of the face of a gentleman well known to Britishers.

WHAT YOU MUST DO.

Cut out the sections round the dotted lines, and piece them together under the silk hat to make the complete face. You will, of course, find that there are too many sections, so that you must select the correct ones.

To each of the ten readers who send in the neatest correct faces will be presented a handsome Gramophone.

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Address your attempt to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C. Mark your envelope "Face." Attempts must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday, December 23rd.

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SERIAL STORY.

A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

LAST INSTALMENT.

BIBLIOTECA BODLEIANA

A Tragic Event.

ILDEN was looking pale and haggard. His set face showed the signs of a long-drawn suspense. For more than twenty hours he had been seeking his wife without a moment's rest—without a moment's respite from the anxiety which consumed him.

The night had been wasted in following a false clue, provided by his detective. It had led to nothing, and the discovery of its futility had left him with barely time for the carrying out of his own plan—the only one which suggested itself.

He remembered that he had been determined to see Percival immediately after his father's funeral, and insist on his giving some account of his connection with Despard. It was more than ever important for him to do so now, when the discovery of Despard might solve the problem of Florence's disappearance; and he had started on the long journey north, chafing at the obstacles which an unkind Fate seemed determined to place in his way.

The trains had been delayed by fog, and just outside York there had been a slight accident which necessitated further waiting.

It had become certain, then, that he could not be present at the funeral, and to his annoyance at the unavoidable breaking of a promise was added the more serious consideration that he might lose his only chance of seeing Percival Ilden.

There was little doubt in his mind that his cousin would do his best to avoid him. It was only till the interment of his father that he could be sure of his whereabouts, and Ilden became more and more anxious and impatient as the time of the ceremony passed, finding him still in the train, but creeping nearer to his destination.

When he reached Mordenhale station at last it was to find that his anxiety had been justified. A pile of luggage bearing Percival's label stood on the platform.

"Mr. Ilden is leaving Mordenhale, then?" he said to the station-master.

"Yes, sir. He is going out of England, I believe. He is expecting to catch the four o'clock train."

Ilden glanced at his watch. There was time left for their interview, and he strode hastily up to the house to meet the man he sought in the hall.

The news of his arrival reached Grant as he was packing for his departure into the world, and put an end to a last uncertainty for him. He had been feeling that he was committed to assist Catherine in her search for her cousin until it ended. Now he had no tie to keep him, and relief at an ordeal avoided mingled itself with a less selfish relief to know that Catherine's fears had been unfounded.

There was no need to see her now, he told himself. It would be safer for him not to do so, and he seated himself to write her a farewell letter, a letter which tried his fortitude to the full.

Downstairs, meanwhile, Percival had concealed his instinctive disappointment at seeing Ilden alive to greet him with a show of geniality.

"Thank Heaven you have turned up, old man," he said, holding out his hand. "We have all been quite uneasy about you. It seemed so unlike you to miss the funeral. I am sorry you are too late even for the reading of the will. They are wrangling about it in there now."

George ignored the extended hand and the unusual show of geniality.

"I want a word with you, cousin Percival," he said, his voice hard and uncompromising.

His cousin had adopted his genial tone with deliberation however, and had no intention of abandoning it.

"By all means. Come in here. We can have a chat all to ourselves there, and I have no doubt I have news for you. Not that I can give you long. I have only been waiting for this sad business to finish to get away from this wretched climate, and my train goes at four."

He was leading the way as he spoke to the drawing-room, a long, low room on the ground floor opening through a conservatory upon the garden, and Ilden did not interrupt his speech until he had followed him within and closed the door.

Then he turned upon him with an abrupt incisive question.

"Where is my wife?"

Percival was still smiling.

"You speak as though I were Lady Ilden's keeper."

It seemed to George as though he were trying to gain time to think out an attitude, and he interrupted him sharply.

"You know where she is."

"At the present moment, no. Neither Lady Ilden nor Catherine cared to accept my invitation to stay here, so I cannot pretend to be acquainted with their precise whereabouts."

A shade of bewilderment was creeping into the tragic determination of George's mood, but he still spoke with accusing hostility.

"You admit that you have asked my wife here. You shall tell me before you leave this room where you saw her."

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"With the greatest pleasure. It was in the churchyard less than an hour ago, when I imagine that she was hoping for your appearance, and feeling uneasy that you did not come."

"It is a lie," said George. "You are trying to deceive me."

For answer Percival shrugged his shoulders and rang the bell.

"Will you kindly tell his lordship where Lady Ilden is at the present moment?" he said to the footman who answered it.

The man answered without hesitation.

"Nobody seems to know for certain, sir. They are looking for her in the grounds and in the Church wood. They say that she caught sight of the man the reward is offered for, and went after him by herself. But I was told they hadn't found either of them, and Miss Hay is in a great state, thinking he may have done her an injury."

It was very far from being the answer that Percival had expected, and the complacent smile faded from his face. He forgot to look for the effect of the announcement on his companion. Despard was in Mordenhale, if this story was true, and he reviled his own luck in not having got abroad a day earlier. He was questioning the footman with every sign of anxiety. According to the vague rumour which had already reached the house, Despard had watched the funeral from the coppice. It was thought that he had been waiting there to shoot Lord Ilden.

Percival's wits came back at the suggestion. It was not likely that the desperado would allow Lady Ilden to overtake him. Till she had given him his sister's message there was more to be hoped for than feared from the presence of the two men in the same spot. He turned to his cousin.

"I did not know Despard was here. Lady Ilden will need our assistance. This is the shortest cut to the Church wood, where she was last seen. I will follow you in a moment when I have found a revolver. From what we have seen of Despard, he appears to be a desperate character."

But George was already questioning the footman excitedly, trying to discover the spot at which his wife had last been seen, and he had hurried through the conservatory and into the grounds before Percival's sentence was finished.

It was not till he was running across the lawn that a doubt entered his mind of the truth of this story he had heard, strange and incredible as it sounded. It came to him with a sudden deceiving clearness that the footman had been prepared with it. It was a trick intended only to get rid of him until Percival had obtained the start of him on his flight out of England.

He stopped undecidedly, and took out his watch. It wanted twenty-five minutes only to four when Percival's train left the station, and, with a sudden resolve, he turned back.

His cousin should not be lost sight of. He should come with him on his search, and he turned back, unconscious of the fact that he had been seen by Guy Despard and Florence, as he stepped out on the lawn.

To Florence his appearance had seemed in the light of a miracle. She was half afraid that it must only be an illusion of desire. How was it possible that George could be at the house alive and well and she not know it? Then the thought of his danger came to make his appearance seem more real. It was really her husband; but Despard would see him and kill him.

She had pursued the unkempt figure which she had recognised from the churchyard, catching a glimpse of him now and again among the trees, but failing to overtake him or make him turn his head in answer to her appeals. The

(Continued on next page.)

Swallowed 150 Coins.

A MAN'S ASTOUNDING FEAT.

An astounding case was reported recently in the *Lancet*. A poor Pathan who was crossing the frontier into Afghanistan with his hard-earned savings had an idea that he would be robbed. Without hesitation he proceeded to swallow the whole of his hoard, amounting to some 150 coins, and then, when the danger was passed, he coolly went to a military hospital and asked to be—and was—cut open so he could get his money again. An iron constitution like this is not likely to be undermined by indigestion or its allied ailments.

Few people, however, are blessed with such a constitution, and thousands suffer the agonies of indigestion who have not swallowed any indigestible substance. For all forms of this ailment Chas. Forde's bile beans are the world's specific. Describing how they cured her of acute dyspepsia Miss Annie Green, of Denton, Newhaven, said to a *Bognor Express* reporter. "So weak was my digestion that I dared not eat any solid food. For months on end I lived solely on milk puddings, until naturally I became ill and depressed. For three years I suffered from indigestion in its most acute form, and I never knew what it was to be without pain. I could not do any housework, and I began to despair of ever getting better. All I seemed to want was to be still and do nothing. I had severe pains in my chest and between the shoulders, accompanied by headache and a constant feeling of languor. My nerves were so shaken that I feared to go out after dusk. At night my sleep was disturbed by horrible nightmares. I took pills and tonics without relief, and one day I bought a box of bile beans. To my surprise a few doses brought relief. I persevered, and slowly but surely my condition improved. The distressing and painful symptoms I had so long endured gradually left me until I was eventually quite cured. My indigestion is now all that it should be, and my constitution is stronger by far." Bile beans for biliousness never fail to cure indigestion, headache, pains in the chest and shoulders, sleeplessness, biliousness, and all liver and kidney disorders. For constipation, piles, anæmia, and all female ailments, colds, rheumatism, influenza, they are unrivalled. One and three-halfpence or two and nine a box is the price at all chemists, or from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, London, E.C. There is nothing like them for restoring and keeping in order the digestive system.

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pursuit had led her into the grounds of the house and to the sequestered south lawn outside the drawing-room.

But here he was lost sight of. It seemed to her as if the figure had disappeared near the shrubbery away from the house, and she waited there seeking and calling distractedly to the hidden man that she would do nothing except ask him for her husband and tell him something that his sister had said for him before she died, and something also that his sister did not know. But there had been no answer, and she had waited and waited near the spot where she had seen him last, whilst Catherine and the others were searching the wood for her, fearing to leave it, lest she should lose him altogether, and with him all chance of knowing what had become of her husband.

And then from the window of the conservatory across the lawn she had seen the husband she already mourned as dead, appear clearly coming towards her hastily. She had watched him with a breathless wonder turn and retrace his steps, and then too late, as he re-entered the house, she had started forward calling to him. For as he disappeared she had seen another figure rise from the shrubbery close by the window through which George had just passed, and enter after him.

The next moment the report of a revolver ringing out into the silence of the garden seemed to put into one terrible expression all the sickening dread that had been in her heart.

She ran now only to see the verification of her fears. In the drawing-room a crowd had already collected, drawn from the next room by the report which had put an abrupt ending to the wrangling over the will that had still been going on there. They were all gathered in a close group round something in the centre of the room, all except the two or three who held Guy Despard a prisoner against the wall.

The murderer was making no effort at escape. His eyes held a satisfied smile which made his white face even more terrible. But Florence did not glance at him. She was pressing forward with eyes that strained themselves only to see the figure that lay extended on the floor in the centre of the room. Somebody in the centre of the group seemed to rise from his knees.

"He is quite dead," he said, "shot through the heart, I should say."

The words sounded the death-knell of her last hope.

The Foe Discovered.

The report which drew everybody into the drawing-room reached Grant Ilden in the midst of writing his last farewell to the girl he loved, but whom he felt that he could never ask to be his wife, and for a moment he sat undecided trying to explain it to himself.

Then the sound of hurrying feet downstairs took him down unwillingly, and he was ready to regret the impulse when in the hall he found himself face to face with Cathie who came hurrying in excitedly from the grounds. He had intended never to see her again. It would only make parting harder, and he was afraid of the temptation that might come to throw honour to the winds if she showed by a word or look that his going would pain her.

She turned to him instinctively, laying her hand on his arm.

"What has happened? There was a shot, and they tell me cousin George is here?"

"I know nothing," he said. "I was upstairs when I heard it. Everybody seems to be in the drawing-room."

They went there together, Cathie with her hand still on his arm in unconscious reliance, followed by some of the servants who had been accompanying Catherine in her vain search for Florence in the wood.

The little crowd had cleared now from the silent figure on the floor, and Cathie uttered a cry, seeing her worst fear realised.

"It is George. He has killed him."

But even as she spoke she saw that Lord Ilden was at the other side of the room holding his wife in his arms. At the same moment Grant's startled exclamation told her the truth.

"Good God! It is Percy."

"The man who deserved death at my hand." Guy Despard's voice, calm and emotionless, sounded clearly above the whispering around him and silenced it suddenly. "I have to ask your forgiveness, Lord Ilden," he went on in the same collected tone, "for the many attempts I have made to take your life. A just and all-seeing Providence guarded you and saved me from the sin of taking an innocent life in my ignorance. Now that I have found the villain who, by taking your name, tried to brand you with the shame of his ill-doing, He has no longer turned my aim or robbed me of my just vengeance."

To George himself the words were still only the meaningless rambling of a maniac. It was not till afterwards that his wife and Catherine together enabled him to understand how nearly he had been made a victim for the heartlessness of his cousin, who after all had deserved his suspicion by being his only actual foe.

And it was only in prison that Despard explained how his first suspicion of Ilden's innocence had been conceived during the cross-examination at Pennybrook Hall, and strengthened by Percival's kindness in setting him at liberty; how he had gone to Castledale to make inquiries, and found his suspicion confirmed.

For the present his explanation passed almost unheeded. George had thought only for the girl-wife, so unexpectedly given back to him, who trembled in his arms, scarcely able to believe yet that it was really he, alive and uninjured, who held her.

They were the first to leave the room, with its terrible tragedy, which only served to emphasise the danger through which George had passed.

As they sat in the pleasant little morning-room, where he had taken her, holding each other's hands and drinking deep of the love and thankfulness which each saw in the other's eyes, Florence was struck by a sudden thought.

"And now that you know that I did not help you a bit by marrying you," she said, "are you not sorry that you made me your wife?"

"Only for one reason," said George, and the lovely face looking into his grew serious.

"That I cannot marry you again, and ask everybody I know to rejoice with me in my good fortune."

It was afterwards, when the body of Percival Ilden, the foe in the family, whose tragic removal left Ilden at peace with his relatives and the world, had been carried to the principal bed-chamber of the house he had called his own for one short half-hour, that Sir Charles Barton took Grant aside.

"I am glad that you agree with me about your father's will," he said. "I do not wish to say anything against the dead, but there can be no doubt that your brother used undue influence to make him forget his other children. Now that you have the disposal of the property you will not forget that."

Grant was not in a mood to discuss the question; but it brought with it a sudden realisation, and he went up to his room to tear up a half-finished letter that need never be delivered now.

The End.

See Our Competitions On Pages 792 & 819.

(*Don't miss reading our new serial by Louis Tracy, entitled, "The Albert Gate Mystery," on page 793.*)

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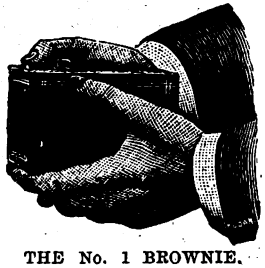

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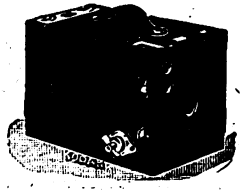

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For Love of Doris.

The True and the False.

Lieutenant Walter Manfield read the note with contracted brows and crushed it within his strong grasp. It was a reminder that a certain debt ought to have been paid a week previously.

"I must get Doris in the mind to marry me very soon!" he reflected, giving the last touches to his toilet. "Perhaps it is as well that the note came just now, as it may stimulate me to make a great effort, if I get the chance this afternoon. I daresay many a marriage proposal has been made and accepted on a Spring afternoon in the Park! These fellows will not wait much longer, and I can't go on as I am. It's either marriage or foreign service!"

He revolved the position in his mind as he strode along. Doris was the only daughter of Sir Arthur Manfield, Bart., whose fortune she would inherit almost entirely, for the old man idolised her and was not likely to divert any considerable portion of his wealth into other channels. The title would go to Lieutenant Manfield, with a small annuity, no doubt, but he would succeed to a barren title, for he could certainly not keep up the dignity unless he obtained the Baronet's daughter as well as his Baronetcy. He had tried Doris before, but the result had not been favourable.

"Still, I do not intend to be discouraged. The stake is too important a one to be given up lightly!" he soliloquised, as his eyes sought his cousin's form among the frequenters of the Park. "Ha, there she is!"

He was soon by her side on a seat. It was sufficiently warm to permit of a rest on a chair without taking cold, and it was fresh enough to produce roses on the fair cheeks. Most men would have been bewitched by her beauty, but Walter Manfield had other thoughts for the moment.

"Doris," he said tenderly, after having watched the loungers for three or four minutes, "let us walk to a more secluded spot. I have something to say to you, and I cannot endure to have the eyes of other men riveted on your beautiful face while I am speaking. And I must speak!"

The girl's face coloured over so slightly at the compliment, but she made no attempt to move.

"I am a little tired, Walter," she replied, with a touch of weariness in her tone. "I have been walking about and need a rest. We can stay here. Do you feel cold?"

"Not at all!" he responded quickly, trying to speak brightly in spite of his annoyance.

He could scarcely help guessing that the weariness was caused, not by walking, but by the thought that she would have to listen to something which she had already heard and did not wish to hear again; that this was so, was proved by the vivacious manner in which she spoke immediately afterwards.

"I call this a splendid day and there are so many people in the Park! There is old Lord Wallington—do you see him, Walter? We had a splendid time at his place last year, father and I, you know. And I really believe I saw——"

An impatient movement on the part of her companion stopped her.

"What is it?" she asked curiously.

Walter Manfield was looking steadfastly past his cousin at a man of martial figure. He shifted his gaze as soon as Doris spoke, but she had noted the direction of his eyes and followed it. A soldierly-looking man, with bronzed face, stern, with black eyes that were intently fixed on her, and a firm chin. The face was one that would attract attention anywhere, and it pleased Doris, but the man started as he became conscious that the girl he was so intently watching was also watching him, and he turned aside hurriedly.

"Who is that?" she inquired, turning to her cousin.

There was no need to explain further; Walter knew that she had seen that handsome face.

"It is Lord Marston," he replied, with a shade of vexation in his voice. "Rather rude of him! I cannot say that I like him, although he is a brother officer."

"Oh, he has just returned from India and succeeded to the title, has he not?" inquired Doris further. "Won the V.C. in a fight with some tribesmen, I think."

"Rather a rough sort of fellow," observed Walter, with a hard expression on his countenance. "He has a cruel sort of look. It's a great honour to win the V.C., but I always think that the courage required for that kind of deed denotes that the man is of that nature which crushes. You could see that in his set features, couldn't you, Doris?"

"I did not see anything of the kind!" declared Doris positively. "The face is stern and strong, but I fancy that he is kindly by nature. Something in the eye appeared to indicate that. Don't you think it is time we had a walk now?"

"I thought so several minutes since," retorted Walter.

But his cousin paid no heed to the retort; she was already on her feet and walking with her usual grace in the direction taken by Lord Marston. Lieutenant Manfield, walking by her side, endeavoured to guide her into a quiet place, but she feigned not to notice his evident intention. Marston, however, had now disappeared, and, as the spot was almost deserted, Walter placed a restraining hand on her arm and spoke.

"Doris, why are you so cruel to me? You know that I love you, that my one object in life is to have you for my wife, to cherish and watch over you! Will you not give me the answer for which I am waiting? It would crown my life with happiness, and it would, I am sure, be the consummation of your father's desires! Doris, Doris, tell me you love me!"

A shiver ran through the beautiful form, but Doris made no reply. The passionate speech of her companion did not strike her as out of place in the Park, but she felt an indefinable sentiment of aversion for the lieutenant at that moment; she had never felt any special affection for him, but now, with the figure of Lord Marston before her mind's eye, she actually disliked him.

"Doris, tell me you love me and will be mine!" whispered Walter. He had difficulty in restraining the exultation within him; he was conquering at last, for when a girl says nothing in response to a passionate declaration, it must be because she loves him in return and her maidenly timidity prevents her from acknowledging it.

"I cannot tell you that, because it is not true!" came the reply at length, cold and crushing. "I have told you before that I do not wish to be troubled by offers of marriage; I intend to devote myself to my father. Why should I trouble about marriage? I have all I want, and can enjoy life to the full!"

"I can wait!" urged Walter. "I will wait for years, if you will only set my heart at rest by saying that you will be mine!"

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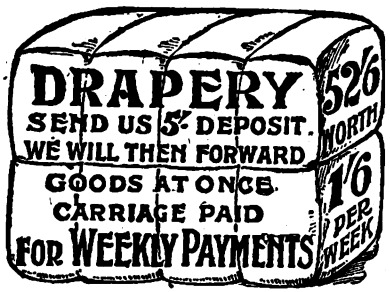

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"I will say nothing!" declared Doris. "Now," she added lightly, "let us go homewards and talk of something else. I must leave you on the way, however, for I have a call to make."

"As you do not wish me to accompany you, I will bow acquiescence," said Walter deferentially, although inwardly boiling. "It is a pity that you are not going straight home, as I promised your father to call on him this afternoon. I will tell him where I left you."

Five minutes later they parted, and it was two hours later when Doris reached home, having made other calls. She stepped into the hall with her usual gaiety, her sweet face lighted up by a radiant smile, but a chill struck her heart as she saw the old housekeeper coming towards her with a sad, almost frightened expression on her good-natured face.

"What—what is it?" she faltered. "Oh, what has happened, Mrs. Norton? My father——?"

"Yes, Miss Doris! He has had another attack, but don't be so upset!" stammered the kindly woman, not knowing what to say in order to break the terrible news gently. "It was so unexpected, but Mr. Walter was here, fortunately. It——"

"Let me go to him," cried Doris, the tears welling to the soft blue eyes. "He is in his bedroom?"

"Yes, Miss Doris, but you mustn't go there! Oh, don't! Stop her somebody! Good gracious, it will kill her!"

But Doris had dragged her arm from Mrs. Norton's grasp and was at the door of her father's bedroom. She rushed in and reached the bedside, where she stopped abruptly as one struck by a heavy blow, pressed her hands to her forehead and fell senseless into the arms of her cousin.

Doris never knew how the next week passed; she had a hazy recollection of sorrowful preparations and it was not till the day after she had seen the last of her beloved and indulgent father that she awoke to the fact that she was alone in the world, save for her cousin, now Sir Walter Manfield. And she was awakened to the fact in the most unpleasant manner.

The only will left by the late Baronet was one made several years previously, whereby he left all his property to his brother, Walter's father. All the deceased man's private drawers were searched, but no later will could be discovered. The family solicitor could throw no light on the matter; the late Sir Arthur, they said, had his own views about will-making and would not let his solicitors draw it up or know anything about it, and they did not even know the contents of the one produced.

"Then what is my position?" asked Doris, looking at her cousin in perplexity. They were alone; she had come to the study at his request.

"It is precisely for the purpose of explaining matters quietly that I have asked you to come here, Doris," said the new Baronet coldly. "This will means that all the money comes to me, as the only child of my father. You are left absolutely penniless."

"Penniless!" gasped Doris. "It cannot be! My father loved me too well! There must be another will somewhere!"

"I fear not!" said Walter unmoved. He seemed rather to enjoy the girl's distress. "It has long been my opinion that your father was determined to combine title and fortune. That being so, he saw no necessity to alter the old will. The matter is simple enough; you *must* marry me! It was your father's dying wish! I was with him, you remember, and he told me, in gasps, to look in a certain place for the will—which proved to be this one—and then said something which I could not catch distinctly, but which I judged to signify that it was necessary to maintain the title worthily and that you must marry me or——"

"Or what?" queried Doris, more calmly.

"My dear Doris, you know that your father thought a great deal of the title, and men have been known to sacrifice their children rather than——"

"It's wrong!" burst forth Doris hotly. "I'll never believe that my dear father would leave me penniless or force me into a marriage against my wish! There must be something wrong somewhere, but I am only a girl and I don't understand these matters."

"Then you refuse to marry me?" asked Sir Walter, trying to curb his anger. "Very well!" he added, almost savagely as she indicated her reply by a movement of her graceful head and a flash from the eyes that were generally so soft and melting. "Then you must take the consequences! Of course, I can make you an allowance, but I consider that I shall be acting contrary to the spirit of your father's will and desires if I give you more than a pittance. When you change your mind about marrying me, I shall be pleased to welcome you here again."

Doris understood him. She drew herself up proudly, gave him a withering look of scorn, and went back to her own room—first to weep and then to make preparations for leaving the home from which she was being driven.

"He thinks that I shall be unable to earn my living, or that I shall tire of being a servant and shall be ready to marry him for the sake of the wealth and position, but he is mistaken. It will be hard, but the Manfields possess courage!"

Almost to the last, Doris hoped that another will would be found or that the solicitors would force Sir Walter to halve the money with her, but neither event happened. There was an idea that the will might be contested, but the statements of the dying man, as given by Sir Walter, formed such strong evidence in favour of the will that the idea of contesting it was abandoned. Doris went forth into a none-too-pitiful world to earn her living as a kind of companion-housekeeper to a widow with a mansion in Sussex.

TURN TO PAGE 815 AND READ A REMARKABLE LETTER.

Mrs. Blackstone had been a widow only six months, but there was a conviction among her friends that she would not remain a widow longer than she could help; she was already receiving and giving parties, ostensibly on the ground that her own feelings must be subordinate to the obligations that devolved on a lady of property and the widow of a county magnate, but that excuse was too thin for most people. She had engaged Doris Manfield on the death of her husband, and found her very useful. In order to hide her identity, Doris had assumed as a surname, half of her own name and was known as Miss Field.

It was not long after Mrs. Blackstone began her parties that she discovered that Miss Field received more attention than she did herself; she had been so engrossed in herself and her own attractions that she had failed to observe that Miss Field's simple loveliness outshone her own more pronounced attractiveness. At first she smiled disdainfully at the comments she overheard concerning Miss Field's beauty, but afterwards she realised that her companion house-keeper might become a dangerous rival and she skilfully contrived that Miss Field should not appear when there were guests.

It was rather a cut for Doris to find that she was debarred from appearing in the drawing-room, as she had been wont to do for nearly six months, but she consoled herself with the reflection that it left her more leisure. She had given Mrs. Blackstone every satisfaction, and that lady had gleaned some information concerning Society manners, which she imagined that Miss Field had picked up in her previous experience, but now she found fault in various ways and Doris' life became less endurable. Mrs. Blackstone only knew that her companion had "come down in the world" through the death of her father; she had not the faintest notion that she had been a Society belle.

"I don't mind!" said Doris to herself, drying her eyes, as she sat in the solitude of her own room, "it will prevent me from meeting someone—being recognised by someone who knew me in the old days!"

It was the afternoon of a glorious day in late summer and Doris was seated at the window of her room, enjoying a few minutes leisure from the duties of attending to the wants of a

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household of people. Her window overlooked a part of the grounds, but she was not surveying the scene through the window, she was deep in thought, and staring into space. Gradually there came over her the feeling that someone was looking at her; she turned her eyes slowly from one point to another, but could see no one. Her range extended farther back, and there, at some distance, a man was standing, his face in her direction. Rather vexed at his seeming rudeness, she was about to leave the window when the similarity of this incident with that in the Park occurred to her mind and she gave a scrutinising glance at the figure. It was familiar—it was the same, she was certain!

Her heart beat faster, and a strange, delicious feeling of mingled joy and sadness took possession of her—for the sentiments of pain and pleasure are closely allied. She dared not confess to herself that the stern, strong face and the kindly eyes had haunted her since, and—yes, she had seen them before her when she had refused her cousin's offer of marriage! She had mentally compared both men and it had strengthened her decision not to marry Walter!

With a start Doris awoke from her musing and hurriedly left the window to go below and resume her duties. Was that really Lord Marston? Was he coming here? She had been informed that another gentleman was expected and had been given to understand that he was a man of importance, but no name had been mentioned. She was almost trembling, but another thought took possession of her and she grew strong and defiant.

"Even if he did see me in the house, he would not think of me; I am no longer a lady of position! This world is cruel to us women; why should not my father's title have come to me?"

She soon found that Lord Marston was indeed the guest expected by Mrs. Blackstone, whose brother was now staying with her. On the morrow Doris had another surprise; still another guest was to arrive in the afternoon, and none other than Sir Walter Manfield!

"Thank goodness!" murmured the girl. "I shall have a chance of keeping out of the way! And I didn't accept his offer of an allowance!"

The working under-housekeeper did most of the actual work, but Doris had to do the planning necessary in a large house, so she had not much time for reflection. Her own constitutional had to be taken in the early morning, when scarcely anyone was astir, and she thoroughly enjoyed the solitary walk. It was the second morning after Lord Marston's arrival that she was startled during her stroll through the garden to hear a voice exclaim: "At last!" and to find herself face to face with the man who had watched her from afar on two occasions.

"I have been trying to find you for six months!" he declared, without pretence at introduction. "I discovered that you were the daughter of Sir Arthur Manfield, but that was not till you had disappeared. Then I saw you at the window two days ago, but I have not seen you among the guests, although your cousin is here, but I would not ask for you. At last I have found you, Miss Manfield!"

He took her two hands in his and gazed ardently with his kindly, true eyes into hers. Both were unconscious of the strangeness of this meeting; it appeared to be the natural outcome of circumstances. Doris felt his gaze sink straight to her heart and her eyes dropped before it. All the world was forgotten in that delightful moment.

"Miss Manfield," he said tenderly, "have you no word for me?"

Then it all came back to her.

"I am not Miss Manfield here," she cried, trying to free herself, "I am only Miss Field one of the members of the domestic staff and not a guest, and my cousin does not know that I am here!"

"I do not understand," he replied in surprise. "No, no. I will not let you go till I know more! Tell me!"

He tightened his grasp and she ceased to struggle. It was pleasant to be held captive thus by a strong hand! In a few words she told him what had happened.

"But you must let me go!" she declared, making another effort to get free. "What would they think if they saw you here and what would my position be worth? I have my living to earn and I am nothing to you!"

"That is not true!" he asserted boldly. "You are everything to me! I have sought you for months and I would have done so for years. I love you, and I wish to take you from this place and give you a position worthy of you. Doris—I may call you Doris, may I not? You became dear to me as soon as I saw you; it is not a fleeting love, for it has grown stronger and stronger. I love you and you will be mine? Say 'yes,' Doris?"

"Oh, let me go!" she pleaded, her beautiful face suffused with blushes. "I must go or someone will see——"

A slight sound near them caused him to relax his hold and glance round. She took advantage of the loosening of his grasp to slip away and run into the house.

Lord Marston saw nobody, but the concluding portion of the interview had been witnessed by Sir Walter Manfield, whose surprise may be imagined. He quickly jumped to the conclusion that his cousin was engaged in the service of Mrs. Blackstone.

"She shall not have Lord Marston!" he vowed, referring to his cousin. "She won't marry me, so I'll see if I can force her into it! Now, how can I get her away from here quickly? H'm! I know! It strikes me that our worthy hostess is rather gone on Marston. Exactly!"

The result of his further meditations were revealed in an interview between Mrs. Blackstone and Miss Field later in the day.

"Miss Field," cried the lady of the house, as Doris entered in obedience to a peremptory summons. "I am amazed at what has just come to my ears! I should never have supposed that you would be seen flirting with one of my guests at an early hour! I need ask for no explanation; I will give you a month's salary in lieu of notice and I will ask you to leave this house at once!"

"Then somebody did see us!" thought poor Doris. Aloud she replied: "I was not flirting! I met Lord Marston by accident. He——"

She interrupted herself. Had she any right to say that he had sought her out? Was not that for him to say? Mrs. Blackstone laughed at the break.

"I am glad that you have the grace to feel ashamed at hinting that he persecuted you with his attentions, Miss Field!" she sneered. "And the fact that you mentioned a name, which *I* did not, shows that my information is correct! Silly girl! Do you suppose that he cares for *your* face—he, a man of the world! He is amusing himself with you! *I* could tell you something that would dispel that illusion!"

There was a significance in the last remark that was not lost on Doris, who had suspected that widow's weeds were not to the liking of Mrs. Blackstone. Doris flushed at the thought that Marston had been playing with her, but her pride enabled her to hold herself upright and confront Mrs. Blackstone defiantly.

"If I am not wanted, I can go!" she said proudly. "But neither you nor anyone else shall say that I was flirting!"

"Hoity-toity!" sneered Mrs. Blackstone again. She felt that she was coming out of the encounter second best. "Go and pack, and I will have the dogcart ready to take you to the station and a cheque signed."

Doris left her tormentor with a heart like lead. Marston had been playing with her! It was too cruel! Who had seen them? There was some consolation, however; he would not be able to continue his amusement and she would escape a meeting with her cousin.

When Sir Walter Manfield learnt that Miss Field was gone,

(*Concluded on page* 831.)

TURN TO PAGE 815 AND READ A REMARKABLE LETTER.

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he nearly uttered an impolite expression ; he had made up his mind to keep his eye on his cousin, but she had flown. He gave instructions to a firm of private detectives to seek her ; the cost of keeping her under supervision would be nothing to him out of a rent roll of £50,000 a year, and he was now bent on making her his wife.

Lord Marston was also surprised and felt unable to explain why she had disappeared without giving him notice. He had an uneasy suspicion that his indiscretion had been at the bottom of it, but to have asked his hostess would not have mended matters. He also resolved to seek her, and at the same time he entered upon another quest.

Doris contrived to elude the efforts of those who were looking for her ; with the aid of an old friend she secured an appointment in an office, and for nearly nine months, till summer was coming again, she went to and fro to work, lodging in a home provided by a friendly society for the help of young women in business. Here she learnt much about the life of the lower middle class, and she registered a vow that if she ever came into her own again, she would use the wealth for less selfish purposes than she would otherwise have done.

"But it will never come!" she sighed. "It is fifteen months since my dear father died and nothing has come to light. Still, I cannot believe that he meant it to be so!"

As she left the office one evening, a hand was placed on her shoulder ; she turned and saw Lord Marston. She shrank from him ; he had amused himself with her and she resented it.

"I do not wish to see you!" she cried, her breath coming in gasps.

He paled and his voice shook as he said ;

"Why? If I did you harm, it was my great love that led me unwittingly to do so! Come away with me and let us talk! We shall excite attention here!"

They walked away together, and he asked her what had happened.

"You were pretending love for me and yet you were going to marry Mrs. Blackstone—have married her, I suppose, by now!" she said vehemently. "I am a poor girl now, and may be trifled with!"

"Who said that? I have a right to know!" His voice was hoarse.

"She said—she hinted at it!" responded Doris slowly. She wondered if she had been deceived.

"It was a falsehood!" he maintained. "I perceived, after a day or two, that she was trying to lure me into marriage with her, and I left her mansion on a pretext. It was you, and only you, I wanted and still want! Doris, I have worked for you all these nine months. I have known of your whereabouts only a few days, for you have cleverly evaded us. But now I can bring you good news. The will has been found! I have it here!"

He had to place his arm round her quickly, for she swayed as if about to fall. She quickly recovered and asked him pleadingly not to jest.

"It is no jest!" he returned. "Let us go to the house which should be yours and I will explain. You can claim a right to it now."

He hailed a cab and they went to the old house. How dear it was to her!

"Where is Sir Walter?" she inquired.

"He is leaving the country!" said Lord Marston gravely. "Mrs. Norton, make your mistress comfortable and then stay here while I tell the story."

The old housekeeper was crying all the time with joy, as she took Doris' hat and gloves and seated her in a comfortable chair. Doris listened in amazement to Lord Marston's story.

"I set detectives to work to get at the truth of that will question, which you told me about that—er—that morning. I suspected some foul play on the part of your cousin. It took a long time to trap him, but it came at last. Mrs. Norton helped, and I am bound to admit that my men acted unlawfully in searching the house several times without a warrant and in the absence of the master. Well, we found the will, found it among a lot of old papers which Sir Walter had gathered together to destroy.

"When your father was dying, he told Walter where his lost will was, for he kept it in an old writing desk where it might have remained unseen for years, in a secret drawer. He was somewhat eccentric, was your father, I fear! Sir Walter found the will and saw it left everything to you. He was tempted ; he wanted the money and you, but especially the money. You would not marry him, so he conceived the idea of destroying the will, believing that under letters of administration the property would be divided between you. He took the will away and destroyed it, as he thought ; that is, he burnt the large envelope. But he forgot that he had taken the will out of the envelope. That was not wonderful, for the envelope was very stiff and the will was written on a single sheet of foolscap, and on one side of the paper only. He had taken some other papers out of the envelope containing the will, so, when the will was left out of the envelope, it got among those papers and your cousin didn't notice it.

"He crowded those papers into a drawer in the room usually reserved for him here, and that drawer was not searched, of course, in the hunt for the will—only your father's tables and belongings were searched. Afterwards, those papers and others were piled up ready to be burnt, and there the will was found. I took it upon myself to confront your cousin with the will, and I forced him to confess. He has left the country."

"How wicked of him!" cried Doris. "Yet I should not feel happy if I allowed him to remain without any means at all. I will see that he has an allowance."

"It is very good of you to be so generous to one who has done you a great wrong," said Lord Marston. "And those who have tried to help you?"

The tenderness of his manner induced Mrs. Norton to think that it was time she attended to her ordinary duties. Left alone with Doris, Lord Marston took her hand and knelt by her side, looking up into the eyes that had dropped before his glance.

"It was rather cruel to suspect me of playing with you and being in love with Mrs. Blackstone!" said he, with feigned reproachfulness. "Do you think I could be so deceitful?"

"No!" cried Doris penitently. "But I was so miserable!"

"Our marriage will be mentioned in the papers," said Lord Marston, half an hour later, "and, as Mrs. Blackstone will not know that Doris Manfield is an old acquaintance, we will send her a wedding card with your name like this : DORIS (MAN)FIELD. I should like to see her face when she reads that!"

G. L. Parkyn.

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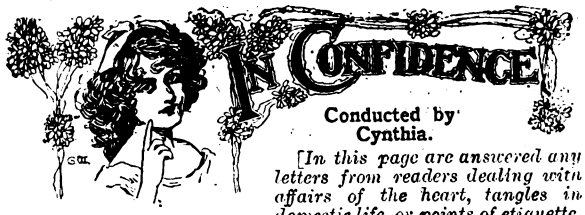

Conducted by Cynthia.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must in future be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* Short Stories.]

Christmas—The Lover's Season.

Among other pleasant things, Christmas is largely the time of lovers. Those who have fallen out find the festive season the best of all peacemakers, and a little present or even cards may once more bring young people together. Then the faint-hearted lover, too timid to say the right thing at ordinary times, often takes courage at Christmas and pops the halting question, which the girl, amidst the prevailing air of happiness, will feel she can no longer delay to answer in the affirmative. Hard-hearted fathers may by led by Christmas into taking kinder views of their children's love affairs, and even the stern mother may unbend where she would otherwise remain firm.

The Time for a Proposal.

So this is the time for both myself and my readers, is it not? All the questions I have before me to-day seem as though I need only mention "Christmas," and they will solve themselves. For instance, "Faint Heart" has been paying attention to Jessie for six months, and has been simply longing to propose. But every time he has braced himself up for the ordeal, the occasion has not been fitting. Either the girl has been worried or pre-occupied, or not in serious mood, so poor "Faint Heart" has been compelled to stave off his advances. He asks me if I can suggest the best opportunity for his resuming his quest.

* * * *

I will answer "Christmas." Choose one evening during the holiday season, when you are alone in a room where the light is lowered, and the mistletoe suggestively hanging near your heads, and the holly and other decorations are all around you; start a romantic conversation, and when you have got her attention, say the right word. With so difficult a girl, certainly some such measures are necessary for you, "Faint Heart," to get a hearing to your question.

The Time to Try Again.

Then there is the man who is doubtful as to whether a certain girl likes him, or even takes an interest in him. This is "A. C. G." (Bristol). Some eighteen months ago he used to see a great deal of her at friends' houses, and they got interested in each other. He did not go to the extent of saying he loved her, because her attitude was that of a friend only. Yet he always felt that he could love her, if only she gave some little hint that it was likely to be returned. Now they are very likely to meet again, as "A. C. G." has been invited for the first time for a year to the house of a mutual friend. How do I advise him to proceed?

* * * *

"A. C. G." has a splendid opportunity. Their long parting must have caused her some thought over the matter. She has either decided that she does or does not like him in a deeper sense than that of mere acquaintanceship. When they meet, she will show it by her appearance on seeing him. If she looks very pleased, then let "A. C. G." go to work energetically, for there is something in it. If her reception is merely cold, then he should proceed warily There is no surer guide to another's feelings towards oneself than the first greeting after a long separation.

And for a Reconciliation.

Then there is "Sophie," who still loves George, but owing to an absurd misunderstanding about six weeks ago they have not seen each other. From rumours she has heard, he is terribly unhappy about the affair, but too proud to start trying to make it up. He will not call on her, and when he meets her in the street he only bows and passes on. "Sophie" has found out since this quarrel that he is the only man she could ever love, yet she, too, does not think she ought to start the reconciliation task.

* * * *

Again I reply "Christmas." If you have not already done so, "Sophie," send him a present, with a card containing some nice little text or motto. If that does not bring him back I shall be very much surprised. I have known many a time when a Christmas card has put such little quarrels right, and don't see why it should not in your case.

An Awkward Plight.

"R. E." tells me a perplexing tale. Some time ago he met a widow of forty, who took rather a fancy to him. Thinking the affair rather a good joke, he cultivated her society. One evening, after they had been to a theatre, and had had a very good supper, he proposed to her, not at the time quite knowing what he was saying. He thought she would take it all as a joke. But next time they met, while he had almost forgotten the affair, she reminded him of his proposal, and said she had already made certain plans in preparation. What can "R. E." do? He does not really love the woman at all, and though she has some money he could not live on her means, and thinks such a marriage would be bad for his career.

* * * *

You have put your foot into it, "R. E." I think you had better tell the lady that you did not know what you were saying when you made that proposal. Ask her to release you from an engagement, pointing out that you could not enter into it under the circumstances in which you are. Possibly she may be well-disposed, and will release you. If, however, she threatens to take any legal steps, I should consult a solicitor. I do not think the law is sufficiently favourable to widow ladies who have drawn young men into their clutches, to be very encouraging to her to proceed against you for breach of promise. She is not in quite the same position as the young girl who has been deceived.

We Cannot Give Introductions.

I sympathise with you, "Virginia Creeper," but I am afraid I must say what Madge Morris said. With every wish in the world, I cannot undertake to introduce clients to each other. This is, you see, only a little paper, and not a Love Agency, and if I were to start introducing people to each other, how should I know where to draw the line? If I agreed in in one case, I could scarcely refuse in another, so I fear all I can do is just to express the hope that one so evidently clever and accomplished as yourself may soon meet a man worthy of your affections without having to employ an agent.

* * * *

As to an English girl wanting to go to Africa, on the off chance of finding a desirable husband, I think the idea is foolish. If a girl cannot find the right man at home, I doubt if she will find him there. From what girl friends out there tell me in letters, the men to be met with in this colony are not at all the sort likely to appeal to a pure-minded English girl. The hard rough work of mines may make money for men, but it does not often make for much else. Besides, "Virginia Creeper" would do well to remember that the proportion of Britons born against those of foreign origin is by no means large.

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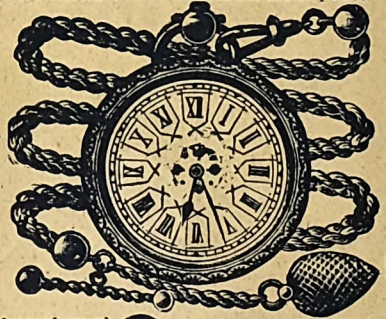

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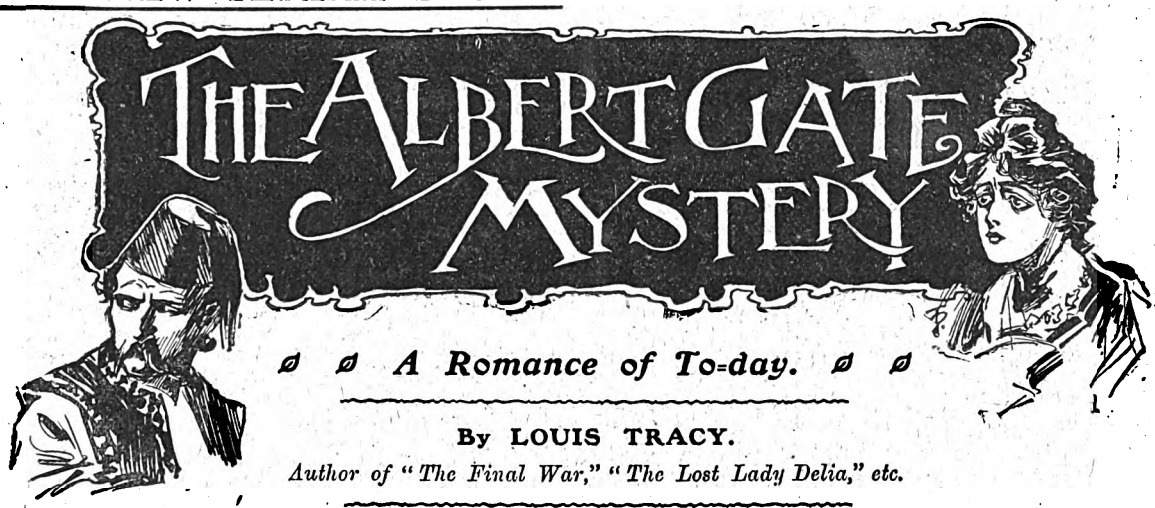

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE IN THE WEST END.

An affair of some magnitude—perhaps a remarkable crime—has taken place in an Albert Gate Mansion.

Owing to the reticence of the authorities, it is at present impossible to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the nature or extent of the incident, but it is quite certain that public interest will be much excited when details are forthcoming. All sorts of rumours attain credence in the locality, the murder of several prominent persons being not the least persistent of these. Without, however, giving currency to idle speculation, several authentic statements may be grouped into a connected form.

Four weeks ago a party of Turkish gentlemen of high rank in Constantinople, arrived in London and took up their abode in the house in question, after some structural alterations pointing at great security within and without, had been planned and executed.

Attending these Turkish gentlemen, or officials, was a numerous suite of Moslem guards and servants, whilst, immediately following their arrival, came from Amsterdam, some dozen noted experts in the diamond-cutting industry. These were lodged in a neighbouring private hotel, where they were extremely uncommunicative as to their business in London. They were employed during the day at the Albert Gate house. The presence in the mansion, both day and night, of a strong force of Metropolitan police, tended to excite local curiosity to an intense degree, but no clear conception of the business of the occupants was allowed to reach the public.

Whatever it was that took place, the full particulars were not only well-known to the authorities—the presence of the police hints even at Governmental sanction—but matters proceeded on normal lines until yesterday morning.

Then it became clear that a remarkable development must have occurred during the preceding night, as the whole of the Dutch workmen and the Turkish attendants were taken off in cabs by the police, not to Morton Street Police Station, but to Scotland Yard, this in itself being a most unusual course to adopt. They are unquestionably detained in custody, but they have not yet been charged before a magistrate.

The police, later in the day, carried off some of these men's personal belongings, from both hotel and mansion.

A sinister aspect was given to the foregoing mysterious proceedings by the presence at Albert Gate, early in the day, of two police surgeons, who were followed, about twelve o'clock, by Dr. Tennyson Coke, the greatest living authority on toxicology.

Dr. Coke and the other medical gentlemen subsequently refused to impart the slightest information as to the reasons that led the police to seek their services, and the Scotland Yard authorities are adamant in the matter.

The representative of a news agency was threatened with arrest for trespass when he endeavoured to gain admission to the Albert Gate house, and it is quite evident that the police are determined to prevent the facts from leaking out at present—if they can by any means accomplish their wishes.

Such is the statement which Mr. Brett, barrister and detective, reads in the morning paper.

He has hardly finished its perusal when the Earl of Fairholme is announced.

He states that he has called regarding the Albert Gate crime. He is engaged, as he explains, to Miss Talbot, the niece of the late Admiral Talbot, at present living with her uncle, General Sir Hubert Fitz-James.

The Sultan, he continues, recently sent over to England some priceless diamonds in the charge of a special envoy. The diamonds being of political importance, the British Foreign Office places the envoy under the care of Mr. Jack Talbot, Miss Talbot's brother. The envoy is lodged in the Albert Gate Mansion, under police surveillance.

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One morning the chief of the Turkish mission, his two secretaries, and a confidential servant are found murdered, the diamonds stolen and Mr. Jack Talbot vanished, though the police are on the premises at the time.

The Earl wants Brett to find Jack Talbot.

In conjunction with the Scotland Yard officials Brett commences operations. A search is first made of the Albert Gate Mansion, Mr. Winter the detective, and two inspectors assisting.

Brett discovers that the stones were conveyed out of the house by means of a hole made in the wire screen of one of the windows.

After making further inquiries he departs with Mr. Winter. They separate at the Carlton Hotel, where the supposed assassins resided, Mr. Winter promising to call at Brett's chambers after the inquest on the murdered men has been concluded.

A Startling Clue.

Once left to himself, Brett did not enter the hotel. Indeed, he hardly glanced at that palatial structure, having evidently dismissed it from his mind as being in no way connected with the tragedy he was investigating. He made it an invariable rule, in conducting inquiries of this nature, to adopt the French method of "reconstituting" the incidents of a crime, so far as such a course was possible, without the presence of the persons concerned. He reasoned that a very plausible explanation of the unexpected appearance of the three strangers in the Albert Gate mansion on Monday night had been given to Jack Talbot. This young gentleman, it might be taken for granted, had not been selected by the Foreign Office to carry to a successful issue such a delicate matter as that intrusted to him, without some good grounds for the faith in his qualities exhibited by his superiors.

Brett thought he could understand the brother's character from the favourable analysis of his sister, and it was quite reasonable, therefore, to believe that Talbot was a man not likely to be easily duped. The principals in this crime were evidently well aware of the trust reposed in the Assistant Under-Secretary, and they again would not underrate his intelligence. Hence, there was a good cause for Talbot to accept the explanations, whatever they were, given to him during the conclave in the dining-room; the effect of which, in Inspector Sharpe's words, had been to "puzzle" the young Englishman. Further, there must have been a very potent inducement held out, before Talbot would consent to drive off with a stranger at such a late hour, and when the cab was dismissed at the Carlton, the excuse given would certainly be quite feasible.

"It must surely be this," communed Brett. "The man explained that he was a stranger in London; that he lived quite close to the Carlton Hotel; and that he found it convenient not only for the purpose of giving directions that would be understood, but also for paying fares, to direct the drivers of hired vehicles to go there and not to his own exact address, which he had found, by experience, many of them did not recognise, whilst his knowledge of the language was not ample enough to enable him to describe the locality more precisely. It follows, then, in unerring sequence, that Talbot was conveyed to some place within a very short distance of the spot where I now stand."

He looked along Pall Mall, up the Haymarket, and through Cockspur Street, and he noted with some degree of curiosity that there were very few residential buildings in the neighbourhood. Clubs, theatres, big commercial establishments and insurance offices occupied the bulk of all the available space. It was a part of his theory that none of the other great hotels in this district could harbour the criminals, otherwise there would have been no excuse to stop the hansom outside the Carlton.

Brett did not take long to make up his mind once he had decided upon a definite course. He stood at the corner barely three minutes, and then walked off through Pall Mall and down the steps near the Duke of York's Column into the Horse Guards' Parade, intending to walk quietly to his Victoria Street flat. A call at the Foreign Office procured him an official authorisation from the Under-Secretary to inquire into the circumstances of Talbot's disappearance and a promise that the Home Office should be communicated with. He desired quietly to review the whole of the circumstances attending this strange mystery of modern life, and the result of his reflections quickly became apparent when he reached his residence, for, in the first instance, he dispatched a telegram, and then made several notes in his private diary.

The telegram, in due course, produced an elderly, pensioned police-inspector, a quiet, reserved man, whom the barrister had often employed on inquiries like that which he now confided to him. He explained, briefly, the circumstances attending Mr. Talbot's disappearance, and added:

"I want you to find out the names, and, if possible, the business—together with any other information that you may happen to come across—of every person who lives within a distance, roughly speaking, of two hundred yards from the Carlton Hotel. The Post Office Directory and your own observation will narrow down the inquiry considerably. It is the unrecorded balance of inhabitants with whom I am particularly anxious to become more definitely acquainted." The man saluted and withdrew.

Brett imagined that he would now be left in undisputed enjoyment of a few hours' rest before the Earl of Fairholme kept the appointment fixed for seven o'clock. But in this he was mistaken.

Smith brought in some tea, which was refreshing after his walk, for the engrossing nature of the morning's occupation had caused him to forget his lunch. A cigar and evening paper next claimed his attention, but he had barely settled down to the perusal of a garbled account, given in the news sheet, of events at Albert Gate, when his man again entered, announcing in mysterious tones the presence of Mr. Winter. Smith's attitude towards the myrmidons of Scotland Yard, who occasionally visited the barrister on business, was peculiar. He regarded them with suspicion, tempered by wholesome awe, and he now made known the arrival of the detective in such a manner as caused his master to laugh at him.

"Show him in, Smith," he said cheerily, "he has not come to arrest me this time."

Winter entered, and a glance at that gentleman's face quickly brought Brett to his feet.

"What is the matter?" he cried, when the door had closed behind the servant. "You have evidently received important news."

"I should think I have," replied the detective, dropping into a seat. "I was just writing a report in the Yard when I was sent for by the Chief, and you could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard the reason. I suppose I am acting rightly in coming at once to tell you, although in my flurry at the time I quite forgot to ask the Chief's permission, but as you are mixed up in the case at the request of the Foreign Office, I thought you ought to learn what had happened."

"Well, what is it?" cried Brett, impatient at the other's careful provisos.

"Simply this," said the detective. "Mr. Jack Talbot bolted from London on Tuesday in company with a lady. They crossed over from Dover to Calais by the midday boat and went direct to Paris. Mr. Talbot calmly booked rooms for himself and the girl in the Grand Hotel, had the nerve to write 'Mr. and Mrs. Talbot, 118 Ulster Gardens, London, W.' in the register, and both of them forthwith disappeared. But we will soon lay hands upon the gentleman, no fear. I have somehow suspected, Mr. Brett, that your notion of a political crime was all poppy-cock. It is a good, big, brazen-faced steal."

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The Letter.

"Is it?" said Brett, while his face glistened with excitement at the intelligence so suddenly conveyed to him. "Would you mind explaining to me how this precious information has reached you?"

"There is no use, sir, in fighting against facts," said the detective, with dogged insistence. "This time you have been dead wrong. Mr. Talbot was recognised at Calais by a Foreign Office messenger who was returning from France. Seeing him with a lady, and knowing that he was not married, the messenger, Captain Gaultier is his name, did not speak to him, especially as Mr. Talbot seemed rather to avoid recognition. Captain Gaultier thought nothing of the matter until this morning when he visited the Foreign Office on duty and heard something of what had happened. He then saw the Under-Secretary, the gentleman who sent the Earl to you, and told him what had happened.

"The Under-Secretary could hardly refuse to believe such a credible witness, so telegrams were dispatched to the Embassy in Paris and to the police at Dover. From Dover came back the information that exactly such a couple as had been described by Captain Gaultier had crossed over to France on Tuesday morning; and a few hours later a wire from Paris announced the discovery of the registered names at the Grand Hotel. The Paris telegram went on to say that the gentleman had told the manager his luggage was following from the Gare du Nord, and that his wife and himself were going out for half-an-hour, but would return in time to dress for dinner. When his traps arrived they were to be taken to his room. No luggage ever came, nor was either of the pair seen again, but we will lay hands upon them, never fear."

Brett took a hasty stride or two up and down his apartment.

"So you think," he burst forth at last, "that Mr. Talbot has not only taken part in some vulgar intrigue with a woman, but that he has also bolted with the Sultan's diamonds, sacrificing his whole career for a momentary impulse and imperilling his neck for the sake of a few gems which he cannot even convert into money?"

"Why not? It is not the first time in the history of the world that a man has made a fool of himself over a woman, or even committed murder in order to steal diamonds."

"Why, my dear Winter," said Brett more calmly, "do be reasonable. Where is the market for diamonds such as these are supposed to be? You know, even better than I do, that the slightest attempt to dispose of them at any figure remotely approaching their value will lead to the immediate detection and arrest of the person rash enough to make the attempt. "Don't you see, man," he continued, more vehemently, "that the Foreign Office and its messenger, its Under-Secretary, your Commissioner and the Embassy Officials in Paris have been completely and abjectly fooled—fooled too, in a particularly silly fashion by the needless registration of names at the hotel?"

"No, I do not see it. One cannot go against facts, but this time the evidence looks so strong that I shall be mightily mistaken if Mr. Talbot does not swing for his share in the matter. Anyhow, I have done my duty in letting you know what has happened, so I must be off."

"To arrest somebody, of course?" cried Brett, with an unpleasant laugh; but Mr. Winter was already hurrying down the stairs.

The momentary feeling of annoyance soon passed, to be succeeded by profound pity for the household at 118 Ulster Gardens. He well knew that once the police became convinced that a particular individual was responsible for the commission of a crime it required the eloquence of several counsel and the combined intelligence of a judge and jury at the Old Bailey to force them to change their opinion. Brett had never, to his knowledge, seen Talbot, yet he felt intuitively that this bright, alert and trustworthy young official was innocent of the slightest voluntary complicity in a crime which must shock London when its extent became known.

The testimony of the Foreign Office messenger was, of course, staggering at first sight, especially when it was backed up by the hurried investigations made at Dover and Paris. But there must be an explanation of Talbot's supposed journey, and, even assuming the most unfavourable view of his actions, why on earth should he so ostentatiously parade himself and his companion at the bureau of the Grand Hotel? There could be but one answer to this question. He acted in this manner in order to make certain that his presence in Paris should be known to the police the very hour they set about the task of tracing him. Then, who could the woman be? The last thing that a clever criminal, flying from outraged law, would dream of doing would be to encumber himself with a young and probably good-looking companion of the opposite sex.

The more Brett thought out the complexities of the affair, the more excited he became, and the longer and more rapid were his strides up and down the length of his spacious sitting-room. This was his only outward sign of agitation. When thinking deeply and fixedly upon any all-absorbing topic, he could not remain still. He felt obliged to cast away physical as well as mental restriction upon the play of his imagination, and he would at times pace backwards and forwards for unrecorded hours in the solitude of his apartments, finally awakening to a sense of his surroundings by reason of sheer exhaustion.

He was not destined to reach this ultimate stage on the present occasion. With a preliminary cough, for the discreet Smith was well versed in his master's peculiarities, that faithful servant announced the appearance of the Earl of Fairholme.

Brett looked at his watch, and was caught in the act by his visitor. "Yes, I know we fixed on seven o'clock," cried the impetuous young peer, "but I was simply dying to hear the result of your inquiries thus far, and I ventured to call an hour earlier."

The barrister explained that he sought to learn the time as a matter of mere curiosity. "Indeed," he added, "your appearance at this juncture is particularly welcome. I want to ask you many things concerning Mr. Talbot."

"Fire away," said Fairholme. "I'm no good at spinning a yarn, but I can answer questions like a prize boy in a Sunday school."

"Well, in the first instance, have you known him many years?"

"We were at school together at Harrow. Then I went into the Army whilst he had a University career. My trustees made me give up the Service when I succeeded to the estates, and about the same time Jack entered the Foreign Office. That is three years ago. We have seen each other constantly since, and, of course, when I became engaged to his sister our friendship became, if anything, stronger."

"Nothing could be more admirably expressed. Do you know anything about his private affairs?"

"Financially, do you mean?"

"Well, yes, to start with."

"He got a salary, I suppose, from Government, but he has a private income of some thousands a year."

"Then he is not likely to be embarrassed for money?"

"Most unlikely. He is a particularly steady chap—full of eagerness to follow a diplomatic career and that sort of thing. Why, he would sooner read a blue-book than the *Pink 'Un!*"

"If you were told that he had bolted with a nondescript young woman, what would you say?"

"Say!" vociferated Fairholme, springing up from the seat into which he had subsided, "I would tell the man who said so that he was a liar!"

"Exactly. Of course you would! Yet here are all kinds of people—Foreign Office officials, policemen, and hangers-on at the British Embassy

Don't Miss a Remarkable Competition on Page 853.

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in Paris ready to swear, perhaps to prove, if necessary, that Talbot and some smartly-dressed female went to Paris quite openly by the day service yesterday and even took steps to ostentatiously announce their arrival in the French capital."

For a few moments the two men faced each other in silent wonder, the one at the strangeness of the news he was imparting, the other at its seeming absurdity. Then Fairholme flung himself back into his chair.

"Look here, Mr. Brett," he said, after a moment's thought, "if Jack himself stood there and told me that what you have said is true I would hardly believe it." A note of agony came into his voice, as he added: "Do you know what this will mean to his sister? Why, man, it will kill her!"

"It will do nothing of the sort," cried Brett. "Surely you understand Miss Talbot better than to hold any such view? She will be the first to proclaim to the world what you and I believe, namely, that her brother is innocent, no matter how black appearances may be. I have no knowledge of him save what I have learnt within the last few hours, yet I stake my reputation on the certainty that he is in no way connected save by compulsion, with this terrible occurrence."

"It gives one renewed courage to hear you speak so confidently," said the Earl, his face lighting with enthusiasm as he looked eagerly at the other, whose earnestness had, for an instant, lifted the veil from his usually calm and impassive features, betraying the strength of character and masterful purpose that lay beneath the outward mask.

"Is there anything else I can tell you?" he added.

Brett reflected deeply before he replied:

"You are quite sure that his was a nature that could not stoop to a vulgar intrigue?" he said. "Remember that in this relation the finest natures are prone to err. From long experience, I have learnt to place such slips in quite another category than mere lapses of criminality."

"Of course any man who knows the world must appreciate your reasons fully," said the other, "but from what I know of Jack I am persuaded the thing is quite impossible. Even if it were otherwise he would never be so mad as to go off when he knew that something very unusual and important was about to occur with reference to a special mission for the successful conclusion of which he had been specially selected by the Foreign Office."

"Ah! there you touch on the strange happenings of coincidence. Circumstantial evidence convicts many offenders, but it has hanged many an innocent man before to-day. I could tell you a very remarkable case in point. Once——"

But Smith appeared to announce dinner, and Brett not only insisted that his new acquaintance should dine heartily, but also contrived to divert him from present anxieties by drawing upon the rich storehouse of his varied experiences.

The meal, therefore, passed pleasantly enough. Both men arranged to visit Sir Hubert Fitz-James that evening and settle upon a definite course of action which would receive the approval of the authorities. Armed with a mandate from the Foreign Office, Brett could enter upon his task without fear of interference from officialdom. Nothing further could be done that night, as the private inquiry agent could not possibly complete any portion of his house-to-house scrutiny in the vicinity of the Carlton until the following morning at the earliest.

They smoked and chatted quietly until 7.30 p.m., when Inspector Winter again put in an appearance, to announce that the coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of "Wilful murder by some two or more persons unknown."

The detective was somewhat quieter in manner now that the sensational turn of events in Paris had assimilated with the other remarkable features of the crime which engaged his professional attention. Moreover, the presence of a peer of the realm had a subduing influence upon him, and he had the good taste not to insist too strenuously that Lord Fairholme's prospective brother-in-law was not only an accessory to a foul murder, but also a fugitive thief.

One new fact had been established by the post-mortem examination of the victims. Considerable violence had been used to overcome the struggles of the servant, Hussein. His neck was almost dislocated, and there was a large bruise on his back which might have been caused by the knee of an assailant who had endeavoured to garrotte him.

They were discussing this discovery and its possible significance when Smith entered, bearing a lady's visiting-card, which he silently handed to his master.

Brett read the name inscribed thereon. He merely said: "Show the lady in," and then he turned to the Earl of Fairholme, electrifying the latter by the words: "Miss Edith Talbot is here."

An instant later Miss Talbot came into the room, and the three men knew that she brought momentous, perchance direful, intelligence. She was deathly pale. Her eyes were unnaturally brilliant, and her mouth was set with tense resolution.

"Mr. Brett," she said, after a single glance at her lover, "we have received a letter from my brother."

"A letter from Jack!" cried Fairholme.

"Well, I never did!" ejaculated Mr. Winter.

But Brett only said:

"Have you brought it with you, Miss Talbot?"

"Yes; it is here. My uncle, who was too ill to accompany me, thought you ought to see it at once," and she handed a torn envelope to him.

He glanced at the post-mark.

"It was posted in Paris last evening," he said, his cool utterance sending a thrill through the listeners. "Is the address written by him?" he added.

"Oh, yes. It is undoubtedly from Jack."

Here was a woman moulded on the same inscrutable lines as the man whom she faced. Seldom, indeed, would either of these betray the feelings which agitated them. Then he took out the folded letter. It contained but three lines, and was undated.

"My dear Uncle and Sister," it ran. "I am in a position of some difficulty, but am quite safe personally.—Ever yours, JACK."

Mr. Winter was the first to recover his equanimity. He could not control the accent of triumph in his voice as he cried:

"What do you think of it now, Mr. Brett?"

But the barrister ignored him, save for a glance which seemed to express philosophical doubt as to whether Mr. Winter's head contained brains or sawdust.

"You are quite positive that both letter and envelope are in your brother's handwriting?" he said.

"Absolutely positive."

"There can be no doubt about it," chimed in Fairholme, to whom, in response to a gesture, Brett had passed the documents.

"Then this letter simplifies matters considerably," said Brett.

Miss Talbot looked at him unflinchingly as she uttered the next question:

"Do you mean that it serves to clear my brother from any suspicion?"

"Most certainly."

"I thank you for your words from the bottom of my heart. Somehow, I knew you would say that. Will you please come and help to explain matters to my uncle? Harry, you will come too, will you not?"

The sweet, gentle voice, with its sad mingling of hope and despair, sounded so pathetic that the impetuous peer had some difficulty in restraining a wild impulse to then and there clasp her to his heart.

Even Mr. Winter was moved not to proclaim his disbelief.

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"I will see you in the morning, sir," he muttered.

Brett nodded, and the detective went out, saying to himself as he reached the street:

"Nerve! Of course he has nerve. It's in the family. Just look at that girl! Still, it did require some grit to sign his name in the hotel register and then calmly sit down to send off a letter telling his people not to worry about him. I've known a few rum cases in my time, but this one——"

The remainder of Mr. Winter's soliloquy was lost in the spasmodic excitement of boarding a passing omnibus, for this latest item of news must be conveyed to the Yard with all speed.

A Journey to Paris.

The sight of Talbot's letter seemed to fire Brett's imagination. He radiated electric energy. Both Lord Fairholme and Miss Talbot felt that in his presence all doubts vanished. They realised, without knowing why, that this man of power, this human dynamo, would quickly dispell the clouds which now rendered the outlook so forbidding. For the moment, oblivious of their presence, he began to pace the room in the unconscious concentration of his thoughts. Once he halted in front of the small bust of Edgar Allan Poe, whose pedestal still imprisoned the two cuttings of a newspaper which formed the barrister's first links with the tragedy. His ideas suddenly reverted to the paragraph describing the efforts of the Porte to obtain from the French Government the extradition of a fugitive relative of the Sultan. At that instant, too, a tiny clock on the mantelpiece chimed forth the hour of eight.

"That settles it," said Brett, aloud. "Smith," he vociferated.

And Smith appeared.

"Pack up sufficient belongings for a short trip on the Continent. Don't forget a rug and a great coat. Have the portmanteau on a cab at the door within three minutes.

"I am sorry, Miss Talbot," he continued, with his charming smile and a manner as free from perplexity as if he were announcing a formal visit to his grandmother, "I have just decided to go to Paris at once. The train leaves Victoria at 8.15. Lord Fairholme will take you home, and you will both, I am sure, be able to convince Sir Hubert that to yield too greatly to anxiety just now is to suffer needless pain.

"You are going to Paris, Mr. Brett!" cried Edith. "Why?"

"In obedience to an impulse. I always yield to impulses. They impress me as constituting Nature's telegraphs. I have a favourite theory that we all of us contain a neatly devised adaptation of Marconi's wireless system, and the time may come when the secret will be scientifically laid bare. Then, don't you see, it will be possible for a man in London to ring up a sympathetic soul in San Francisco. At present the code is not understood. It is not even properly named, so people are apt to distrust impulses."

He rattled on so pleasantly that Edith, bound up in the agony of her brother's disappearance and possible disgrace, could not help the expression of blank amazement at his levity which flitted across her mobile features.

Brett instantly became apologetic.

"Do forgive my apparent flippancy, Miss Talbot," he said. "I am really in earnest. I believe that a flying visit to Paris just now must unquestionably advance us an important stage in this inquiry. Let me explain exactly what I mean. Here is a letter from your brother, in handwriting which you and others best qualified to judge declare to be undeniably his. It also bears post-marks which would demonstrate to a court of law that it was posted in Paris last night and received here to-day. But it does not follow that it was written in Paris; it might have been written anywhere. Now, according to the police, there is an entry in the visitors' book at the Grand Hotel which appears to prove that your brother wrote his name therein on Tuesday night. If the handwriting in the Grand Hotel register corresponds beyond all doubt with that in this letter and envelope, then your brother must be in Paris. If it does not, he is not there. I am convinced that the latter hypothesis is correct, but to make doubly sure I will go and see with my own eyes. There now—I owed you an explanation and I have barely time to catch my train. Good-bye. I will wire you in the morning."

He placed the mysterious letter in his notebook, gave them a parting smile, and was gone.

He just managed to catch the 8.15, which started punctually, the sole remnant of railway virtue possessed by the South Eastern and Chatham line. A restful porter, quickened into active life by a half-crown tip, found him an empty seat in a first-class smoking carriage, and Brett's hasty glance round the compartment revealed that his travelling companions, to Dover, at any rate, were severely respectable Britons bound for the Riviera.

The harbour station at Dover wore its usual aspect of dejected misery. The hurrying passengers pushed and jostled each other in their frenzied efforts to board the steamer, as the average British tourist has a rooted belief that such pushing and jostling and banging of apoplectic portmanteaux against the legs of others are absolutely necessary if he would not be left behind.

With an experience born of many voyages, Brett quickly noted the direction of the wind and the vessel's bearings. A stiff breeze had brought up a moderate sea, and the barrister dumped down his bag, and flung himself into a chair on what a novice would regard as the weatherside of the chart house. He bore his discomfort for a few minutes, and was rewarded for his foresight by possessing the most sequestered nook on deck when the vessel turned her head seawards and began one of the shortest, but perhaps the most disagreeable, voyages in the world.

Having retained his seat long enough to establish a proprietary right therein, Brett rose and took a short tour round the ship. To distinguish anyone on deck was almost out of the question. The passengers were huddled up in indefinable shapes, and there was hardly light sufficient to effect a stumbling progress over the multitude of hand-baggage that seems to be indispensable to most travellers. So the barrister dived down the companion-way and cannoned against a burly individual who had propped himself against a bulkhead on the main deck saloon.

Something hard in the man's pocket gave Brett a sharp rap, and when they separated with mutual apologies, he laughed silently.

"Handcuffs!" he said. "Scotland Yard is always prepared for emergencies. I will wager a considerable sum that as soon as Winter reached headquarters his story about the letter caused a telegram to be dispatched to Dover. Here's a detective bound for Paris and prepared to manacle Talbot the moment he sees him. What a fearful and wonderful thing is the British police system. A crime, obviously clever in its conception and treatment, can be handled by a sharp policeman wearing regulation boots and armed with handcuffs. Really, I must have a drink."

(A further long instalment of this story appears next Tuesday.)

Result of the "Wedding" Post-card Competition.

The ten Gramophones offered in the above competition have been awarded to the following:

F. Nicholls, 219 Monton Road, Monton Green, nr. Manchester; Thos. Rose, 14 Alfred Road, Sutton, Surrey; Mrs. H. Lay, "Cader Idris," Dynevor Road, Grosvenor Wood, Tunbridge Wells; W. Taylor, 5 High Street, Falkirk; R. A. Slipper, Tivetshall Rectory, Norwich; J. Small, 5 Maple Street, Sheerness; G. F. Macro, 17 Summer Hill, St. Luke's Cork; Miss Jean Lawson, 2 Mentone Gardens, Edinburgh; Geo. Bailey, 281 Cann Hall Road, Leytonstone; W. J. Church, 41 Princes Street, Swansea.

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Love Problem No. 2.

A POINT OF VIEW.

Should a Girl Expect to Begin Married Life as Well as she has been Accustomed to in her own Home?

Mabel Travers stood at the gate and watched her lover's retreating figure until it disappeared round a bend in the road.

There was a discontented expression on her handsome face as she walked slowly back to the house and entered her mother's drawing-room.

Mrs. Travers looked up from her work as Mabel, with a little impatient sigh, threw herself into a chair.

"Well, dear?" she said brightly.

"Well?" returned Mabel in a tone that implied the contrary.

"Is anything the matter?" asked her mother. "You haven't quarrelled with Leslie, I suppose," she added, playfully.

"No—yes—at least, really I'm not quite sure," was the unexpected reply.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Travers.

"Mother, it's horrible to marry a poor man!"

Mrs. Travers looked at her daughter in pained surprise.

"My darling!" she said, reproachfully.

"Oh, I know I'm a wretch to say it, and—and perhaps I don't mean it—and yet—and yet——"

"Don't be afraid to tell me dear."

"Mother, Leslie and I have been having a business talk. That's what he called it. It was hateful!"

"But very necessary. Leslie was wise, darling."

"Yes—I suppose so. He said that, as we were to be married so soon now, it was only right that I should know exactly what he could offer me. Oh, mother, I had no idea that Leslie was so miserably poor!"

Mrs. Travers eyed her daughter with a troubled look.

"He has never made any secret of his income," she said.

"I know; but I didn't realise how little it was till he went into all the wretched details about rent, and servants, and house-keeping money, and all the rest of it. Oh, it all seemed so mean and sordid!"

And Mabel flung out her hands with a little gesture of impatience.

"I am very sorry to hear you say that, Mabel," said Mrs. Travers gravely. "It—it almost makes me afraid," she went on hesitatingly, "you ought never to have promised to marry Leslie. Perhaps you are not the right kind of wife for him, dear."

"Mother!"

Mrs. Travers rose from her chair and laid her hand lightly on the girl's dark head.

"Tell me, child," she said, "do you really and truly care for him?"

At this Mabel hid her face in her hands and burst into a flood of tears.

"I—I do love him," she sobbed, "but—but—oh, I don't know what is the matter with me!"

And the girl spoke truly. She knew that she loved Leslie, yet she was miserably conscious of disappointment and disillusionment. That day she had realised, for the first time, the prosaic meaning of a limited income. She had been accustomed to think vaguely of poverty as a rather romantic kind of thing that made love all the more delightful. Leslie's statement of hard facts had scattered all her pretty, sentimental notions to the winds. Her heart had sunk within her as she listened to her lover's description of their future home—a modest villa in the suburbs, with one maid to assist her in her household duties. She dreaded the prospect of all the petty economies they would be obliged to practise, and for a moment, though she hated herself for it the next, she had felt almost angry with Leslie because he was not a richer man. She loved Leslie, she told herself again and again, and yet—

Something of all this the girl contrived to sob out into her mother's sympathetic ear, and as Mrs. Travers listened, the look of perplexity on her face gradually changed to one of relief.

"I think I understand," she said.

"Oh, I'm a horrid, mercenary wretch!" cried Mabel.

"No, I don't think you're that," replied her mother, quietly, "only—well, want of money is never a pleasant thing. We all love wealth and prosperity, and it's perfectly natural that a woman should want her husband to be rich rather than poor. I don't blame you, dear, for regretting Leslie's poverty; only I thought you cared for him less because of it——"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Mabel eagerly. "Mother, you didn't think I meant that!"

"I was afraid, at first, when you spoke so bitterly," replied Mrs. Travers gently. "But I know now I was mistaken."

"Mother, I'm beginning to see things more clearly," said the girl, with a sudden brightening of her face. "I I hate poverty, but I love Leslie. If Leslie were a pauper I should groan horribly, but I shouldn't give him up!"

Mrs. Travers began to laugh.

"Well, it isn't as bad as that, is it?" she returned. "After all, Leslie has quite a respectable income. I admit it might be larger, but then, there's every prospect of its increasing as time goes on. Do you know, Mabel," Mrs. Travers continued, "you're just a little bit inclined to exaggerate your future husband's straightened circumstances?"

"Perhaps I am," admitted Mabel, "But then——"

"Oh, I know what is in your mind," interrupted her mother, "Poverty is always comparative, and so, because you have been accustomed to a big house with plenty of servants, a little house with only one servant must seem poor and mean to you."

Mabel looked puzzled.

"You see," said Mrs. Travers, "when you compare the big house with the little one, you're comparing your father's position with Leslie's, and the one, you know, is nearly thirty years older than the other."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mabel, with startling emphasis. "What a silly child I am!"

And Mrs. Travers smiled in a satisfied way. She knew that her daughter was cultivating the proper frame of mind.

"And I never thought of that! I actually expected Leslie to start where father left off! Why, *of course*, it's unreasonable. Mother, I remember now what you told me once—things have come to you gradually. You and father began just as Leslie and I are going to begin!"

"Well—no, not quite," returned Mrs. Travers.

"But you were almost as poor, weren't you?"

Mrs. Travers laughed gaily.

"If you *must* know, my dear," she said, "your father's salary when I married him was exactly half the income Leslie is making now."

"Mother," said Mabel, "you make me more and more ashamed of myself."

"Oh, but ours was a dangerous experiment. You see, our income was below the minimum of discretion."

"Anyhow, the experiment ended happily."

"As it happened."

Mrs. Travers blushed charmingly.

"It was a risk, though, which I shouldn't like you and Leslie to run."

"You think *I* don't love Leslie as much as you loved father, and no wonder, after the way I've behaved," said Mabel humbly. "Mother, I wish—I wish Leslie were as poor as father was, so that I might *show* you——"

The sentence was elliptical, but Mabel's mother understood.

Grete Hahn.

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ONE KISS IN THE DARK.

A Little Story of a Christmas Party.

"WHAT creatures they are—those women! A glance of an eye, a chance touch of a soft little hand, a little ear peering out beneath shining bands of brown hair, a twinkling mouse of a foot in its satin slipper, and it's all over with a man. But, if he just chance to get a kiss in the dark, he's lost for ever—carried off by enchantment!"

"Hush, Paul!" Here spoke the pretty little lady sitting opposite Mr. Dupré, at his own table, Mrs. Dupré by name; and a blush that made her prettier and more piquante than ever crimsoned her somewhat pale cheeks, and even the pearly tips of her ears that just showed themselves beneath "shining bands of brown hair."

"It is true, is it not?" persisted Mr. Dupré, laughing at the pretty threat of that upraised finger. "Here's Benson, almost bursting with curiosity to know how I, Paul Dupré, who six months ago, went to Paris a sworn bachelor and man about town, should have been entrapped, bewitched, inveigled by the arts of an enchantress, and transformed into a sober husband and master of a household. I must tell him, little one, and if you would not listen, you must run away."

With a defiant shake of the little hand, and a pout of the red lips that only made them more tempting, Mrs. Dupré rose from the table. As her husband held the door for her to pass, he said: "It will be told when thou hast prepared for the opera. Adorn thyself, *ma belle*, and in one little half hour return to us magnificent and ravishing."

A wealthy bachelor, of quiet habits, and, unlike the majority of his countrymen, shrinking from society, Paul was quite the last man I had expected to find, on my return from a half-year's sojourn in France, married and settled in a handsome but unostentatious household. Where had he found this beautiful, piquante, dark-haired girl of twenty, who presided so gracefully at his table, and was evidently very much in love with her shy, stately, middle-aged husband?

This was just what he was about to tell me. Paul, having been resident in England since his boyhood, spoke good idiomatic English, with only a slight accent, interspersing his conversation usually, however, with a good many French words. As these are far from being essential to the narrative, we will not record them.

"Tom Dalton—you know Tom?" he began, "spent a month with me a year ago last autumn, at my little place at the North, where I go always for the shooting, and in return he exacted from me a promise that I would go down with him to his father-in-law's house in the country for the Christmas holidays.

"'Only a family party,' said Tom, and I was foolish enough to take him in a literal sense. I knew Tom's wife, and had been introduced to that wonderful boy of his who transcends all other children, and I fancied I was to meet just them and the papa and mamma. I thought I might endure that for a few days, especially as Mrs. Tom Dalton is only a pretty statue, and never annoys one with small talk.

"Fancy my astonishment, then, when I found there was a large party—Mrs. Tom's married sister and husband, and her married brothers and their wives, and a host of babies and nurses, and—ah, what was worst of all!—a half score of girls. Think, my friend, of that! Paul Dupré, bachelor and woman-hater, trapped and imprisoned in a country house with at least ten girls with bewildering eyes, and curls, and voices, and hats and dresses, all levelled at me because I was the only single man of the party, excepting always a lad of sixteen who was brother or cousin to every one of them.

"We arrived on Christmas Eve, and as I took Mrs. Rutherford, Mrs. Tom's mamma, in to dinner, and talked politics with the Judge all the evening, I managed to survive the hours pretty well. Next day we all went to church, I still in attendance on Mrs. Rutherford, who was a little old lady, very grand and stately, like the picture of a *marquise* of the old school. Afterwards came a long walk with Tom, then dinner, and I had been twenty-four hours in the house without speaking to a girl. Of course, there had been a general introduction the previous evening, but, to have saved my life, I could not have told the name of one of them.

"But in the evening we must needs have games for the children, so they said, and blind man's buff among other things. I soon found that I was not able to escape my share of it.

"I give you my word I could not see a particle, except a glimpse straight downward of my chin and the side of my nose. I had been blindfolded carefully by the aid of two or three pairs of hands, and twirled three times round, and set off on my journey by a push.

"Here was a dreadful embarrassment—blind! yes, blinded with a handkerchief—and set to catch somebody—one of those girls, or a married sister or aunt, who could tell? And, oh! fearful task! to tell the name or kiss the one I should catch!

"That was the penalty of being introduced as Tom's friend. 'We are quite a family party,' they said; 'we will not make a stranger of Mr. Dupré.' And so I must be blindfolded and set to catch somebody; and if I could not guess who I had caught—and how could I where all were strangers?—I was to pay the forfeit of a kiss.

"I knew most of the names, but it was quite impossible

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that I should identify the individuals to whom they belonged, even with the help of my eyes. How then was I to do it by the touch alone? The kiss was already a foregone conclusion.

"I groped about with little alacrity, and of course caught nobody—just what I had intended. Garments rustled near, and even brushed me as their wearers leisurely moved out of my way. I had only to reach out my hands to catch some of these languid beauties, but I knew very well what must follow, and had not the courage for the feat. If only the children had not been sent to bed, I would have brought that fact to an end very soon! I did not see then how right it was that I had not been drawn into the game while they stayed.

"Presently they seemed to read my thoughts, or perhaps Tom gave them a hint, for they—those girls, I mean—began to inflict intolerable abuse upon me. They pinched my arms, they pulled my hair and my coat, and then—hoydens that they were—ran away tittering and jeering.

"'It was quite time to end this,' I said, for I was aroused to retaliation. The catching, and—and what was to follow, should soon be over. Suddenly I began to dart about, and fluttering and musical little screams increased. There was frantic haste, and sundry crashes and collisions that convinced me that the 'play' had become extremely earnest.

"Looking straight downward I could sometimes catch a glance of a stooping figure gliding past me; but presently I lost the power of seeing even so little. I was groping in a narrow passage, for my hands touched the wall on either side, and probably a dark one. Before me I could hear a soft rustle of garments, and a low, hurried breathing. Probably one of my tormentors was hidden there and could not make her escape. If so, the game was nearly ended.

"Pressing forward, as I expected, my hands soon came in contact with the head of a crouching figure drawn closely into a corner.

"I felt smooth strands of hair, a little wreath or bunch of ribbons, a warm, satin-like cheek. The hair might have belonged to any of the younger ladies, with the exception of two or three who wore ringlets, and their cheeks were all round and smooth with health. Of course I could not guess who this was.

"If she would only speak! I knew the voice of Tom's wife, and it might be she. But not a sound issued from her lips; the figure trembled violently and breathed hurriedly, but gave no other sign of life.

"'Rise up, mademoiselle,' I said at last. 'Tell me your name, and then I shall announce it and go away at once.' I thought I had hit on a brilliant expedient, and the lady, rising, seemed about to give me the required information, when, with a great shout, three or four persons entered the other end of the passage.

"'Mr. Dupré has caught someone!' I heard them say. 'Who is it? Tell us whom you have caught!'

"'Yes, Paul,' shouted Tom; 'give us the name, or honestly pay the forfeit.'

"'Speak,' I whispered to the lady whose arm I held; but, trembling, she remained silent.

"'Indeed, I cannot tell,' I said, and then another great shout rose from rosy lips. I was angry and desperate. I drew the slight figure towards me, I tore the handkerchief from my face, and, bending down, I pressed a resounding kiss upon a pair of lips that pouted with annoyance as their owner struggled to release herself.

"There was another shout, but I was scarcely conscious of it. In my own country I have dark, rare wines which seem to send an electric thrill, as of new and abundant life, through my veins. In effect like this, but a thousand times more intoxicating, was the draught I had just tasted. Elate, triumphant, yet half giddy under the new exhilaration I experienced, I advanced towards the group that thronged the entrance to the drawing-room. I had drawn within my arm the hand of the lady I had caught, and—but no matter. I was recalled to myself by the sound of angry voices, and by feeling the little figure trembling and swaying by my side.

"'Go to your room at once, Miss Charter!' old Mrs. Rutherford was saying, while angry exclamations burst from the lips of the younger ladies—'Astonishing assurance!' 'Such impertinence!' 'Prowling in the passage on purpose!' all directed apparently to the little creature I was supporting.

"Before I could find words to express my surprise at a scene I was far from comprehending, Miss Charter had quietly withdrawn from my arm. Facing the group that frowned upon her, she spoke with spirit, though with a piteous tremor in her sweet, clear voice.

"'Indeed, Mrs. Rutherford, I assure you I had no intention of committing an impertinence. I came down to speak to Mrs. Charles Rutherford about Bella, who is very restless and feverish. While I was endeavouring to attract Mrs. Rutherford's attention this gentleman came out. I moved back, but he followed me up the passage and I could not escape. For what has passed further I am not responsible.'

"'Indeed, madam, she is not,' I found voice to say. 'I caught her fairly, and was, of course, unable to name a lady I had never seen. If, however, in my ignorance of your customs I have done wrong, I trust to be pardoned by all present, especially by this lady, who, it seems to me, has been the greatest sufferer.'

"'No pardon is required by you, Mr. Dupré,' replied Mrs. Rutherford coldly; and she added, 'Return to your room, Miss Charter; and if you want anything in future, please ring or send Miss Bella's nurse.'

"Miss Charter bent her head and turned away in silence. I gave her my hand to lead her to the stairs, but she declined it with thanks, and I heard a low sob as she went wearily up the long flight.

"'I beg you will forget the impertinence of that girl!' said Mrs. Dalton, as we all returned to the drawing-room. 'She is my sister's nursery governess, and though generally well-behaved, has probably enough of the curiosity of her class to lead her to intrude here. I hope Sarah will dismiss her at once. Nothing is more destructive to household quiet than the slightest insubordination of dependents. Miss Charter must be taught her place.'

"'But what, then, is her place, madam?' I asked, I fear not very politely, for, with the intoxication of that kiss lingering about me, these remarks jarred painfully upon my feelings. 'She surely has the manners and refinement of a lady?'

"'No one could expect a lady to make a companion of her nursery-governess, or introduce her as an equal to her friends,' said Mrs. Dalton; and her mother, who had been listening, explained further:

"'Miss Charter has been well and carefully educated. Her father once held a high position, and her mother was a well-bred and pleasing woman. Their daughter—an orphan and poor, sinks to a lower sphere. It is an undoubted impertinence in her to venture beyond its confines.'

"I listened with deference to the ladies, but I was not satisfied. How could I be when all my memories of Miss Charter were so fresh; her gentle young beauty, her spirited, yet ladylike manners, her quiet dignity, and, above all, the kiss that yet thrilled like fire along my veins? I felt the spirit of a champion aroused within me. I had brought this trouble upon the unoffending girl—was I not bound to protect her? Yet I had the tact to see that it were better for me not to plead her cause at present.

"There were no more games after this, the excitement of this scene had destroyed all desire for them. Mrs. Charles Rutherford withdrew to look after her sick child—possibly to scold Miss Charter; the ladies drew into groups, whispering of what had occurred; and the gentlemen went away to slippers and cigars.

"All but myself. I could not pollute the lips that had touched Miss Charter's with the

Turn at once to page 853 and read a remarkable letter.

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vile weed. I went to my bed in a delirium, half induced by the ecstasy of my new sensation, half by impotent anger against those I named my persecutors.

"These thoughts pursued me through my dreams, and were with me when I awoke. From my window, in the early morning, I saw Miss Charter with the children in the grounds, and I hastened to join her that I might seek forgiveness for the unintentional wrong I had done her. The presence of the children removed all impropriety from the act, and I thought I should feel more in charity with myself if I assured this young lady that, let her position here be what it would, I felt for her as much as for the highest in the land.

"When I returned to the house half an hour later, I had made a discovery, and that was that I should never be quite happy until I had the right to repeat the kiss I had stolen as often as I chose, and, further, that that was likely to be very often indeed. If Miss Charter had looked very pretty, delicate and refined under the advantageous circumstances attending our first meeting, all these attractions were enhanced by the clear morning air, her own modest self-respect, and the charming embarrassment which the sight of me caused her. I had come down to The Elms priding myself on my confirmed bachelorhood, and contrasting my free, 'unhoused condition' most favourably with that of my friend Tom, who was the slave of the multitudinous fancies of a capricious wife. But all was changed! That kiss had wrought the miracle of revitalising the heart which I thought was dead to all tender emotions. I was as desperately in love—I at thirty-five—as any boy of twenty with his earliest flame.

"I did not see Miss Charter many times at The Elms. My respect for her, her own sense of propriety, alike forbade clandestine meetings. Sometimes she came into the drawing-room to play for the children's dances, when I always showed her marked deference. Once or twice I encountered her abroad. I learnt she had been discharged and was about to go to London. I obtained her address there and pleased myself with the thought of meeting her.

"I was disappointed in this. Only one night she spent with the relative to whose house I had been directed, and then went away to a distant situation which Mrs. Rutherford had procured for her. For a whole year (do you not recall the restlessness that used to excite your mirth?) I wandered about, my soul disquieted with an intense longing to see her once more, to snatch her from a life of toil, to claim her as mine, to make the kiss which was such a delicious memory, a sweet, ever-renewed reality.

"At last, when I had come almost to despair of the realisation of this intense desire, I suddenly and all unexpectedly encountered her one day in a public street. She had returned and was staying with the relation of whom I knew. She met me with a blush and a smile, and a timid pressure of the hand that I interpreted as favourable to my hopes. And she did not deny me the pleasure of meeting her at her house.

"There is not much more to tell. I have told you about the kiss, and its consequences were for me the dearest, sweetest, brightest of pretty little wives; for her a home where she is cherished and beloved, and where I believe my efforts to make her happy have been entirely successful.

"Her only fault consists in the bit of sly malice with which she sometimes insinuates how different the consequences must have been had I chanced to catch and kiss somebody else on that memorable occasion—for instance, one of those black-eyed or flaxen-haired girls, who are now the very dear friends of Mrs. Dupré, once the poor Miss Charter."

L. Parkyn.

LOOK OUT FOR NEXT WEEK'S COVER.

IT IS THE ERSKINE TARTAN.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

December 23.—Those whose birthdays fall here, will have a good year for business and general affairs. Avoid speculations and guard against fires; insure against accident.

Girls will need some care in love matters.

The day is good for doing business with electricians, cloth merchants, and professional people.

A child born to-day will be cheerful, generous, but unsettled and fond of travel.

December 24.—The health will need care during the next year; more than usual opposition in business. Guard against fire, cuts, and falls.

Girls will receive attentions, but little will come of them, chiefly flirtations.

The day is not good, and important matters should be laid aside. Beware of mishap in the evening.

A child born here will be rash and headstrong; will have an unsettled life; should keep in the employ of others. An unhappy marriage if a girl.

December 25.—A Merry Christmas to all, is the wish of "Asturel."

Those celebrating their birthdays to-day will find the next year one of anxiety and worry. Business will require much attention and home affairs will not go smoothly.

Girls born near 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. will experience trouble and disappointment in their love affairs.

A child born this day will be improvident and will do best in the employ of others.

December 26.—A quiet year; have a care with letters and agreements. Better for elderly people, farmers, and landlords.

Young girls will have crosses and obstacles, and must not place much confidence in the opposite sex.

A child born to-day will be thoughtful, ambitious, and persevering. Not fortunate in business.

December 27.—The health will need some attention over the next twelve months; business and general affairs are favoured and some progress will be made.

Girls will find love matters interesting, if engaged they marry.

The day is good for most things; do business with hardware dealers, drapers, literary people, and visit doctors.

A child born here will be active, cheerful, and painstaking. Will have a fortunate life and should succeed.

December 28.—A year of activity and travel; favourable changes can be made. Business and general affairs go well.

Girls should be cautions and prudent in their love affairs; some attentions from married men.

A child born to-day will be unsettled and travel much, but the journeys will generally be fortunate.

December 29.—An unfavourable birthday. Great care will be needed in business, or it will go wrong. Avoid law and quarrels.

Girls will find friction and discord in their love affairs.

The day is one on which to keep quiet; beware of mishap and quarrels. Guard against loss.

A child born here will be best in the employ of others. The mind will be rash, and stubborn.

Asturel.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who visits Cairo.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

WHILE staying at the Continental Hotel at Cairo, I lose my fortune by the failure of Hammond's Bank. I undertake, therefore, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, the daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire, and to bring about her marriage with the son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres, and his mother the Duchess.

The Duchess and I agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; we do everything, therefore, to bring this about.

One evening, under the guidance of a fine-looking Bedouin, we all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing, when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Instantly all is confusion. The guide snatches Belinda and hurries us away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, and suddenly, with a cry of "Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all, he's David Carr!" throws herself into his arms.

The dragoman is dismissed, and on our return to the Hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes me to task for the occurrence. I retort that not long ago I saw the Duchess' own daughter, Honoria, in the arms of a real Egpytian!

The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and, after storming at her, slaps her face. Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room.

Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, I discover that Belinda has only just prevented Honoria poisoning herself to escape marriage with her cousin, Mark Striven. Later in the day we go to the Pyramids.

Lord Reginald Davenant, a new arrival at Cairo, accompanying the party, at one time in love with Mrs. Murchison-Lee, now transfers his affections to Belinda. The slighted Mrs. Lee, or "Midge," as she is called, is furious, and threatens violence to Belinda.

I checkmate Midge, however, by abstracting the morphia (to which she is a slave), with the hypodermic syringe, from her dressing-case.

That same evening I suddenly discover the Duke of Eastacres and a new-comer, Stanley Forbes, in the midst of a violent altercation. Fearing that a duel may ensue, I rush between the two men.

Sending Eastacres off on some errand, I tax Stanley Forbes with quarrelling with the Duke in regard to a girl named Sheila Kenwyn. She had disappeared some time back; it is thought the Duke is responsible for her disappearance. An open scandal about Eastacres would interfere with my matrimonial projects.

"Forego a quarrel with the Duke," I implore Stanley, "and I will extract Sheila's address from him."

Stanley consents. With some diplomacy I entrap the Duke into telling me where the girl is.

Next morning I start Belinda and the Duke off to Cairo, and tackle Stanley Forbes successfully in their absence. Later, I return to the Continental and find my labours rewarded. I behold Belinda clasped in the Duke's arms!

On offering my congratulations, however, Belinda repudiates all notion of an engagement with the Duke. She explains that her attitude is one merely of liking for him, and that when in token of friendship she gave her hand to her lover, she found herself embraced.

"I made Miss North a proposal of marriage," says the Duke. "She did not answer me in words, but put her hand in mine. Am I to be blamed if I misread her meaning?"

I assure the Duke that his conduct has been quite natural, entirely blameless, and represent to Belinda that, after her behaviour, marriage with the Duke is inevitable, as I was not the only one who saw the Duke's embrace, and that unless her engagement to Eastacres is announced she will be looked upon as an immodest girl.

Belinda still refuses to regard herself as engaged, however, and as a last resource I threaten to send her back to her father. She consents under great pressure to an engagement in name only for a month. At the end of that time, when we shall be leaving Cairo, I promise to announce that the engagement has been broken off.

Close on her consent the door opens, David Carr enters, just sixty seconds late.

My influence had obtained an appointment for him at St. Petersburg, and he had come to say good-bye. The Duke lays his hand upon Belinda's arm, and remarks calmly, "We are just engaged."

"It is a lie!" cries David, and appeals to Belinda.

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Then, for the first and only time while she is with me, Belinda faints. I turn the two men out of the room and get Belinda to bed. She asks for Honoria. That ungrateful girl takes a base advantage of my kindness and brings David Carr a message from my *protegée*.

"Belinda says she won't be married for a year, at least," announces Honoria. "Will you please come to her wedding?"

David, greatly comforted at the words, departs.

Our stay in Cairo now draws to a close, the Khedive's ball ending the season. I determine on that occasion to make a public announcement of Belinda's engagement to the Duke.

One night I discover that Belinda's pearls are missing. I go to the Duchess to consult her as to the best means of recovering them. Looking through the door of her room, I discover her Grace in the middle of the room, one hand raised in a threatening attitude towards her daughter, in the other lay Belinda's pearls! The Duchess explains to Honoria that Belinda gave her the pearls to take care of. Honoria retires to her own room and the Duchess proceeds to empty the contents of a trunk upon the floor. It contains all sorts of knick-knacks; amongst them I recognise a valuable fan of mine. The truth suddenly dawns on me. The Duchess is a kleptomaniac! I obtain the pearls from her Grace, on the plea that Belinda told me she was keeping them for her, but she will not give up my fan.

On the night of the Khedive's ball, Belinda publicly declares she is not engaged to Eastacres. The latter follows her to a side room to remonstrate. I am about to join them, when the Khedive enters into conversation with me.

From where I stand I see that Eastacres and Belinda are quarrelling. Suddenly through a door on the Duke's right a veiled woman appears. At sight of Eastacres she screams.

It is Honoria, who is about to elope with El Hamed, her Egyptian lover.

The Duke darts forward to stop her, but, with Belinda's help, she evades him, and makes for the river, by which means El Hamed had arranged for her to get away from Cairo, he meeting her some few miles lower down.

Late though it is, the Duke insists that I shall accompany him to search for his sister. We arrive at the quay, and suddenly see Honoria on board a small launch which is just steaming away.

Our cries to the captain to stop, and Honoria's frantic appeals to him to go forward, convince the captain that something is wrong, and he returns, and finally hands his charge over to Eastacres.

I now leave Cairo with Belinda for Paris, on a visit to my old friend the Marquise D'Arteuil and her nephew the Comte de Sonnaz. Determining to drop Eastacres, I decide that the Comte shall be the next on the list of Belinda's suitors. Arrived at Paris, however, I am dismayed to find that Eastacres is already there to welcome me.

This Week's Instalment.

BELINDA BECOMES THE RAGE IN PARIS.

To find that Eastacres was a guest of the Marquise caused me almost as much annoyance as Belinda. His presence, I thought, was likely to interfere with my plans in regard to Belinda and the Comte; rejected himself, he would not tolerate a more favoured suitor.

Belinda showed her displeasure more plainly than she should have done. She accorded the Duke the chilliest of greetings, and made a marked difference in her treatment of him and the Comte.

The Marquise d'Auteuil explained that Eastacres had called on her an hour or two before we arrived.

"He found himself desolated to leave me," she said, with an expressive gesture, "What could I do but ask him to remain?"

"What, indeed?" I murmured, marvelling that at her age, and with her experience she should be so inordinately vain as to swallow the Duke's outrageous flattery.

The Hotel D'Auteuil stands in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and is one of the most splendid of the many mansions of fashionable Paris. It is one of those grand foreign houses at which all great people meet. A sort of neutral ground in which political differences are obliterated, and, all that is well-born or well-dowered with money or brains received.

The house is grand, gorgeous, brilliant, adorned in the taste of the second Empire, to which it belonged; glittering and overladen, superb, yet at times too showy. The vestibule of marble, lit by gilded gasaliers, is filled with masses of camelias and azaleas, beautiful and scentless; the wide staircase is bright with scarlet carpetting, into which the feet sink as though treading upon velvet, mirrors line the walls, and heavy odours of burnt pastilles fill the heated air.

Belinda achieved as great a success in critical Paris as she had done in cosmopolitan Cairo. Her beauty, her girlishness, her curious disregard and contempt for the remarks of Society, charmed the Parisians, always on the *qui vive* for something new and startling.

The Comte, as I had foreseen, fell desperately in love, while Belinda showed a decided liking for the young Frenchman.

I sounded her on the question of marriage with him, but, as usual, she was disappointing.

"I like him," she said frankly, "but as a friend, no more. I told him so the first evening that we came here. You see," she added, noting my look of dismay and astonishment, "I did not want him to make a mistake like the Duke. I said I should be pleased to have him for a friend, but I explained that David Carr was the only man I wished to marry. The Comte seemed a little surprised at first, but after he understood why I had told him, and was very nice. So you see," Belinda flashed a smile, "there's no reason why I shouldn't talk and laugh, and ride, and drive with him. He won't misunderstand *now*."

Belinda had decidedly used her experience with Eastacres to some purpose! I felt she had outwitted me, and when that evening I spoke to the Comte himself, he gave me little consolation.

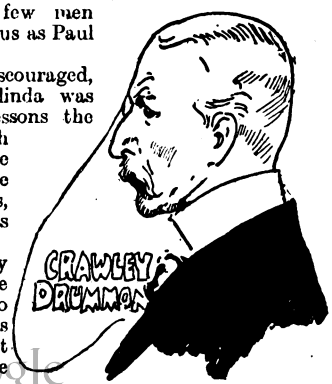
"She is beautiful!" he exclaimed, "she is *chic*, *ravissante*, adorable. But she is not for me. She has said so herself. We are *bon camarades*, Lady Peggy, no more."

"You are easily discouraged," I said, smiling, "since when were you faint-hearted? A rival should fire your enthusiasm, not damp it."

De Sonnaz paused; then, with a half laugh, and a faint flush, bent towards me.

"She has told me of her lover," he said softly, "and, as she spoke, her eyes—those beautiful blue eyes—looked me through and through. They appealed to me, asking me to help her, to act with honour to her, and that most fortunate of men, M. Carr. Had she delayed, had she waited but another day, it would have been too late. I could not have given her my friendship, I could only have offered her my heart. But, as it is"—he looked me straight in the eyes—"I am her friend," he added softly, "and—M. Carr's."

What he said gave me cause for great uneasiness. Belinda, by a clever trick, had disarmed the Comte as a lover, and transformed him from a suitor to a friend. She might pursue the same tactics in regard to other men with similar results! Only, thank goodness, few men were as foolishly chivalrous as Paul de Sonnaz.



Still, the incident discouraged, almost alarmed me. Belinda was learning some of the lessons the world has to teach with remarkable aptitude. She was fighting me with one at least of my own weapons, finesse masquerading as candour.

My eyes involuntarily sought the Duke's. He was, as usual, close to Belinda. All her efforts and manœuvres could not dislodge him from the place

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that he had chosen — at her right hand. At every function, dance, "At Home," water or theatre party, he was there. And against his persistency, well-bred but determined, even Belinda's will was powerless. As a consequence, the story of their engagement and its rupture was recounted, discussed, and commented upon, in every salon in Paris, the general verdict being that a "misunderstanding had arisen, which would eventually be put right."

Hardy North shared this opinion, and wrote to that effect with great earnestness and some severity to Belinda for the steps she had taken.

The Duke's eyes met mine over the girl's fair head. He seemed to read what was passing in my mind. He strolled over to where I sat, dropping into the vacant chair beside me.

"Tired?" he said softly, "or worried, which is it, Lady Peggy? The Comte is not playing the part assigned him to your satisfaction, perhaps? It is your own fault. I told you the *rôle* was mine. Sooner or later Belinda will accept me as her fate, and of her own free will."

I shook my head.

"She will never willingly marry except for love," I answered.

"Or hate," he returned, "either is sufficient. She does not care for me, truly, but neither does she for any other man—the engineer fellow is not worth considering."

"She *may* care, though," I returned maliciously, "she is very young and very beautiful, and half Paris is at her feet. She would be more or less than woman to withstand such homage." I motioned to where Belinda stood, a tall, girlish figure in white cachemire, an old silver girdle of German work about her waist, and in the coils of her bright hair a single silver arrow.

The Marquise was holding a reception; her rooms, as usual, were thronged, and Belinda was surrounded by admirers.

The girl was looking her best. Strikingly unlike the charming *mondaines* that graced the hotel, she had a style and distinction all her own. Her fair face was guiltless of paint and powder, her hair took its gold from Nature, and her figure, straight and slim as a sapling, owed nothing to artificial compression.

In the midst of the brilliance, the luxury, the glittering lustre, the *va et vient* of the Hotel D'Auteuil she stood calm and serene, like a white statue against a bank of flaming crimson flowers.

At the moment that I called the Duke's attention to the girl, Alphonse Hervé, the French painter, was bowing over her hand. Young, rich, famous, with the genius of a Raphael, and the face of Saint Sebastian, Paris went mad over him.

Great ladies competed for his notice, he was the lover of the rulers of Society, the hero for a hundred intrigues and romances—and he had fallen a victim to the grave blue eyes of a girl in her teens. He was bewitched by Belinda!

Her face coloured under his ardent gaze, but his manner, almost reverential, reassured her. Gradually the group of men surrounding her melted away. She had ears for none but the famous Hervé.

A certain Grand Duchess, an imperious woman who fancied that she reigned over Hervé's life, because he dominated hers like a fatality, watched Belinda with an anger hardly to be restrained. A lovely creature, exquisitely painted, she wore a gown cut *en cœur*, fashionably indecent, and sparkling with gems. She was a triumph of art, the highest product of our world. Belinda was crude beside her, and yet, so blind are men, that Hervé never cast a look in her direction.

Belinda appeared equally impressed, as I noted with alarm. Hervé was a genius truly, but a commoner, and, therefore, no match for Hardy North's millions. The Duke, to my relief, interrupted the *tête-à-tête*.

Belinda received him coldly, and pointedly ignored his effort to draw her into conversation.

"I wish to speak to Lady Carstairs," she said calmly, "Will you take me to her, M. Hervé?"

The Frenchman bowed, offered his arm, and piloted her safely towards me.

"M. Hervé is painting a wonderful picture, Lady Peggy," she said in her fresh young voice, "but he is not pleased with his model. He wants me to sit to him instead. I hope you will not object, because M. Hervé has promised that if I will sit for this picture he will sketch my head and face for father. You know how that would please him."

"If that is your only reason for acting as model, Miss North, "said the Duke, who had quickly followed her across the room, "the matter can easily be arranged otherwise. I will commission Hervé to paint your portrait at his own price, and, with your permission I will send it to your father." The Duke gazed at the painter with the cool insolence of which he was master. Hervé flashed and bit his lip. For a moment I feared he would answer in terms as provocative, but with an effort he controlled himself.

"I cannot accept your commission," he said coldly.

"Nor my father your gift," flashed Belinda, danger in her eyes. Then, turning to Hervé she said sweetly, "It will give me great pleasure to sit for you, monsieur. Lady Peggy, do you object?"

This painfully direct method of attack discomposed me. It was difficult to return an ambiguous answer to such a horribly open question.

"My dear Belinda, I am delighted that M. Hervé should pay you so great a compliment," I said, smiling. "You are to be envied."

"When may I sit to him?" said the terrible girl.

"That is for me to decide with M. Hervé," I said quietly. "The Marquise is looking for you, Belinda," I added. "Eastacres," I turned to the Duke, "will you take Miss North to Madame D'Arteuil?"

With a very bad grace my charge accepted the Duke's arm. Our hostess, a fairylike little person with a wonderful wig, and a marvellous complexion, both Piver's latest, received her with a smile. She had an admiration for the girl's beauty, and a liking for her courage.

"When may I hope to see you at my studio, Lady Peggy?" said Hervé softly. "It is an eternity since you came. I remember you brought your daughter, Lady Millicent—how long is it—five years ago? She was lovely, your daughter, fair and slight, with eyes dark as night, and soft as your own."

"Belinda's are blue," I said, smiling.

"Oh, yes, the day follows the night! Both are beautiful."

He gazed at me meaningly. Somehow I did not care to meet his look. Millicent had nourished an infatuation for him at a time when he was but beginning his career. I had nipped the attachment in the bud, but it would seem he still remembered her.

"You will let me paint this beautiful young girl?" He bent over my hand, his eyes flashed into mine. I reflected that to be painted by the great Hervé would immensely enhance Belinda's reputation as a beauty. I would accord the artist no opportunity for making love to his model. Besides, Belinda——

"I will bring her to the Rue Royal to-morrow," I said, and Hervé thanked me with a brilliant smile.

The Comte de Sonnaz drew me aside as I passed down the room.

"Why don't you give the Duke his *congé*, Lady Peggy?" he asked moodily. "Belinda has an acute distaste for him, he troubles, indeed, almost frightens her, with his attentions. Can't you make him understand they are unwelcome?"

"Paul de Sonnaz, are you mad?" I cried indignantly. "Do you ask me to insult a guest in your aunt's house?"

"Belinda also is a guest," he returned shortly. "The Duke is annoying her. If you won't stop him, why," he laughed, "I must. It is the duty of one friend to help another."

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"Paul," I laid my hand on his arm, "for Heaven's sake, think of the Marquise! You are so hot, so hasty, you will insult the Duke, he will retaliate, and then——" I paused and glanced at him significantly.

"Have no fear for me or your dear Duke. We shall not fight, I promise you that. I shall remonstrate with my tongue only. Now for Alphonse," he glanced after the painter, "there is cause to be alarmed. Alphonse is already the rival of Eastacres. And"—he glanced at me shrewdly—"it is possible he may prove more fortunate than even his Grace or I."

"Impossible! Belinda would not reject Eastacres for a painter!"

"My dear lady, but what a painter! And what a man! And how superb a lover! Where else is to be found genius and beauty, and fascination such as Alphonse Hervé's? Have a care, Lady Peggy, or, you may plunge Paris into mourning. The Duke is a dead shot, and Hervé——"

"My dear Paul, do not be melodramatic. English Dukes do not fight duels with artists."

"Unless they are challenged," he interrupted. "Eastacres will provoke a challenge unless you are careful."

I laughed at his earnestness, and asked what he wished me to do.

"Tell the Duke you no longer permit his addresses to Miss North. You do not wish him to marry her?"

"He is an excellent match," I answered.

For answer Paul de Sonnaz sneered—sneered in my face.

"An excellent match!" he repeated. "For how many sins do a title and a settlement atone to you women? I'm not a feeling fellow, Lady Peggy, not a particularly moral one, but there are some things I can't stand. To speak of marriage between Belinda and the Duke is desecration."

"What do you know of Eastacres?" I asked hurriedly, my mind reverting to *l'affaire* Sheila.

"Only what all Paris and all London knows, that is quite enough."

I felt relieved, and smiled at him serenely.

"Paris knows much about us all, *mon cher*," I whispered, "so long as it doesn't tell, what does it matter? The Duke is no better and no worse than other men. Come, you are jealous, that is all."

He made no answer, but left me with a formal bow. His hints anent the painter's possible fascination for Belinda disturbed me much more than his diatribes against the Duke. Hervé, as I had cause to know, was a dangerously charming man. Belinda, with that obstinacy peculiar to herself, was quite likely to fall a victim to that charm, if for no other reason than to oppose me.

I regretted my promise to call at the Rue Royale the next day, and decided it should be our first and only visit. One sitting, I reflected, could do no harm. I would not leave Belinda for an instant.

The next day was a memorable one. Paris was keeping holiday, a *fête des fleurs* drew everybody to the Bois. There was to be at half-past three that afternoon a procession of carriages—equipments of all kinds—decked with the favourite flowers of their fair owners. There was considerable rivalry among the great Parisian ladies in the matter of this procession. Thousands of francs were lavished on the purchase of violets, lilies, orchids—the blooms of a day—in which to smother their carriages and coachmen.

Belinda was excited at the prospect of seeing the procession. We were to drive with the Marquise in a landau decorated with carnations, pink, and red, and white.

Our gowns were designed in harmony with the colours—Belinda in a rose-coloured cloth, with finely chased silver and turquoise buttons, looked most distinguished.

We arrived at Hervé's studio a little after two. It was a magnificent apartment, the floor of stained oak was covered with leopard and tiger skins, seductive looking divans were stretched against the walls, masses of hot-house flowers filled the air with sweetness, works of art of priceless value ranged themselves before you. Statues, gorgeous tapestries silver and gold flagons that had graced the hall of some mediæval baron, sketches signed by names of European repute, Venetian mirrors in curiously wrought metal frames. Everywhere luxury, elegance, ease.

Hervé at work in his studio was a silent, almost stern man. Quite different from the Prince Charming of the Paris salons. His face was tense as he stood before his easel, his eyes large, brown, limpid, grew luminous as with swift, masterly strokes, he reproduced Belinda's face on canvas. As for soft speeches or tender looks, they did not exist for him that afternoon. He was possessed by the demon of work, and save for a few short sharp directions to his model, hardly spoke.

Belinda made no demur, but submitted to his orders obedient and willing as a child.

Just after three Paul de Sonnaz made his appearance.

He declared Hervé must throw down his brushes on the instant, and insisting on our all adjourning to the front of the house, as there was something "outside" likely to surprise us. Immediately before the house, the centre of an admiring crowd, was Paul's dogcart, drawn by a mare, by name Kitty, a beautiful, high-spirited creature, capricious and wilful as Belinda herself. The dogcart was a mass of roses, rich red, damask, delicate pale pink, soft, velvety white. I have never seen anything more tasteful or more lavish. The cart was a moving bouquet. Kitty, with a bunch of roses coquettishly stuck in her mane, looked wicked but handsome.

"I'm glad you like it," said Paul, delighted at Belinda's enthusiasm. "It was Hervé's idea, he and I discussed it this morning. You've no objection to my driving Miss North, Lady Peggy? I'll take good care of her."

A few minutes later they had driven off. Hervé following on his bay, while I returned to the Hotel D'Auteuil to join the Marquise.

It was a perfect day, a day of brilliant sunshine in which Paris looked her best. In the best of spirits we drove to the Bois and joined the procession. The dogcart was immediately in front of our landau. Belinda caused a sensation from the moment she joined the long line of carriages which moved slowly up and down the Avenue, two on each side of the row of gendarmes, going in contrary directions.

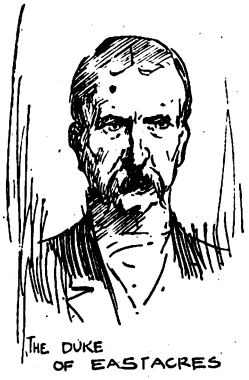
The beauty of the girl, her exquisite rose costume, the handsome cart, more artistically decked than any of the others, exhaling the costly odour of hundreds of drooping roses, aroused the utmost enthusiasm from the carriages nearest to theirs, and from the thousands of spectators who lined the footpaths. Some of the people climbed on chairs, and commented audibly upon her beauty, others crowded forward, and a perfect fusilade of flowers, lilies and violets, carnations and almond blossoms fell upon her.

Leaving the Bois we turned in the direction of the Hotel D'Auteuil, the dogcart preceding the landau. Crossing the Rue de la Concorde, Belinda dropped a rose, instantly Paul de Sonnaz was on his feet, he jumped to the ground, and, stooping, picked up the blossom. Belinda had taken the reins as they fell from Paul, and the mare, immediately realising that a slighter hand controlled her, grew restive, not to say skittish, threw up her head and fairly bolted.

Paul rushed after the cart, the landau of the Marquise followed suit. We strained our eyes to follow Belinda's slender, girlish figure seated erect, grasping the reins steadily, firmly.

"If she keeps cool she'll master the mare yet," gasped Paul, as he swung on to the landau. "She knows how to drive, and Kitty hasn't a bit of vice in her."

All the same we shouted to our coachman to urge his horses to the utmost speed. We rushed along at a frantic rate, but still the cart forged well ahead, the rose-coloured figure of Belinda



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

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swaying with the motion. As she neared the Pont de la Concorde the mare lowered her head, and, swerving to one side, dashed down the Quai D'Orsay.

Gradually Belinda was getting the mastery of her, when, as they turned the corner, a steam-tram gave vent to an unearthly screech. The mare reared, plunged and reared again, nearly falling backwards. Belinda cut her smartly with the whip, but, with a movement of the head, she got the bit between her teeth, and bolted for all she was worth.

At that moment there flashed past us a man on a tall grey horse.

"Thank God!" cried Paul, "it's Hervé. She'll be saved! Alphonse will overtake her."

Suddenly, his white face working with emotion, Paul pointed to where, at the end of the street down which the dogcart was flying, a monster steam-roller was crushing the stones used to pave the road. The gendarme regulating the traffic obliged all vehicles to pass in single file. Another two or three seconds and the dogcart would near the stream of waiting traffic—would crash into the nearest carriage, and then!

It seemed as if nothing could arrest the catastrophe. Already in imagination I saw the cart dashed to pieces, Belinda's form outstretched upon the ground. And then, just as all hope was over, Hervé by a frantic effort brought the grey level with the dogcart. Rising in his stirrups he clutched the mare as she dashed past and hung with all his strength and the risk of his life, on to her bridle. The mare thus checked paused in her headlong career—the bystanders rushed to give assistance. The crisis was over. Belinda was saved.

"I owe my life to you, Monsieur," she said, giving her hand to Hervé, as they stood upon the footpath. "You risked yours for me. So great so wonderful a life for mine."

Her eyes glistened, her face was flushed, she trembled.

He was a great artist, a perfect lover, and the handsomest man in Paris—and he had lost his heart to this young girl! I wondered, would she give him hers, or would she still keep faith with David, the far distant engineer.

Belinda's narrow escape was but the first of a chain of startling incidents in which Hervé played a prominent part. From that day he was Belinda's shadow, as persistent as patient a shadow as the Duke himself.

On one occasion he invited us to luncheon in his grounds. It was to be an *al fresco* entertainment, and the Barrone de Choiseul insisted that the woman should go dressed in peasant costume, with bare feet, short skirts and high white caps *à la Normandie*. It was a picturesque scene. In one part of the grounds there were wooden booths such as are erected in Paris during Carnival time, fitted with dainty trifles in the way of sweetmeats, bric-a-brac and jewellery.

Belinda sold gold-tipped cigarettes for roses. She was smothered with blossoms, and her stall was cleared in twenty minutes. Such a *fête* could only take place in Paris. To attempt a similar entertainment in London would be to court failure, not to say ridicule.

Events had moved very quickly since we came to Paris, Of Hervé's infatuation there could be no doubt, what puzzled me was whether or no Belinda returned it. Until I was sure of that I judged it better not to interfere.

Hervé was idolised by most women—no one yet had resisted his charm. It remained to be seen whether or no Belinda would prove an exception to her sex.

The proof came unexpectedly. One evening after we had returned from a dull play at the Théâtre Français, Belind arushed into the salon. The Marquise turned, a slightly vexed expression on her face.

"My dear, what *is* the matter?" she inquired.

Belinda, without pausing to reply, came up to me.

"Quick, quick, Lady Peggy," she cried. "There's no time to lose. You must come at once. The Duke and Hervé are about to fight—to fight, I tell you, in the studio. Alphonse can't shoot a bit. And, and"—she paused—"what shall I do?" she gasped. "What can I do? The Duke will kill him, and—*I cannot bear it!*"

(*A further splendid instalment appears next Tuesday.*)

YOUR EDITOR CHATS.

Last week I promised that I would tell you the true story of the way in which one of the tales in the Christmas Number came to be written, and of the manner in which payment for it kept a home together.

The tale was entitled "The Story of Esther," and the *nom de plume* of the writer was "Orme Lewis." The circumstances are as follows:

Among the manuscripts which I was reading one night a few weeks ago I came across one on very soiled paper and written with obviously watered ink. It was a pathetic story, altogether too melancholy for use in a bright little paper like *Short Stories*, but I was struck with the depth of emotion expressed in the story, which, in simple language, told of the struggles of a wife to keep a home together while her husband was stricken down with a lingering illness. It seemed as though the writer of the story had actually experienced those feelings of absolute despair that were expressed by the chief character in the narrative, and I put the story aside. The next day I wrote a letter to the author expressing my regret that I was unable to make use of that particular story, but saying that I should not only like to see another story of a more cheerful description, but that I should be willing to give some advice if the writer cared to call. The writer did not call, but promised to send another story within a few days. The manuscript arrived, and was entitled "The Story of Esther." After reading it I at once accepted it and sent a cheque in payment. A few days later I received the following letter:

Dear Sir,

I enclose a formal receipt for the cheque which you sent me in payment for my manuscript, "The Story of Esther." I don't mind telling you now something that I would not tell you before, lest you should be influenced in my favour in your decision regarding the story.

Three months ago my husband was taken seriously ill, and remained in bed for nearly four weeks. After that the doctor said that it was absolutely necessary that he should go away for a change of air to the south coast or he would be certain to have a relapse. He had to go, but as we had only a few pounds in the bank, our funds were soon exhausted. The firm at which my husband was employed refused to pay him any money while he was ill, and, of course, there was nothing coming into the house. At the end of a mont my husband came home, and the shock of finding that I had been obliged to sell a lot of our household effects in order to help to pay for his change of air so unnerved him that he again became prostrate. I got some needlework to do, and with the few shillings I received I managed to keep the little home together, but I had to run into debt.

Last Christmas we had a happy time, for my husband was then earning £4 a week, and my little boy was in the best of health. The outlook for this Christmas was indeed desolate—my husband was earning no money, my little boy had grown thin and pale owing to want of nourishing food, and we were in debt.

One day I received a letter from our landlord which said that unless his rent were paid up-to-date he would have to put in the brokers. That night, while my husband and little boy had fallen asleep, I sat at a table and wrote down on paper the whole story of our struggles. It did me good to open my heart, and when I had finished I crept into bed and cried myself to sleep. The next morning I found the manuscript, and a thought flashed through my mind that I might be able to sell it, and I sent it on to you. Well, you know the result.

Although it was not accepted, you asked me to write another, which I did with a light heart; and the cheque which I received not only paid the landlord what was owing to him, but enabled me to get good food for my husband. I am now going to write more stories, which I hope you will accept. But I am too proud to live on charity, and I am sure that your decision with regard to my stories will not be in any way influenced by what I have told you.

Yours very gratefully,
Orme Lewis.

You will perhaps wonder why I think fit to tell you a story of this sort. My reason for doing so is to let you know that all the stories you read, however bright they may be, are not written under such comfortable circumstances as you would imagine.

After reading this, I am sure that you will feel additional interest in the tales which appear in *Short Stories*, especially those to which the name "Orme Lewis" is appended.

Your Editor.

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FOR HER SAKE.

The Story of the Week. See our Coloured Cover.

Midnight was booming slowly out from the clock over the stables at Hamdon Hall, when a figure stole out of the side gate of the park and turned into the lane skirting its western side. The figure was that of a woman wrapped from head to foot in a long cloak, which effectively concealed her form, but did not hide a stoop which might have been caused by age. Keeping close under the hedge she glided swiftly in the direction of the churchyard that lay a quarter of a mile or so along the lane. A pale moon shone fitfully through the clouds, and wavering shadows fell across the low-lying meadows beyond the churchyard and made strange shapes of the gravestones within its borders. Round the lych-gate the shadows lay deepest, and here the hurrying figure paused to look right and left with anxious glances, peering oftenest of all into the darkness made by the lych-gate itself.

"Are you there?" The words were breathed at last in trembling accents. "Are you there, Hal? Come out, dear, it's safe, and I—I've got what you wanted."

The voice sank to a whisper, but that whisper had been heard. From the place of deepest shadow, a man's form stepped quickly, and crossed the road to where that other figure waited under the hedge.

"How much?" he asked roughly, in a hoarse undertone.

"I—I'm not sure; I think it's fifty," said the trembling woman's voice, and a hand was outstretched from the enveloping cloak, holding out to the man a packet, which he eagerly seized.

"Fifty?" There was a note of dissatisfaction in his tone. "Well—it can't be helped. Wouldn't he give more?"

"He—he—Oh, Hal, I *could* not ask him," the woman's voice faltered and broke. "I—he does not know—I mean—I have got it for you, and indeed it is all I can get. I——"

Her words ended in a choking sob; she drew nearer to the man, laying a trembling hand upon his arm.

"Oh, all right, it must do—there, there, don't cry, that's a dear soul. I can't stand tears. Kiss me, and let me be off; I must be some way from here by daybreak. I've expected you since ten o'clock."

"I know, dear, I know, but I could not get away; and O, Hal, promise me, promise that now you will begin afresh—will turn over a——"

"For Heaven's sake don't preach, and don't cry either," he added hastily, as she uttered another choking sob. "Good-bye, and cheer up. Perhaps I'm not so black as they paint me?" Stooping, he kissed the white face uplifted to his in the moonlight, and before she could utter another syllable, he had turned away and plunged once more into the shadows of the churchyard.

The woman walked slowly back by the way she had come, re-entering the park by the side gate into the lane, and as she went, she murmured brokenly over and over again:

"May God forgive me! May God forgive me! He alone knows my temptation; it is only He who can understand—can understand."

And with a pitiful moan she disappeared amongst the trees of the park and was lost to sight, but not before a sharp pair of eyes had noted that strange coming and going.

* * * * *

Mildred Henley, the pretty young nursery governess of Hamdon Hall, went slowly down the great drive on a misty October afternoon, singing softly to herself as she went. She was very happy; life seemed just then a pleasant pathway! Nothing, it seemed to her, could be more ideal than the arrangement which had been made possible by Squire Hamdon's kindness, an arrangement by which she lived with her parents in the small white house within the boundaries of the park, and went daily to teach and amuse the children at the Hall.

The loss of much of her father's money two years before had made work for Mildred imperative, and at first she had come to and fro to the Hall from Middlewich, the nearest town. But when the White House—as it was called—fell vacant, Squire Hamdon offered it to Mr. Henley at an absurdly low rent, and Mildred's joy over the arrangement had amply repaid the kindly Squire for his act of thoughtfulness.

Mildred's happy little song was brought to an abrupt conclusion on that October afternoon by the apparition in her path of a tall, stalwart young man, who looked down on her with laughing, love-lit eyes, saying "Well met, sweetheart; I walked up to escort you home."

"O, Jack, how lovely of you—there is heaps to tell you, and, no, you mustn't be silly any more!" And she drew herself out of his arms, lifting a rosy, laughing face, which he promptly kissed again before they resumed their way talking the happy, foolish lover's talk, which only lovers understand.

Presently, as they drew near to the place where the White House became visible through the trees, Jack said abruptly: "Mildred, darling, I hate to bring up worrying subjects, but is *he* keeping away just now?"

The girl's face turned white, her grip on her lover's arm tightened.

"Oh!" she cried, "don't let's talk of him to-night. He—he——" The eyes that met Frank's were wide and frightened. "I—I don't want to think of him to-night," and she shivered a little.

"Very well," was the grave answer, "but—look here, Mildred, you and I are to be husband and wife, so soon to be husband and wife, dear, with no secrets between us" (did she shiver again?) "promise that you will tell me if he comes to worry you again."

"I"—she hesitated perceptibly, and looked half-nervously about her—"I promise to tell you when he comes again," she said mechanically, and as if the words were dragged from her, and once more a shiver ran through her slight frame.

"That's right, sweetheart," Jack Denison's hearty voice had a cheering ring in it, "we must share all our troubles now, and never hide anything from each other."

"No—never hide anything from each other," she repeated, and there was still that mechanical note in her voice. "Ah! come in Jack, dear, out of the shadows, and let us—let us forget everything but that we belong to each other, and that we are to be married in a month!"

The change in her tone was so sudden, such a curious forced cheerfulness sounded in it, that Jack drew her once more into his arms.

"What is the matter?" he said, looking long and earnestly into her pretty white face. "You are not in trouble, dear? You have nothing on your mind?"

A vivid flush sprang over her face. "On my mind? What nonsense!" She drew herself out of his embrace. "How could I have anything on my mind? The Hamdons are good to me. I love the children, and I am to marry

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you in a month." And, with a laugh, she broke from him, and ran into the house, whither he followed her.

The room they entered was cosy and home-like in a marked degree. A small fire burnt in the grate, and in an arm-chair beside it sat a venerable old man—Mildred's father, whose face lighted up at his daughter's entrance. By the table on which a lamp burnt brightly, sat a harassed-looking elderly woman, intent on some needlework. There was a careworn expression about her eyes and mouth, and the smile which greeted Mildred was a sad one, and at sight of the man's form behind the girl Mrs. Henley started violently, and her hands twitched nervously.

"Why!" she began shakily—then as her future son-in-law emerged into the light, she said with evident relief, "Oh! it is you, Jack! I might have guessed that."

"Yes, you might have guessed it," he answered gaily; but there was pity in the glance he threw at her careworn face. "Who but I would be likely to turn up in this promiscuous fashion?"

Though he spoke carelessly, his eyes scanned the face before him closely, and he noted that Mrs. Henley winced and grew pale.

"Nobody, my dear boy, nobody but you," Mr. Henley's hearty voice chimed in; "and now you are here, sit down and tell us the news from Middlewich."

Jack was the son and partner of a rising doctor of that town, and he always stored up little tit-bits of gossip for his prospective father-in-law, with whom also he was wont to discuss topics of the day, whilst sitting by the fire in such a position as to watch the sweet face of his betrothed, and to hear her soft voice when she either joined in the talk or spoke in undertones to her mother regarding some of the pile of needlework that of late had occupied both women's busy fingers.

"I am not very rich," Mildred said to him once, half-wistfully, half-playfully, "but I mean to come to you well endowed with clothes, and mother and I are as busy as bees making them all. You shall not have an ill-dressed wife, dear!"

It was a happy picture of family life in the White House that evening, and to a man who stood outside, shivering in the October mists, but peeping into the room through a chink in the shutters, it brought a great wave of bitter regret.

He could not have told anyone how long he stood there, his face pressed against the panes, watching how the lamplight played upon the white head of the old man by the fire, gleamed golden on Mildred's soft curls, threw into relief the anxious face of Mildred's mother, whilst it lighted up the strong features of Jack Denison.

"All happy," the man outside muttered as he turned away. "God knows why I came back to-night. I am a fool for my pains, of course. I could have got clear away with that fifty she gave me, but——" he shrugged his shoulders, and laughed a trifle hardly, "men like me are always fools. I had to come and look at them again. They in the light—I in the shadow. Ah well!" He shrugged his shoulders and slouched away, neither seeing nor hearing a man who crouched against the wall of the house behind a bush—watching his every movement; a man who never stirred until he had long vanished from the scene and who then rose slowly and stiffly from his hiding place and walked quickly away, murmuring to himself with a contented chuckle: "If I don't pull off the trick, my name's not Henry Simmonds! The thing's as plain as a pikestaff and if I can finish the job as neatly as I've begun it, I ought to get something for my pains. The chap gave the show away when he talked out loud about that fifty!"

At the Hall on that same afternoon a strange conversation took place between Squire Hamdon and his wife; he, pacing up and down her boudoir in a dumb fury of indignation, she remonstrating, pleading, urging him—in vain.

"Maurice," she said at last, "I cannot bear it; there must be some explanation. Let me ask her! Let me talk to her about it—before——"

"No, I refuse absolutely," the Squire replied. "I have been more than good to these people and this is my reward. I refuse to do anything but let the law take its course. The thing is proved up to the hilt."

"But are you sure, dear? Are you certain?"

"Of course I am sure. There is no manner of doubt. I tell you the proofs are overwhelming. Once for all—my mind is made up—the law must take its course."

* * * * * *

Jack had returned to Middlewich directly after the six o'clock tea which at the White House formed the chief evening meal, and the little house party settled down to their usual pursuits, Mildred amusing her father and mother with gay little stories of the quaint sayings and doings of her small pupils.

Mrs. Henley and she were sewing busily the while, and who can say how many tender dreams and loving thoughts were woven into the dainty garments the girl's hands fashioned. Through everything ran the golden thread of joy,

"Jack loves me; in a month I shall be his wife!"

Just as the grandfather clock in the hall struck eight a loud ring at the bell startled the inmates of the White House, and when a moment later the servant appeared at the sitting-room door, with scared face, and the words:

"Please, sir, please, ma'am, the policeman—he——" Mr. Henley sprang to his feet saying:

"What on earth does the man want at this time of night? I'll go and speak to him."

"I'll step in, sir, if I may," came a gruff voice from the doorway, "and I'm sorry to trouble you, but a warrant's a warrant, and bound to be carried out early or late, and——"

"A warrant!" The old man gazed blankly into the policeman's impassive countenance.

"Yes, sir; you'll excuse me for interrupting you, but"—the man crossed the room and suddenly laid a hand on Mildred's shoulder—"I arrest you, miss, on a charge of stealing fifty pounds' worth of banknotes from your employer, Mr. Hamdon."

Mildred's face grew positively deathlike; her eyes looked up at the policeman with an expression of mute amazement that staggered the man of the law. Mrs. Henley uttered a low scream of horror, and sank back in her chair, seeming to grow all at once pathetically small and shrunken.

"My God!" she ejaculated under her breath, "my God!"

Mr. Henley stood behind her, his face rigid with horror.

"This is monstrous!" he said at last, with shaking voice. "My daughter accused of crime? Are you mad?"

"No, sir," the man said respectfully; "but 'tis only fair you should know the facts. There was a bundle of notes on Mrs. Hamdon's writing-table in the morning-room a week ago, and nobody went into that room except Mrs. Hamdon herself and this young lady"—the hand on Mildred's shoulder pressed more heavily. "After Miss Henley left, the notes were missed, and I don't suppose she can deny as she paid the butcher's bill in Middlewich two days ago with a five-pound note—one of the missing ones," he added significantly.

"Ah—h!" The cry came from Mrs. Henley, who half rose from her chair, then dropped into it again in a half-fainting condition, moaning softly.

Mildred wrenched herself away from the detaining hand that gripped her, turning towards the policeman, her eyes flaming angrily.

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"How——" she began; then all at once her voice faltered, broke, stopped entirely. Her eyes left the man's face, and travelled first to her father's—bewildered and outraged; next to her mother's—white, drawn, anguish-stricken, with eyes that met hers in agonised appeal, and then dropped to the ground, whilst the colour swept over her face, and ebbing quickly, left it ashen white.

"I—I," the girl's voice seemed choked; she put her hand to her throat with a convulsive gesture. "You need—not—be afraid—I—shall not resist you." There was a pause between each word. "I—will—go—with you—quietly—I—confess—my—guilt."

* * * * *

"Does the prisoner at the bar plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, my lord."

Every face in the crowded Court-house at Middlewich flashed round towards the dock, where Mildred Henley stood, her face drawn and white, her eyes fixed upon the blank wall above the judge's head.

A murmur ran round the Court, quickly suppressed by a frown from the judge, and a strange and ominous silence followed those three words—"Guilty, my lord."

A man seated a few paces away from the place where the prisoner stood dropped his head on his hands with a groan. It was Jack Denison, and to him, as to many others in the packed building, those words had come as a fresh and terrible blow. And yet even now, as his own sober reflection told him, he ought to have expected nothing else!

Mildred had never for an instant wavered in her declaration of guilt, nor had she allowed her agonised father or her distracted lover to provide counsel for her defence, or try to improve matters by pleading extenuating circumstances.

"I cannot say either more or less," she had repeated over and over again with sad firmness when these two who loved her visited her in the county gaol, "I plead guilty, I accept the consequences, I will bear the punishment." And though her lips had quivered pitifully over the last words, though the agony in Jack's eyes had made her stretch out her hands to him with a yearning, appealing gesture, she had not yielded to his supplications.

"I will not allow father and you to have the expense of a useless defence," she said. "I plead guilty; let me be spared the misery of a long trial. I plead guilty."

It had been her cry throughout, and now the day had come when before the crowded court, in sight of all her little world, she once more declared herself guilty of the crime of theft.

"Best thing she could 'a' done," one constable whispered to another. "She'll maybe get a lighter sentence than if she'd brazened it out, and the proofs against her were overwhelming."

If the silence that followed the prisoner's avowal of guilt seemed long to those who sat and watched her, what did it seem to the girl herself, who stood, the silent recipient of all those curious, unfriendly glances.

The torture of the moments that dragged by like centuries was well-nigh unbearable—a great longing to cover her face, to shrink back into some dark hiding-place, never to see another human being again overwhelmed her. She caught her breath, and her hands groped out to the rail in front of her, and gripped it fiercely.

All the faces before her seemed to run together into a dazzling flash of whiteness, and then to waver up and down sickeningly. A great blackness began to wrap her round, a thick mist came before her eyes, and very far away out of the mist she was suddenly aware of a grave judicial voice pronouncing her sentence. She swayed a little where she stood, trying to collect her forces sufficiently to take in what the judge was saying, when, all at once, a shrill woman's voice broke in upon those grave tones—a thin, high voice, that went wailing through the Court, and penetrated the thick darkness with which Mildred felt herself surrounded.

"I cannot do it!" the voice wailed out. "I cannot let her be punished for my sake. I am guilty—not my daughter. I am guilty—*I stole the notes!*"

The hurried attempt to restore order failed completely as these last words were uttered. A storm of sound broke over the crowd, and the flash of faces turned towards the place where the mother of the prisoner stood, her arms outstretched towards the judge, the tears raining down her careworn face.

"I stole the notes," she repeated, in a firm voice, and then her strength seemed to fail her, and with a cry she sank down in a crumpled heap at her husband's feet.

The sequel is soon told. Mrs. Henley's tardy confession, prompted by horror at hearing sentence pronounced upon her daughter, was proved to be a true one.

It transpired that a ne'er-do-well son—Hal by name—had for years preyed upon his poor parents and upon his sister, draining upon their resources, and rendering their lives a burden by his constant escapades, and worse than escapades.

A sudden demand from him for money had driven his mother to the verge of distraction. No longer daring to ask his father to help him, hiding the matter even from Mildred, Mrs. Henley had determined to try and raise the money herself and had planned a visit to the Squire to negotiate a loan. Passing the morning-room window, which opened upon the terrace at the Hall, she had glanced into the empty room, and seeing the bundle of notes on the writing-table had been seized by a terrible temptation, and, for the sake of her idolised son, had stolen the whole packet.

And then, as often so strangely happens, she had attracted suspicion to Mildred by unwittingly substituting a note she had in the house for one of those out of the bundle, whilst giving the latter to her daughter to pay the household books.

In the dead of night she had given the stolen notes to her son, and had crept home again, unaware that her movements were watched by the shrewd constable, Henry Simmonds, who mistook her for Mildred.

The poor lady never paid the penalty of her misdeeds; the anxiety, the shock, and the final effort of confession, proved too much for an already weakened frame, and she sank to rest two days after that terrible scene in the Court-house.

"And did you guess who had really taken the money?" Jack Denison asked his wife long months afterwards, when she had partially recovered from the strain she had undergone.

"Yes," she said simply. "It all flashed upon me as the policeman laid his hand on my arm, and said—'I arrest you.' I seemed to understand it then, and my mind was made up at once. Just for one mad moment I almost flamed out at him in the hot indignation of innocence, then I knew what I must do, and I did it. I pleaded guilty, dear, because I knew it was the only thing I could do to draw away all suspicion from my poor mother. I did it—For Her Sake."

L. G. Moberly.

Rather Overdid It.

SHE: "You remember what you promised before we were married? You said you would make every effort to make yourself worthy of me." HE: "Yes; and the result was that I overdid it, and made myself better than you deserve."

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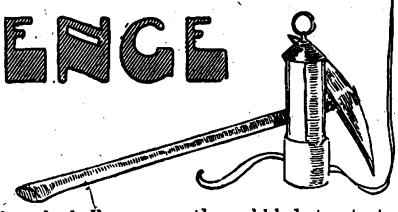
A FATAL REVENGE

THE TALE OF A FIGHT.



It was Sunday afternoon. The sound of church bells ringing was wafted across the still air and fell as if in gentle reproach upon the ears of four men. They were sentinels, and each stood upon the summit of a little promontory, and eagerly scanned the surrounding country, as if fearful of the approach of some dreaded invaders.

Meanwhile, down in a little valley below them, was raging a dreadful fight. First one side was getting the better of the fray, and then the other. The ever varying issues of the struggle were made known to the four sentries by the low, suppressed cries from the adherents of the different parties which continually rent the air.

Ever and anon a messenger would leave the struggling, shouting mass below, and run swiftly to the sentries, going from one to the other with anxious inquiries, and admonishing them afresh to keep a vigorous outlook.

Yet this was no historic battlefield. The scene of all this anxiety and commotion was a retired bit of rugged waste land in the suburbs of Durham. The sentries were four ragged lads; the dreaded invaders, the police; the terrible battle was between two men.

There they stood, bruised and bleeding, their seconds at their sides, and a crowd of unassorted roughs cheering them on to further blows.

Both men seemed played out. Yet one had evidently the mastery. This was Jim Mulligan. The other, half blinded with the blood that poured from his eyes and nose, his face terribly swollen, and already half dead, was Bill Ganger.

Hanging about the outskirts of the crowd, as if longing to learn how the struggle was going, yet daring not to look upon the mutilated countenance of his son, was Bob Ganger, the father of the worsted combatant. Groaning to himself he wandered up and down, his hands before his face, for he loved his blackguard son more dearly than his life. He would willingly have rushed in and thrust himself between his offspring and the sledge-hammer blows of the powerful Jim. Yet he knew the attempt would be in vain.

The rabble crowd, revelling in the sight of blood and the heavy thud of the blows as they fell thick and furious, would permit no interruption.

Three minutes more and "Cad" Ganger, as he was called among his fellow roughs, fell heavily to the ground. But even as he staggered and received the last cruel blow which felled him he showed no signs of the agonies he must have been suffering. His whole mind was overflowing with one thought, an intense, unquenchable hatred for the man who now stood over him—his victor.

At the moment when Bill Ganger fell there was a suppressed yet distinct shout from one of the sentries, "Coppers!" The word was passed with amazing celerity from mouth to mouth, and in three minutes' time the evil mass of dilapidated human beings had melted away.

Upon the deserted piece of common land Bill Ganger was still stretched at full length. He was groaning piteously—but not from pain. It was his rage and disappointment that overmastered him. He lay there biting the dust with his teeth, and tearing up the grass by handfuls. He rolled from side to side reviling his antagonist, and blaspheming in a way which made his poor old father tremble as he stooped over his prostrate form.

Evidently the alarm of "police" had been a false one, for no one appeared to interrupt the ravings of the conquered man.

Presently he staggered to his feet. Without a word he leant upon his father's arm, and turned away from the scene of the fray towards the little barrow in which their faithful Jenny was patiently standing. For many miles they rattled over the cobbled streets towards their living place amongst the gloomy slums.

Little had old Bob imagined when he had set out that morning, with his son at his side and Jim Mulligan laughing and cracking jokes as his long legs dangled out from behind the little coster cart, what the two desperate men took the trip for, and why they had growled at him when he had declared his intention of going on the "spree" with them.

Now he saw it all. Presently he turned sententiously to Bill. "What did ye want to fight 'im for? Yers bin fooling around his gal agin. Didn't I toll yer to chuck that? She don't care for you and she do for Jim, so what's the good of busting yerself?"

"'E's done me this time," growled Bill, "but we ain't through yet. Not by a long chalk. S'elp me, I'll have his life yet, yer see if I don't." And the battered, bleeding giant relapsed once more into stolid silence.

The threat was an evil one, but Bill meant what he said.

The next morning broke dull and cheerless. Bill Ganger's state of mind had not improved. All the night he had tossed about, for the throbbing of his bandaged head had driven all sleep far from him. When he roused himself to tramp with his father to the neighbouring mines, he was still turning over in his mind the easiest method of avenging himself for his double defeat both in love and with the fists.

Jim was working at the same pit as themselves, which fact made the old father Ganger tremble for the man's safety. How would the two work side by side? he vaguely wondered, as he and Bill trudged slowly along with their pickaxes thrown over their shoulders.

Presently they arrived at the mouth of the shaft. They stepped into the bucket, and were lowered at a terrific rate into the darkness of the subterranean world.

A dreadful fight was raging in the valley, the ever varying issues being made known by the cries of the spectators.

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Much to Bob Ganger's relief the day passed by quietly enough. The two rivals scowled at one another, but neither uttered a word.

Yet old Ganger saw enough in his son's face to show that his threat had not been forgotten. The fiery hatred was still burning within his heart.

Many years before Bill Ganger had loved a lass that lived in the same street as they did. Then Mulligan had come into those parts, and got before him in the race. He had stepped quietly in and asked the girl to become his wife, and poor Bill Ganger had been left out in the cold.

Ever since that time the two men had hated one another with a loathing which had culminated in the pre-arranged fight on that Sunday afternoon.

The time for knocking off work had now come round, and all the men engaged in that stage of the mine had already been hoisted up.

Around the foot of the shaft there stood in a group father and son Ganger, and Jim Mulligan. The lamps fixed on to their miner's hats threw a weird and flickering light upon the three men.

Suddenly they heard the bucket rapidly descending. With a jerk it came to a standstill within two feet of the ground. Bill Ganger sprang inside. "Come, Jim," he called out, "get in sharp."

There was a wild look in Bill's eyes that scared old Ganger.

"Go up by yourself, boy," he called out. "I want Jim here for a moment." With an angry scowl Bill Ganger gave the signal to the man far away up top, and after fifty seconds of rapid ascent found himself once more in the fresh air.

As if moved by some sudden and wholly irresistible impulse, he turned round as he was on the point of leaving the office.

The man at the engine was waiting for the signal to lower. Another moment, and the bell rang sharply twice. Then the great iron bucket was dropped at a bewildering speed once more into the bowels of the earth for its last load that night.

With practised steady eye the old engineer was busy watching the huge cable unreel from the big conical drum before him. On either side of him were the two huge engines panting and puffing as if chafing at being used for such frivolous work.

With a fixed determined look in his eyes, he seized his father and leapt into the darkness.

Bill waited for a moment when the old man was stooping down over the machines. Then he stole swiftly past, and with his pickaxe hung on to his shoulder climbed down the slippery ladder which ran down the whole length of the shaft. When he had gone down some one hundred feet, he left the ladder and clambered on to a tiny ledge formed in the dripping sides of the shaft.

Was he in time for his purpose? He glanced at the cable. It was still now.

Evidently they were loading up below. So far so good.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes passed, and still there were no signs of the bucket being hauled up. Bold and desperate man that he was, he did not half like the delay.

It is one thing to commit a crime on the spur of the moment, and quite another to sit in a dark hole with drops of water dripping at slow intervals down the neck—waiting.

The natural rumblings of the pit seemed suddenly to have attained fresh meaning. At every noise the man started.

He felt a cold sweat breaking out over him. Would the cable never begin to go up again? The miserable man waited for what seemed to his strained nerves an eternity. Then he became too nervous to bear the suspense and solitude any longer. He made for the slimy ladder once again.

At that instant he caught the sound of the bell far away above. It rang sharply three times.

At the sound all his courage returned to him. Calling himself a coward, he stepped back, and took up his position once again.

Another second, and he saw, far below, the bucket coming up. Even looking such a long way down beneath him his eyes, accustomed to the flickering of the lamps, distinguished the burly form of his father, and by his side the slimmer figure of his enemy. He sighed a sigh of genuine relief as he noticed that his father was on the side of the bucket furthest removed from him. This was exactly what he had hoped for.

His black eyes gleamed with pleasure and hatred. Kneeling on both knees, his pickaxe tightly clasped in both hands, Bill Ganger leant over the shaft. The engines were running unusually slowly.

Had the two men who were being hauled up the shaft happened to glance upwards, they would both have been startled by the apparition.

The man, his face blackened by the dust, his hair streaming over his forehead, looked more like some fiend of darkness than a human being.

The cable was running faster now. He raised his weapon above him, fearing he should after all miss his prey.

As the two heads appeared just beneath him, Bill brought down the pickaxe with all his might. The blow was beautifully aimed.

Bill Ganger had his revenge!

As the bucket rushed upwards the victim was dragged by the axe on to the ledge, and Ganger, who had hauled with all his might to prevent himself being dragged forwards into the abyss, dropped to the ground, and the body fell with a sounding thud across him.

He glanced at the face as he scrambled to his feet. Then suddenly an awful cry broke the stillness of that black pit.

It was a scream of fearful and intense agony which no words could ever describe. The scream echoed strangely round and round the pit. A moment went by, and then, with another irrepressible burst of intense terror and affliction, the cry went up once more.

The body was not that of Jim Mulligan!

"Father! Father! Oh, speak to me," he cried in agony.

His cry was echoed and re-echoed again and again. Above him and far below he heard his words taken up and repeated as if by some mocking fiends. Yet no answer came.

At that moment he heard the cable running out again. He could not be found as he was. With a fixed determined glare in his fierce eyes he seized the mutilated body of his father. Then with another heart-rending scream he leapt with his terrible burden into the darkness.

P. L. Jones.

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WON BY LOYALTY.

Telling of Some Stolen Jewels and a Lover's Test.

At that time I was engaged (and very pleased to be) to a most enigmatical young person. She spoke rarely and in a way always a little mysteriously, making voluntary secrets of a hundred little actions of life, and loving solitude in an alarming manner.

All this was off-set by eyes so beautiful, by a colouring so marvellous, by an expression so divine, that I had not the courage to reflect on the singularity of her character. I loved her, and I often passed hours of the night sitting before her door-step, simply dreaming "that she lived here," and meditating on her presence as does the believer on the transubstantiation.

I did not know, in the first place, whether she loved me or not; she always refused to answer that question, referring to the wishes of her parents and her confidence in their wisdom. If I insisted, she generally ended by saying "that she knew nothing about it, but that she felt no antipathy towards me, and that, according to her ideas, was enough to decide a young girl on marriage!" In vain I supplicated, in vain I tried to animate this enigmatical being; she remained as distant as the manner in which she loved, as unknown as she was dominating.

One evening as I was dreaming a little sadly of these things, a commotion was heard in the house. I returned to the salon, where everything was in disorder, my hosts were distressed, their friends embarrassed and troubled, and old Mme. Laroche horribly pale and trembling.

"What in the world has happened?" I asked. They explained incoherently that Mme. Laroche's diamonds were stolen—old family diamonds of great value. All the servants had been summoned into an adjoining room—in short, a formal search was to be instituted. An old gentleman, M. Coppé, had been unanimously selected to direct this investigation, just as I was entering, and his first proposition was that everyone should submit, or, rather, offer himself to be searched. Although the thing was rather offensive, no one protested, and it was decided that, after the servants, each person present should be examined.

To tell the truth, all this seemed of small importance beside my personal cares; and, with several others, I awaited the end of the adventure, while M. Coppé, his two witnesses and our host, began the inspection of the domestics.

Very soon I fell again into my meditation, my eyes fixed on the fireplace as though there were a fire, when suddenly I felt a light touch on my elbow. I raised my head with a start, to see my *fiancée* looking at me most beseechingly. We were alone near the fireside, and could talk in low tones without being overheard. She murmured very low:

"If you love me, arrange that they search you first; then try to be near me and, without being seen, try to conceal the object that I shall pass you from behind."

My blood ran cold. This annoying incident became terrible, filling me with the most passionate trouble. I looked at the girl in agony, but forced myself to smile, and whispered:

"It shall be as you wish!"

My knees trembled, my mouth was hot and dry. The feeling that overwhelmed me was inexpressible. It was a strange mingling of bitterness and pleasure, that my loved one should be weak to such a degree. I forced myself to have a sort of disdainful pity, and in reality love beat ardent, strong, stern in my breast. I understood, in a flash, how beauty could become divine above baseness of soul, and how one could respect it even in dishonour—and a hundred other things in which were confused fervent love, devotion without limit, a desire noble and perverse.

Jeanne had thanked me with hardly perceptible movement of the lips; she stood by the wall with an air of indifference and pride!

"They are very long about it," she said sternly. "M. Coppé is a man of method," someone replied. And a silence followed which told more and more on one's nerves, for even the waiting in a peaceful frame of mind finished by disturbing and emptying the brain, like a pump. However, the moment arrived when the searching of the servants ended, the door opened, disclosing our host, the two witnesses, and the old gentleman.

My heart beat furiously. I felt myself become terribly pale, but, concealing my agitation and steadying my voice, I asked to be searched first.

M. Coppé smiled at what he considered the whim of a young man, and proceeded methodically to my examination. I blushed, I became pale, without anyone finding that peculiar under the circumstances. When it was over, I made two or three steps backward and I found myself near Jeanne. She lowered her fan and handed me something with a coolness that was only equalled by my calmness in seizing the object and placing it in a pocket of my coat. After which I leant against the fireplace, being now merely a witness and above all suspicion.

M. Coppé's search was unproductive of results. There remained nothing to do but to visit all the rooms and then inform the police.

Still my trouble of mind increased as I remained standing by the fireplace. My brain was in a whirl, and I felt the crime weigh on me as though I were indeed the thief!

Jeanne at last came towards me, with that undulating step of hers, and gave me a look of such passionate gratitude that it almost seemed to scorch me. Then in an imperative low tone she said:

"Do you still love me?"

I did not hesitate. I replied firmly:

"Yes."

"In spite of all that I have done?"

"In spite of everything!"

"Will you marry me?"

"I will marry you."

She enveloped me with the same look, still warmer and more lingering. I fully comprehended the power of woman, above all law, human or natural, drawn from the fountain-head and against which nothing ought to prevail.

I felt strangely happy in this equivocal adventure, and I could not throw off this happiness for which I reproached myself and of which I was terribly ashamed.

As I was struggling with those contending emotions, exclamations were heard and I saw M. Coppé reappear holding a little box.

"We have the jewels and the guilty one!" he said very calmly.

I had only time to hear this much and to see the livid face of the valet—the guilty one—when I found that Jeanne was gently urging me out on to the terrace where the shadows lay thickly. There I felt my head seized with two hands, while two pure lips were pressed to mine, as Jeanne murmured:

"The thief adores you! She has tricked you! To test your love she gave you her own box!"

H. Smythe.

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A REMARKABLE LETTER.

GIFT OF £50 FROM ONE READER TO THE REST.

Last week we received the following communication from an anonymous correspondent living in America:

DAYTON, OHIO, U.S.A.
NOVEMBER 25th, 1902.

DEAR EDITOR AND FRIEND,

IN February, 1894, I received from you a cheque for £10 as a prize in connection with a competition that ran in SHORT STORIES.

That £10 was the foundation of a fortune which I have now, thank God, accumulated. I was a single young man at the time, and could find no employment in England. So, with the help of the £10, I emigrated to America, and, after knocking about New York for a few months, found my way to Dayton. Here I started in the cycle business and, when the boom came in 1897 and 1898, I made a lot of money. This money I speculated with and have now turned into a fortune.

My reason for writing you is to express my gratitude to you for having offered the £10, and to say that I have now decided to give to the readers of SHORT STORIES, through the medium of your paper, five times this amount every year I am spared.

I therefore inclose you bills for two hundred and fifty dollars, and ask you to distribute these in five sums of £10 each amongst the readers of SHORT STORIES in a competition the nature of which I leave to yourself. All I ask is that the announcement may be made and the competition closed in time for the prize money to reach the winners during February, which is the month in which I received my first £10.

You are, of course, at liberty to publish this letter, but I do not append my name as I have no desire for notoriety, and simply make this offer out of pure gratitude in the hope that those who receive the £10 prizes will turn them to as good account as I was able to turn my £10.

Your Obedient Servant,

DAYTON.

This letter is certainly the most gratifying and remarkable one that I have received since SHORT STORIES started, and it gives me great pleasure to publish it. I have given the matter very careful consideration, and have arrived at the conclusion that, as my anonymous correspondent was in great want when he won his prize, the most satisfactory manner of distributing his gift of £50 would be to offer it to those who can give me the best reason for receiving it.

You may be wanting to emigrate to one of our Colonies. You may want £10 to buy something you have needed for a long time. You may want to clear off some small debts that have been worrying you. Or you may want to trade with the £10 and, like "Dayton," turn it into a fortune.

Whatever your reason for wanting it may be, write it down in the space below, and send it to "The Competition Editor of SHORT STORIES," Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "Dayton."

Readers may send as many reasons as they like, provided each is written on a separate coupon. Another coupon will appear next week.

CUT OUT THE COUPON HERE.

My reason for wanting £10 is.....

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Name..... Address.....

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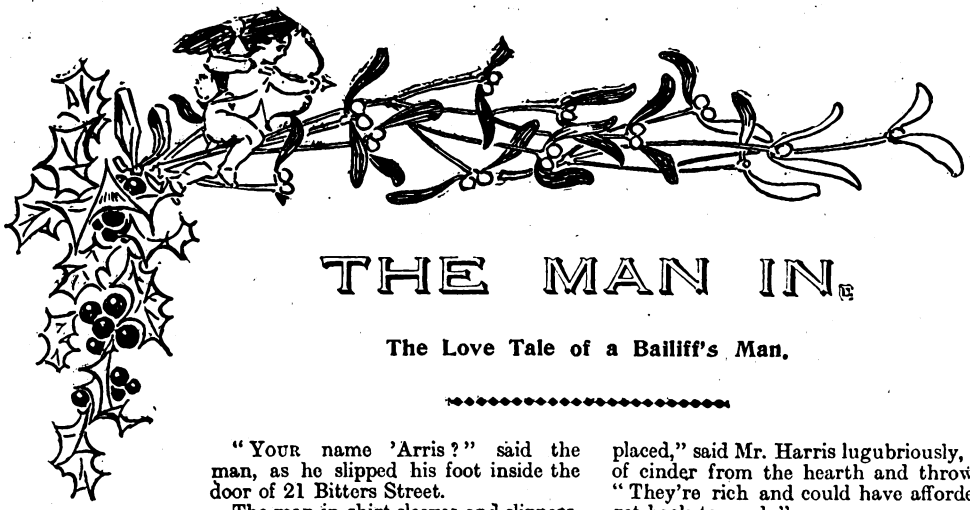

THE MAN IN.

The Love Tale of a Bailiff's Man.

"Your name 'Arris?" said the man, as he slipped his foot inside the door of 21 Bitters Street.

The man in shirt-sleeves and slippers, one of which had been unsparingly carved to accommodate a gouty foot, looked half-puzzled, half-alarmed, and nodded.

"Got a bit of trouble for you," said the first man, stepping on to the door-mat and drawing a long folded paper from his pocket.

Mr. Harris shut the door incontinently, and turned a trifle paler than he had been looking for the last few months, although that was manifest enough for his neighbours to have remarked it.

"Summons?" he interrogated laconically, as he nervously watched the visitor unfold the paper.

"Worse—worse. Distraint upon your goods and chattels for arrears of payment—seven—eighteen—six. Can you pay it?"

"Seven—eighteen! Distraint? And after I went and saw Mr. Street—er, the manager, and told him I was sorry I'd got backward with the payments, and would start again as soon as I was able to return to work, which I hoped to be able to do after Christmas; and he said it would no doubt be all right, and he'd see the boss for me and arrange to give me the time and the missus out too, and 'ill come home——"

"Can you pay?" repeated Mr. Harris, leaning against the wall for support. "How do they bring it up to that? The original debt was only seven pound, and I paid two-ten of that."

"Can't help it; there it is—seven—eighteen—six. The only question's—can you pay?"

"I've been out of work four months and more."

"*Can you pay?*"

"No," said Mr. Harris, resting on his sound foot, and looking wretchedly at the visitor.

The latter went to the door, opened it, put his head out and whistled to his man waiting outside.

"Come in," said the first visitor to the second, who closed the door behind him and looked at his victim indifferently.

The newcomer was a man about fifty, with a large ruddy nose, watery blue eyes, and a long, shaven upper-lip. He wore a frock coat and a hard felt hat, and linen wrist-bands which slipped down to his big knuckles whenever he dropped his arms to his sides. His black trousers were too long for his legs, and his boots creaked distressingly.

Twenty minutes after his entry he bade farewell to his bailiff from the front door-step, and, closing the door, returned to the front room, before the fire in which Mr. Harris was sitting nursing his suffering foot.

The man drew up a chair to the fire, with all the assurance of one in possession, and sat down.

For a long time there was silence.

"It ain't your fault you're here," said Mr. Harris at length, stirring the fire with an old stair-rod, which had been pressed into service as a poker. "So there ain't any reason why we shouldn't make you as easy as we can."

"That's a very sensible way of looking at it; it ain't no use raving and tearing my hair. Here I am and here I've got to stop until the money's paid or the goods cleared," responded the man stoically.

"But they must be stoney-hearted people to put in a bailiff two days before Christmas, seeing as how I told 'em just as how I was placed," said Mr. Harris lugubriously, picking up small pieces of cinder from the hearth and throwing them on the fire. "They're rich and could have afforded to wait until I could get back to work."

"They're rich, because they're wise," said the man sententiously. "And being wise they agree that people gen'ly have money about Christmas time and object to bailiffs joining the fam'ly circle. Consequently it's a good time to press for payment."

"But they know I haven't got the money," protested Mr. Harris angrily. "Eight pound! Where am I to get eight pound, and Christmas rent and rates coming along. Haven't earnt a penny since the end of July, and here I am with you in the house demanding eight pound by menace, as the saying is."

"And it looks to me," said the man, glancing round the room with the eye of a valuer, "that there'll be precious little left in the house when I'm gone. Things fetch very little by forced auction, for the auctioneer knows to a penny how much he's got to raise, and it don't matter if he has to sell the whole lot so long as he covers the debt and expenses. There's that sideboard there. Now I daresay you gave as much as three pound——"

"Three-fifteen not a couple of year ago," Mr. Harris interjected.

"Did you re'lly. Why, I've seen boards lot better than that knocked down for fifteen shillings scores of times. This table suits your purpose all right, I don't doubt; but it wouldn't fetch more than a crown."

Mr. Harris groaned inwardly.

"Any children?"

"Girl, eighteen, out at service," replied Mr. Harris absently, examining his pouch in a vain effort to find a few shreds of tobacco.

The act suggested to the man that his own pipe had long been cold. He drew it from his pocket, filled, lighted, and puffed at it with gusto.

"Couldn't your daughter lend you the money out of her savings?" he suggested, not appreciating the envious glances his victim turned on the smoking pipe.

"She's sent us all her savings already," Harris returned gruffly.

"Well," said the man, with an air of finality, as he stretched out his short legs and tilted his chair back, "the longer I'm here, the bigger the bill."

"What's that matter!" shouted Harris, banging the table with his clenched fist. "You can't sell us up twice!"

There was a footstep in the passage, and the door opened before Harris could rise from his chair.

He looked at the little woman who entered imploringly, and, hobbling round the table, whispered a few words in her ear.

Her face, which in her youth must have been very pretty grew pale as death; and she sank upon a chair near the door and burst into tears.

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Meanwhile the man, still with his chair tilted on its back legs, was smoking and gazing into the fire, a picture of apathy.

"It ain't any good your taking on like that, marm," he said, with mild conviction, glancing over the articles on the mantelshelf. "What is to be, *is*; the inevitable must be so, Christmas time or doomsday. I'm always sorry for people when they make me as comfortable as they can, and don't object to doing a few odd jobs by way of exercise. But I can't put up my hand and say, "Stand back, law, and let this party alone. Law is law, same for me as for you."

"He's right, Martha," said Harris soothingly. "It ain't any use crying. Come, now, come. Things are never so bad but what they might be worse."

"Very sensibly said," exclaimed the man, rising and shooting back his refractory wrist-bands. He might have added that when things are at their worst they're sure to turn round.

He did not intend to cast any personal reflection on himself, but it was not inappropriate that he wheeled about at that instant. He looked at Mrs. Harris and blinked. He looked again, watched her staunching her tears, and an expression of half-wonder, half-amazement, crossed his face. He wheeled round again quickly and poked the fire to hide his embarrassment the moment she looked at him.

It was a queer situation, good gracious! He'd been in some queer situations since he first took to the work, and had grown hardened to them. But this—this beat everything! There was no error in his mind; there couldn't be; Harris had called her Martha, and his own eyes had seen in her face the ghost of what had been, twenty—twenty years ago, the pretty face of Martha Hall! And here he was in their house—going to sell 'em up! He'd forgotten all about this old thirst for revenge, how he had hated her, who had "chosen a better man." Here he was in the "better man's" house, sitting on the "better man's" furniture by order of the Court, costing him money and food every day he remained? And Christmas coming! A fine old spectre at the feast he'd be, especially for her if she had really recognised him! Harris, of course, didn't know. Perhaps she'd tell him though—tell him that the man in—the man going to sell 'em up, was the man who had courted her only to be thrown away like a broken band-box the moment Harris had come along. He had never thought of such a situation, even when his hatred was most imaginative.

But it was uncomfortable. She *had* been a pretty girl! He remembered how she looked the day—aye, and there was still something of that in her face. It was an uncomfortable situation, when all was said and done. The people might have waited till after Christmas, hang it! To sell up a woman's home when her husband's been ill for four months and just about to be able to return to work, it might be business, but—— Still, there might be friends in the background who'd come up to the scratch. He didn't want anybody to say that he'd taken to the job on the mere chance of getting his own back after twenty years. He didn't like to see anybody's home broken up—wasn't natural he should. It was a horrible way of earning money—brokering. He wondered it had never struck him so before.

Suddenly he became aware that, by persistent poking, he had raked all the fire out of the grate. He looked round, expecting to find himself alone; but Mrs. Harris was still sitting by the door. Her hands were folded on her lap, and her eyes were blindly fixed on him. Seeing she did not appear to remember him, he permitted himself to examine her face more attentively, wondering whether it were not possible he was mistaken. And for some seconds they stared at each other in this manner.

"It is hard, isn't it, now?" she said, collecting her thoughts by a supreme mental effort, and looking at him sorrowfully. "I shall never survive it, if it comes to the worst. After twenty years' married life, and never a dark day until John fell ill, to be sold up a day or two off Christmas."

"It ain't my doing," he said, shamefacedly, "I'm only an instrument of torture. This is the last job of the kind I'll touch."

"Somehow I seem to know your face—you don't look a hard-hearted sort, either."

He stretched out his hands to reach the back of a chair. Somehow his hands, though nothing out of the common, always seemed to accentuate any awkwardness that happened to be perceptible to him. But, remembering the trick of his wristbands, he folded his arms behind his back, and, tilting himself on his heels, attentively regarded a grease-spot on the carpet.

"Don't say your name—your name's Walker?" said Mrs. Harris faintly.

"It's the hand of Fate, Mar—marm, the hand of Fate," he said, sighing profoundly, and, again forgetting his wristbands, nervously fingering a corner of the table-cloth.

"It's an ill-omen," she returned, as she rose weakly, and left the room.

He remained balanced on his heels and the corner of the mantel-shelf for some seconds. He'd have given something to have known what Mrs. Harris was saying to her husband in the back-room. He was not above listening, perhaps, but he wore creaking boots and the width of the room separated him from the door.

Harris brought him a cup of tea, and three wedges of bread and butter, and put them on the table.

"Hope I ain't keeping you from the fire," said Mr. Walker, forgetting it was out.

"No," replied Harris, more truthfully than he thought. It was a weary-dreary tone he used; there was no suggestion of malice in it. From which fact Mr. Walker drew the deduction that Harris had not been told.

"I say," Walker exclaimed, as Harris was leaving, "haven't you got any friends who'll help you out of this?"

"No," in the same weary-dreary tone. The flesh of the spectre had worn off, leaving the mere skeleton; the cruelty of it, the sharpness, relentlessness of the creditors had faded from Harris' mind, leaving the bare fact that his home was to be sold up.

"That's bad," muttered Walker, stirring his tea. "That's bad!"

He continued stirring his tea long after Harris had left the room. He broke a slice of bread-and-butter, and, resting an arm on the table, turned a pair of melancholy blue eyes at the heap of cinders on the hearth. Somehow he didn't feel hungry, nor very thirsty, for that matter, though he had a sort of fancy that a drop of something warm would have done him good. He felt low, not exactly unwell, but low, dispirited. It might have been that a change had occurred in the weather. But if he left the bread and butter the Harrises would probably think he was dissatisfied with it, and it would put them out.

He wrapped up the bread and butter in a piece of newspaper and put it in his pocket, then emptied the contents of the tea-cup into the pot of a "parlour-fern" in the window.

Going into the passage he coughed twice to attract attention. As nobody came, he went to the kitchen door and knocked gently.

"I'm just going home to fetch a brush and comb, and such like," he said, pleasantly. "Shan't be long. If my bailiff *should* happen to look in, you

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might say I've gone round to see him. I'm not supposed to go, you know."

"All right," said Harris' weary-dreary voice.

Mr. Walker went out, closing the door quietly after him. Half-way down the street he met a scraggy little boy, to whom he disposed of his bread and butter.

He went home and made straight for the upstair parlour. The room was in darkness, but he groped his way to a cupboard beside the fireplace, and drew from the corner a box. He opened the box and took something from it, replaced it, re-locked the cupboard, and went out again. He went straight to his bailiff.

"What's this mean?" was the gruff query that met him.

"I know it ain't in order," said Walker, scratching his head with the brim of his hat, "but they found the money, and wanted to get me out, but I wasn't keen on staying, and, as he could not come, and she didn't like to, I said—knowing it would be safe, as I had the money—I said I'd bring it along."

"Oh, there ain't no 'arm in that," said the bailiff. "Where's your paper? Ten-pound note, eh? I thought as much. As soon as I saw 'im I knew he could get 'old of money when pressed. And one pound's right."

Mr. Walker counted out the change tendered him carefully, and, having put it in his pocket, watched his bailiff fold up the bank-note and thrust it in a small cash-box. He had never before seen so little change out of a ten-pound note.

"Well, that's all square," said the bailiff. "You're going back with the change, I s'pose?"

Walker nodded.

"What are you—— Oh, you want your fee, don't you? There you are."

Walker took the half-crown the other pushed towards him eagerly. It was a little more change out of his ten-pound note.

"I suppose I can consider myself out?" he asked as he went to the door.

"Yes, oh, yes! But look in in the morning, I've got another job for you."

"Not me," said Walker, without waiting to be heard, "I've chucked it."

On his way back to the Harrises' he passed a furniture shop, in one window of which was displayed a second-hand dining-room suite. He had promised himself—worse, he had promised the missus, as a Christmas present that suite for the shop-parlour (Mrs. Walker kept a second-hand clothes establishment). It was an elegant suite, and he had only missed it through his tendency to keep his money as long as possible, and now it was gone, and the suite——

He didn't mind so much for himself, though since he'd be more at home in future than heretofore, he *should* have liked the suite. But it was for the missus he regretted; yet not perhaps so much *for* her as *because* of her. Mrs. Walker's temperament was not all Mr. Walker would have wished.

Harris opened the door to him, for he knocked and waited, just to show them that he knew they might have locked him out if they had willed.

Mrs. Harris was making up a bed for him on the parlour sofa when he entered the room.

"I'll make you as comfortable as I can," she said sadly.

"You're very kind," he said, looking at her and hunting in her face for all that was still there to remind him of Martha Hall. "But I shan't be sleeping here, in fact, I'm paid out!"

"Paid out!" cried she, gasping.

"Yes, I went round to see my bailiff, and he said he was just coming to take me out, as a gentleman had been in very mysteriously, saying he was a very old friend of yours, and, hearing you were distrained upon, and having a bit of money, he didn't quite know what to do with, would pay out the execution."

"A gentleman—old friend? John, John!" She rushed out of the room.

Mr. Walker put his hand in his pocket, and produced the last complete pound of his ten-pound note.

"It won't buy the suite," he said ruefully. So he pushed it under a leg of the American clock on the mantelshelf.

"Is this right—square, eh?" exclaimed Harris, limping into the room, his face alight with excitement, and followed by his wife.

"I'm pleased to say it is; it must be since I've orders to clear out," replied Walker, shooting back his wrist-bands violently.

"And he didn't say who he was?" asked Harris.

"No; he was an old friend of your wife's."

"Well ——!" gasped Harris.

"God bless him, whoever he is," said Mrs. Harris, with a strange glance at Walker. "You'll stop and have a bit of supper with us, won't you?"

"I must get home," said he, smiling wisely. He did not wish to be questioned ere he could anticipate the questions. But, if I may, I'll look in for a minute on Christmas Day and drink your health!"

He did.

* * * * *

He was sitting in the shop-parlour an hour later, his mind divided between a paper and his thoughts, when a pair of piercing eyes glanced at him from either side of a hatched nose.

"James, w'en's that furniture comin'?"

"The suite?" murmured Walker, to gain time.

"The suite! What else d'yer think I meant?"

"I don't know," tingling from head to foot.

"I should think not! When's it comin'?"

"'Fraid it ain't coming, my dear."

"Sold? I told you what it would be! That comes of leavin' it—— "

"It ain't sold; I ain't got the money." He braced himself up for the effort. "I met Bobbin to-day, and he asked me for the ten pound I owed him."

"An' you paid it? You silly, fat man, why didn't you tell 'im you 'adn't got it?"

"Why—well—I couldn't go and tell a downright lie. He said he wanted it."

He drew a deep breath and muttered to himself, "I hope he don't" before Mrs. Walker began.

C. Randolph-Lichfield.

A Dutch paper publishes the following significant advertisement from a disconsolate wife—"Adolphus. Return to your Matilda. The piano has been sold."

Fond Parent: "Bobby, Bobby, you ought not to laugh because that old lady fell down." Bobby: "I didn't, pa. I was laughing because she couldn't get up."

Mother: "Tom, you mustn't go fishing with Freddy Slowcum. He is just getting over the measles." Tom: "There won't be any danger, ma. I never catch anything when I'm fishing."

Angry Customer: "Hullo, you waiter, where is that ox-tail soup?" Waiter: "Coming, sir—half a minute." Customer: "Confound you, how slow you are!" Waiter: "Fault of the soup, sir. Ox-tail is always behind!"

Visitor: "Are you going to be a great man when you grow up, Willie?" Willie: "Yes! I'm going to be an Arctic explorer." "An Arctic explorer's life is full of hardship, Willie." "Yes. But I can stand 'em, I reckon." "I like your spirit, my boy. There is a great deal of glory to be gained in a career of that kind." "Yes. And you don't never have to wash your face."

Stubbs: "Well, sir, I gave it to that man straight, I can tell you. He is twice as big as I am, too, but I told him exactly what I thought of his rascally conduct right to his face, and I called him all the names in the dictionary, and a lot of others as well." Spudds: "And didn't he try to hit you, Jenkins?" Stubbs: "No, sir, he didn't. And when he tried to answer back, I just hung up the telephone receiver and walked away."

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He Once Held a Nicer Hand.

She (half suspiciously): "Did you ever hold a hand that you would like to hold better than mine?" He: "Only once, darling. Then I had eleven trumps."

Nothing Left.

Wife: "Wake up! There are thieves in the house!" Husband: "Go down and show them your new winter bonnet, and they won't waste any time looking for money here."

Fear Lent Strength.

Policeman: "I don't see how a little woman like you succeeded in capturing and holding a big burglar like that." Little Woman (weakly): "It was dark, and I—I thought it was my husband trying to—to elope with the servant girl."

The Cow Knew.

Fair Maiden (a summer boarder): "How savagely that cow looks at me!" Farmer Haysced: "It's your red parasol, mum." Fair Maiden: "Dear me! I knew it was a little bit out of fashion, but I didn't suppose a country cow would notice it."

He Went without the Cellar.

"Will you keep a wine-cellar when you have a home of your own?" "Well, well," stammered the young man, "in the event of illness I think it well to be provided." "All right," the old man replied; "you can marry my daughter, but don't be surprised if I call on you twice a week and get taken ill."

What it all Means.

Each eve she meets me at the gate—her brow has roses on it; and for one kiss she gives me eight (that means a winter bonnet). Each dish that most delights my eyes the table has upon it; and, "Dear, try this, and this," she cries (that means a winter bonnet). My slippers always are in sight; my smoking cap, I don it; she strokes my hair: "You're tired to-night" (that means a winter bonnet).

Scratched or Pinched?

Here is a story of a ping-pong tournament. One young lady not being up to time, the secretary sent a verbal message to her house to inform her that if she did not come at once he should "scratch her." The maid, horrified at the want of courtesy in the use of the term she did not understand, endeavoured to soften the message by delivering it thus: "Please, miss, Mr. Jones says if you do not came at once he will pinch you."

Heard at the Post Office.

A young woman called at the post-office in a provincial town and bashfully inquired if there was a letter for her. "Business or love letter?" jokingly inquired the clerk. "Business!" was the reply, accompanied by a blush of the deepest crimson. As no such letter was to be found the young lady took her departure, but came back after a little while, and said in faltering accents: "Please, would you mind looking among the love letters?"

Why She Wanted Time.

She (after the proposal): "You must give me time." He: "To consider?" She: "No, to break off my last engagement."

In Case of Emergency.

A young lady who is partly deaf, is in the habit of answering "Yes" to everything when a gentleman is talking to her, for fear he might propose to her and she not hear it.

Making a Name for Herself.

Friend: "Your daughter seems determined to win a name for herself by writing." Papa: "Yes, she has answered over a hundred matrimonial advertisements, and isn't discouraged yet."

A Wasted Life.

He: "Life with me has been a failure." She: "You must have had and wasted some opportunity." He: "No; I have spent half my life raising whiskers to conceal my youth, and the other half dyeing them to conceal my age."

Easily Collected.

"Ah, Professor, what a charming collection of stuffed birds you have here! Where did you get them from?" "Oh, that is quite simple. I have been collecting them for years from the worn-out hats of my seven daughters."

Johnnie was Careful.

"Now, Johnnie, go and kiss your little sweetheart and make it up," said Johnnie's mother. "No, I won't." "Go and tell her how much you love her, and how sorry you are." "No, I won't. Pa says he got into a breach of promise case by tellin' a girl that, and had to marry the old thing. I won't run any risks, I won't."

Wanted an Extra Flounce.

Younger Sister: "Mother, I think it is too bad; I am sixteen, and you make me wear such short dresses that it mortifies me terribly." Mother: "My dear, you cannot wear long dresses till your eldest sister is married." Younger Sister: "Well, she is as good as engaged to Mr. Doolittle, and I think I am entitled to an extra flounce."

How She Managed It.

"Madam," said the judge sternly, "you must answer the question. What is your age?" "I was born in the same year your lordship was. That would make it about——" "It isn't necessary to go into particulars," interposed the judge stiffly. "Gentlemen, have you any further need for the witness? You may stand aside, madam."

Helping Papa.

A minister's wife was starting out for a walk, and invited her little daughter to go with her. "No, mamma, I can't," was the very positive reply. "Why not?" "I have to help papa." "Help papa! In what way?" "Why, he told me to sit here in the corner and keep quiet while he wrote his sermon, and I don't believe he is half done yet."

Home Decoration.

Mrs. Fatpurse: "You paint pictures to order, don't you?" Great Artist: "Yes, madam." Mrs. Fatpurse: "Well, I want a landscape, with lots of deer, and ducks, and quail, and pheasants, and cattle, and sheep, and pigs, and so on, you know; and put a lake and an ocean in—fresh and salt water, you know; and be sure to have plenty of fish swimming about, because it's for the dining-room."

My Two Loves.

I love two women; both are good and kind; and one is tenderer than the infant dawn, full of wise counsels, loving as a fawn, and lover-like, to all my follies blind. The other, like a tender, blooming rose, shaking its sweets upon the air, shakes in my heart love's odours and doth bear life's sweetest pleasures as she goes. I love them fondly—unto both I'm true—Nay, blame them not! nor deem me free of speech, for I am loyal still and just to each! One is my mother, and one, sweet, is you.

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A Madman's Bequest.

A STORY OF LOVE AND FORTUNE.

"And that is all the message that I am to give him from you—'Kind regards.' Poor Alf! His whole letter to me is about nothing else but you alone! His mother is nobody—nothing to him; and yet you won't give or send him even one kind word!"

"Dear Mrs. Willoughby," replied the girl, earnestly. "I am very, very sorry; but, believe me, it is better for your son—for you, that I should remain just the boarder, and, if you will, the good friend of you both."

"I'm afraid Alf will not be satisfied with that! See what he says: 'This wretched fever, ague-smitten place is only tolerable to me when I think of her as a possible reward for my patience. Just tell her, mother, that even in Sierra Leone (the one spot on this earth that *must* have been created for human torture and punishment) I can endure if only I may hope. She knows how I love her; I believe, if she would but confess it, that she loves me. Ask her to write and tell me so, or if she will not do that, ask her to send me a message in your next letter. I suppose that she is still grinding away at that miserable typewriting. See that she doesn't overdo herself, for whether she will or whether she will not, her interests, her welfare will always be my one great heart concern!'"

During the reading by Mrs. Willoughby of this extract Ella Staunton stood by the sitting-room window, drawing on her gloves.

"I am afraid I shall be late in the City," was all she said at last. Then, as if she thought that the mother's wistful pleading demanded some little word of recognition, she added, as she reached the door, "Say, please, that he knows why I am apparently unkind; but, that should anything ever arise which would enable me to act differently, I will not hesitate so to act; and of that he may be assured."

"Well," said Mrs. Willoughby, with a sigh, "I suppose he must be content with that crumb of comfort, small as it is; and I only hope that the time you speak of will come before my poor boy is quite finished up by that dreadful West Coast."

Ella Staunton had, for the past four years or more, been a boarder in Mrs. Willoughby's house in Chelsea; long enough, in fact, to look upon it in the light of "home."

It was only a small house, and beyond herself there were no other stranger inmates.

Mrs. Willoughby was the widow of a long deceased master mariner, with one son, between whom and herself there existed a truly ideal affection. The young fellow was not exactly of his father's profession, though of a very similar one, he being an electrical engineer on one of the cable ships of a certain big ocean telegraph company. Most of his time was passed upon the West Coast of Africa, his vessel being stationed for long spells off Freetown, Sierra Leone.

This was the only "crook in his mother's lot"—her son's many and long absences—so that had it not been for Ella's presence in the house her loneliness would have been almost unbearable.

When, on his first home-coming after Ella's advent into the little Chelsea establishment, he saw daily a young girl, barely nineteen, who realised in her dainty little person, his most cherished ideas of womanhood, Alfred Willoughby began to wish that his lines were cast in a place not quite so distant from Chelsea Reach as Sierra Leone.

Ella, too, was undoubtedly attracted by the sunburnt young marine scientist, who, though unduly spare and out of sorts from a two years' residence among the mangroves, was in every way a manly man, while his experiences in "foreign parts" were of a kind to find favour with a girl, whose intelligence was well above the average.

Alfred Willoughby was not the sort of young fellow to wilfully neglect his opportunities; so that during his three months' leave it was no unusual thing for Ella to find him waiting for her of an evening at Sloane Square Station in order that he might walk up the King's Road with her.

That the inevitable should result was not wonderful—on one such occasion his love getting the better of his discretion.

It was undeniable that she had learnt to care for him; her tone and manner told him that; but it was also apparent that she was struck with the unexpectedness of the declaration.

Sensibly self-possessed, without being excessively so, she told him why, for the present at anyrate, there must be merely friendship between them.

"I have not a relative in the world," she said, "not one! As a child, of three or four, perhaps, I can just recollect a man—a big, rough, loud-voiced man—who about that time disappeared out of my life altogether. I have a faint remembrance also of a gentle, sad-eyed woman, who must have been my mother. In the house where she died I remained till I secured my present position, and came to live with your mother. A small yearly sum has been paid for my education and support, by whom I do not know. This annual payment suddenly ceased, however, last year, and my reason now for not saying what you wish me to say, is because I have made a determination to discover the identity of my mysterious benefactor. It may be that I shall, if I am successful, find a kinsman, and then, who knows what may happen. In the meanwhile, Mr. Willoughby, you may see someone else better suited for you than I am."

"Never!" was the fervent reply. "You will always be the one woman in the world for me! And I will wait and hope, with what patience I may, till you tell me finally, and in so many words, that you cannot love me."

* * * * * * *

The sun was beating down, blazing hot, upon the deck of the cable steamer *Hambria* as she lay at anchor off Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The mail had arrived that afternoon, and Alfred Willoughby, assistant electrician, was in his cabin, reading, for the fifth or sixth time, his mother's letter. He had dared to hope that there might possibly be inclosed a few lines from Ella, and could not help experiencing keen disappointment at finding none.

Still, the outlook was not so completely dark, for did she

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not speak of "something" which might happen, and which would make for happiness for both of them?

"If this thing should be," he said to himself, "'she will not hesitate to act.' Yes, but will it!—will it? This man she once spoke of to me, and the mysterious benefactor, are they one and the same? And if so, who is he? What is he? Where is he?"

These thought-inquiries were to be answered sooner than the querist imagined, and in a way the most romantic and the most unexpected.

The next morning, soon after breakfast, a small steamer, evidently of the "tramp" species, was seen to be coming in towards the inner anchorage.

She was dirty, high out of the water, and pitched and rolled in a manner that must have been highly inconvenient to those on board her.

Having nothing particular to do Alfred Willoughby watched the newcomer till at last she "let go" within a few cables' length of the *Hambria*.

She was a stranger to everybody on board the latter vessel, though one man in the stokehold declared that he knew her, having come across her at Loanda a year or so previously. At that time, he said, she was trading for ivory; for anything indeed in the intrinsically valuable way. Her reputation was not by any means "sweet" on both the south-west and east coasts, rumours of "black business," in connection with Zanzibar and other neighbouring "slave centres" being unpleasantly rife.

To the surprise of the captain of the *Hambria*, a boat put off and made for them, its one passenger being evidently the tramp's skipper.

Willoughby happened to be near the gangway as the stranger stepped on to the *Hambria's* deck.

The latter was a short, thick-set man, of nearer sixty than fifty, slovenly dressed, and with a curt, sharp manner approaching closely to the uncivil:

"Mornin'!—are you the skipper?" he jerked out.

The young electrician assured him that he was not, and indicated the captain, who now came down from the bridge.

"Ah!—mornin', sir! Just got in from St. Jago, Cape de Verdes. Have you got anything in the shape of medicine you could let me have? My medicine-chest's run out; and I'm bad—been bad for a week now."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Captain Price.

"Don't quite know. It's this blamed climate! I don't often put in here; not once in twelve months, but I couldn't stick it out till we should get to Loanda."

"Of course not! My doctor's on shore for a day or two, shooting, but you're welcome to anything out of my medicine-chest, Captain—er——"

"Morris, sir!—Samuel Morris; skipper and owner of the steamship *Golden Land*, trading between the Cape de Verde's and anywhere between Loanda and Zanzibar."

"Been long on these coasts, Captain Morris?"

"Close on eighteen years now! Haven't seen or touched British soil, for all that while. I did think of paying the old place a visit this autumn; there's someone I'd like to see, and say something to, but it don't look much like as if I'm going to get there."

"Oh, you'll soon get all right. Either I or our assistant electrician, Mr. Willoughby, will pay you a visit later on, to see how you get on."

Before answering Captain Morris bent his thick eyebrows and gave a keen, scrutinising glance at both Captain Price and Willoughby.

Then, apparently satisfied, he said: "Glad to see you—if I'm alive!"

"Oh, you're not dead yet. Come and get what you want in the drug way."

In ten minutes he was on his way back to his own vessel, the *Hambria's* captain expressing his opinion that the "man was suffering from some mind trouble, which was acting upon his body; and that he was evidently in a bad state."

(Continued on next page.)

Christmas Eating—and After.

"What a blessing is a good digestion," exclaimed Anthony Trollope, and thousands since have repeated his words. About Xmas time, however, the other side of the subject which may be expressed in the exclamation, "What a curse is a bad digestion," is most commonly before one's mind. A very distinguished physician has said, "I think the cause of most of the maladies of the human race lies in their stuffing their digestive organs to excess."

This expresses in very blunt fashion the truth borne home at Xmastide. Indigestion, the result of Xmas eating and drinking, is at this period painfully rife. As a handy, safe and reliable cure not only for indigestion, but for heartburn, sour stomach, headache, and other symptoms of Xmas indiscretions in diet, Chas. Forde's bile beans are unequalled.

They are not sugar-coated, and may be carried loose in the waistcoat or dress pocket. One or two taken after a heavy meal will prevent any unpleasant consequences. A dose taken at night will be sufficient to prevent any "nasty taste in the mouth," dry tongue, or other unpleasant morning symptoms. Bile beans are obtainable from all chemists at one and three-halfpence or two and ninepence per box, or post free from the bile bean manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, London, E.C., upon receipt of prices. Purely vegetable in composition bile beans are now recognised as the world's greatest specific for all liver and stomach disorders, and are prescribed by many eminent medical men.

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"Look here, Willoughby!—you go across to that old iron kettle of his by-and-by, and have a look at him."

"Right you are, sir! I'll go after dinner."

When in three or four hours' time Willoughby boarded the *Golden Land*, a deck-hand answered his inquiry for the skipper by simply pointing in the direction of the after cabin.

No one was in the small saloon, out of which four berths opened. One, the captain's, had its door ajar.

Pushing the latter open, Willoughby saw its inmate lying, fully dressed, upon the swinging cot.

In even those few hours the man was changed for the worse; for his features were pale and drawn, while his breath came in laboured gasps.

He saw Willoughby, and motioned him nearer with a feeble lifting of his hand.

There was some brandy on the fixed bureau and Willoughby poured some out and gave it to him.

It did him good in a way, for in a minute or two he seemed to gather strength.

"Where do you live?" was his curious query, made in so low a voice that the other was obliged to stoop in order to hear.

"When I am at home, you mean? In London—Chelsea."

"I am dying—I know it—put your hand under my pillow—take out a letter you will find there. Yes, that's it."

It was in a foolscap envelope and very bulky.

"Do you see the name and the address upon it?" asked the sick man.

For the moment Willoughby could not make it out, in the dim light of the one oil lamp.

Holding the letter close to the light, what he saw there made him start as if he had been shot.

Written in large but shaky characters was *Miss Ella Staunton, 18 Blythe Road, Hammersmith, London.*

"You know her!" cried the other excitedly, but in a weak voice.

"I—I know a young lady of that name; but she does not live there."

"No!—where—where does she live—your friend, I mean?"

"She lives with my mother in Chelsea."

"It must be!—it must be!" muttered the dying man. "If it is—she will know that address. Listen!"

"Yes; I am listening."

"Open that drawer!" pointing to the top drawer of the bureau. "Now—that box in the left hand corner. That is it—open it."

It was full of sovereigns, to the amount, Willoughby thought of several hundred pounds.

"That money!—you see it!—take it!—leave your ship—take passage in next mail for England, and—and deliver that letter to Ella Staunton—my—my step-daughter."

"Then you were——"

"Her mother's husband."

By this time the man had become exhausted, and when Willoughby asked him if the letter would make its recipient fully acquainted with all that she ought to know, he just nodded his head ever so slightly and closed his eyes.

Thinking it strange that no one came to attend upon the dying skipper, Willoughby went out upon deck and spoke to the sailor-man whom he had first seen.

"Where is the steward?" he asked, "or one of the officers."

"There's no one aboard except me, the engine-room lot, and six more, as is asleep, dead beat, in the fo'c'sle. Everybody else left the ship at St. Jago. They said the skipper was mad. What's the matter with him now?"

"He's dying!"

"Dying!"

"Yes—and you had better go and see what you can do for him. I'll go back to my own ship first, and then will get the Consul to put an officer in charge of you. However you managed to get here from the Cape de Verde's I don't know."

"Nor I, sir—it's the cherub that sits aloft as must have done it!"

Without bandying any more words, Willoughby went back to the *Hambria*, handing over the box of money to Captain Price for safe keeping.

He then very much astonished that worthy seaman by announcing that, on the mail steamer's call in six days, he meant to throw up his post on board, and take passage for home.

Asked for an explanation, he gave it, by repeating all that he had seen and heard on board the *Golden Land*.

"Well, it's one of the most extraordinary things I have ever known," was Captain Price's comment. "And now you had better return to the poor chap yonder, while I send Hutton (the second officer) on shore to the Consul."

When Willoughby found himself again in the cabin on board the *Golden Land*, it was to see a dead man.

The deck-hand was there, and said that the end had come almost before Willoughby reached the *Hambria*.

Obviously there was nothing more for the latter to do, beyond impressing upon the sailor that everything in the late skipper's cabin must be scrupulously left untouched till the Consul or his representative arrived. Then, with a last look at the face of the man, who, though dead, was to be the means of giving to him the one thing on earth that he most desired, he turned and made for his boat.

Six days afterwards he stood by the hurricane-deck rail of the Union Mail steamer *Matabele*, as she moved swiftly seawards, and watched the rapidly receding hull of the dirty little "tramp," the *Golden Land*, that at length became but a mere small black patch, and then disappeared altogether.

* * * * * *

The little household in More Street, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, was more than usually quiet on a certain evening in September.

Mrs. Willoughby and her fair boarder were alike thinking the same thoughts.

The African mail was several days overdue, and the newspapers were chronicling daily storm, disaster and loss of life.

The mother could not conceal her anxiety, while Ella, putting aside all other considerations, betrayed herself by her tender comforting of the parent of the man, who, she told herself, might never more be kept out of her heart, if, indeed, he had ever been really out of it.

It was long past the widow's usual time for "locking-up," but neither felt inclined for sleep, and both sat on talking to each other and waiting for they knew not what.

At last two o'clock sounded from the tower of old Chelsea Church, and, as the second stroke died away, the rumble of a cab became more and more audible through the night—or morning stillness, till it stopped at the door of the house in which the two women sat looking into each other's eyes and reflecting on another's thoughts and fears.

"No! no!—not you!—let me go!" said Ella, as a vigorous knock and ring thundered and jangled through the house.

The man upon the doorstep will always carry in his mind's eye the picture of the girl, holding a lamp above her head, and looking at him in solemn wonder, which would not let her speak.

She was not quite conscious of his presence until, in the little parlour, she saw him, with his mother's

(*Concluded on page 862.*)

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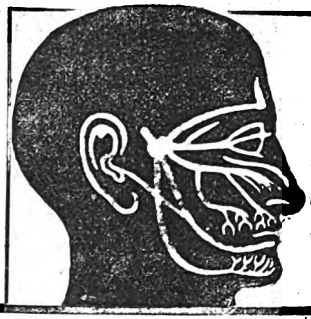

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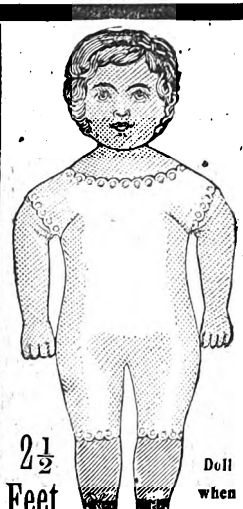

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arms round his neck; his mother's head buried in his breast.

She was not hurt or envious, for with the unselfishness of a great love, she was content that the mother should have pride of place.

And she had her reward.

"I have found him!" he said to her.

"Found him?" she echoed.

"Yes—and I bring you a message—from the dead!"

He placed the packet in her hands, but it was not till the next day that the strange tale was told, and the message read.

* * * * *

Samuel Morris, twenty years before, had married Mary Staunton, the young widow of a man, who had left her but ill-provided for, and with one child, a daughter.

For some strange reason, Morris took a strong dislike to the little Ella, a dislike, which, on his wife's death two years after marriage, developed into an uncontrollable jealous hatred.

His wife buried, he made arrangements for the child being looked after by the woman in whose house the mother died, and departed for Africa.

A man of abundant means, he invested a portion of his capital in the purchase of a small steamer of 800 tons burden, named her the *Golden Land*, and for the next eighteen years carried on a lucrative traffic in ivory, and like valuable matter, in the process, amassing a big fortune.

His almost ferocious eccentricity had won for him among his men the name of the "mad skipper," a title he fully deserved.

All this was confessed and related in the long communication brought to England by Alfred Willoughby.

Morris, in that document, went on to say that, being desirous of making some sort of reparation to his innocent step-daughter, he had long since had his will drawn up, by which he had bequeathed to her everything he possessed.

The will he had already forwarded to London, and it was in the hands of the agents, through whom Ella's maintenance-money had been paid.

There was only one condition annexed to the legacy, a strange one, seeing that the testator was himself a seaman.

The condition was expressed in the following clause in the will.

Whereas, if the said Ella Staunton shall at any time, either before or after receipt of the property herein bequeathed to her, marry a sailor, or anyone earning their living on the sea, or following the sea in any way as a vocation, she shall immediately forfeit such property, and it shall pass in its entirety to the Royal Society for Indigent Master Mariners, Belvedere, Kent.

"Then good-bye to happiness!" said Alfred, "unless you think, dear, that a poor electrical engineer's pay would induce you to break the condition."

"No," she said, with a peculiar smile. "I shall not break it; I shall keep it to the letter!"

He looked at her, trying to fathom her meaning.

But the smile did not die away. If anything it expanded, and became very tender and sweet.

"Can you not see," she said, "how I may keep this condition, and yet—yet——?"

"No," he replied. "I am blind, I suppose."

"That is just it," she said. "You are blind. What is to prevent you from giving up the sea, from this moment, and becoming a landsman?"

"But how am I to live?"

"Easily, for you are worth the best part of fifty thousand pounds."

"I?"

"Yes, you! For as you brought it to me it is yours, dear, and if you will but vouchsafe me enough to buy me my gowns, I shall be content, and you——"

"I," he interrupted her, taking her in his arms, "I, too, am content, though I would that money and condition were both at the bottom of the sea."

Ralph Enderby.

"You have no right to imprison me as a vagrant," said a lame beggar to a magistrate. "You have no visible means of support," replied the judge. "Yes, I have. What's the matter with this crutch?"

"See that man," said one of two people who were talking about success in life. "Yes." "He has left behind lots of people who struggled to overtake him." "Who is he?" "Conductor of a tramcar."

Teacher: "Why was Solomon the wisest man in the world?" Boy: "He had so many wives to advise him." Teacher (a strong-minded female): "Well, that is not the answer in the book, but you may go up top."

Mrs. Grumps: "I s'pose you'll word your will so that I won't get a penny if I marry again. You're mean enough." Mr. Grumps: "No, my dear. I have merely inserted a wish that if you marry again it shall be Mr. John Jimson. He and I were boys together. He licked me once."

Wife (returned from church to her husband, who had stayed at home): "You should have heard Dr. Doe's sermon this morning, my dear. I don't know when anything has made such a profound impression upon me. I think it will make a better woman of me as long as I live." Husband: "Did you walk home?" Wife: "No, I took a tramcar; and, do you know, John, the conductor never asked me for my fare, and so I saved twopence. Wasn't I lucky?"

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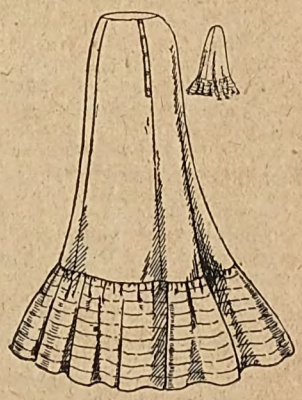

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HOME NOTES

(No. 467)

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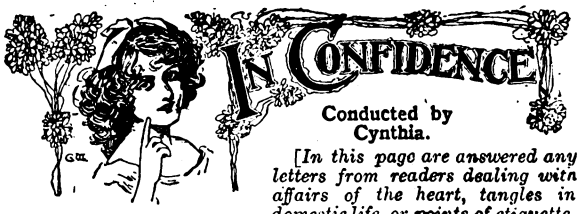

Conducted by Cynthia.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must in future be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* Short Stories.]

Two Girls and a Man.

For some time "Ella" tells me she has been attracted towards a young man whom she had known by sight. From his appearance he showed that he wished to meet her. By a fortunate train of circumstances, they got to know each other, had several meetings, and found that they had much in common. When their friendship was fairly established, "Ella" introduced him to her greatest girl friend. From that moment, he seemed to lose all interest in "Ella," and to be entirely in love with the friend. In a very short time "Ella" felt that she had completely lost him. Then, suddenly, the man and "Ella's" friend became estranged, and he disappeared. They saw nothing of him for months.

* * * *

"Ella" has now met the man again. What attitude should she take up towards him? Do I think she should drop him altogether, seeing that he is evidently not fond of her? To this my answer is "No." Cultivate each other's friendship. You do not know what may come of it. His affair with your friend was apparently simply an infatuation and had no lasting qualities. You say you and he have much in common. Well, there is more hope is that simple bond than there is in the majority of infatuations.

Calf Lovers.

Does a girl of seventeen know her own mind? "Anxious" is that age, and is deeply in love with a girl of the same age. Do I, he asks, think she will change before long?

* * * *

How can I say, "Anxious," not knowing the girl? I have known girls who have fallen in love at seventeen and never afterwards looked at another man but their early love. It all depends on the girl. If she changes her mind, then most likely you will change yours. Even boys of seventeen, you know, are not carved out of stone, and often enough are as changeable as girls. Don't worry about the future. If you are fond of each other now, enjoy it as long as you may. Neither you nor I can prophesy what may happen as you both grow older.

A One-Sided Love Affair.

"H. F." is a young man of nineteen, who goes out frequently with a girl of his own age. He does not care for her, he tells me, but thinks she is very fond indeed of him, which makes him reluctant to break the news of his own indifference to her.

* * * *

I think "H. F" had better say nothing at all. There is no need to make the girl unhappy. Besides, in time he may get to really love her, and will then have a very different story to pour into her ears. Let him wait until things reach some definite stage, and in the meantime be as nice to the girl as he can.

What to Do with our Parents.

Among the questions which a love adviser is regularly called on to answer is "What shall we do with our fathers?" It is constantly happening that, just as a young couple have discovered that they are all-in-all to each other, one of these monsters steps in and with callous brutality shatters their young dream. To-day I have a long story from "Chesterfield," too long to relate in full. But briefly it is this: For two and a half years he has been intimate with a girl, and last summer got her parents' consent to their engagement. Then he fell out of work, and remained so for five weeks, when her father told him that he must cease the engagement, and forbade him to see his daughter any more, or to write to her.

* * * *

Well, as "Chesterfield" and the girl are about as much in love with each other as it is possible to be, it is hardly likely either of them obeyed this harsh command. Of course they corresponded and saw each other secretly. Things came to a head when the father told "Chesterfield" he must either take back his engagement ring, or the girl must leave home. Of course, this put my correspondent in a quandary. He could ot take her from home, neither did he wish to take away the ring.

* * * *

In one respect, "Chesterfield," the father is quite right. While you were out of work, naturally he could scarcely look with favour on your continued engagement. Of course, I do not know the circumstances, but did you really do all in your power to get fresh employment? Did you persuade her father that you were really worthy of her and able to make your position? Until I know that I fear I can scarcely say the parent was in the wrong. You will, of course, see that the only thing to do is for you to really work as hard as you can and prove to the father that you are able to support his daughter. This may take a year or more, but it would be the best way to prove your love for her even if it meant your sacrificing for a time each other's society. Until you do this, her father may well say that your engagement must be held over. So all I can advise you to do is to work hard, and bring matters back to their original position.

The Dancing Question.

No, "Ada," I do not think you are right in trying to prevent your *fiancé* from dancing with other girls. It may make you jealous to see him whirling round a room with his arm round someone else's waist, but probably he is enjoying himself no more than you are. He is simply obeying the rules of etiquette, and acting like a gentleman. And I am sure you like your *fiancé* to do that, don't you? Only, I think, if I were you, I should try to impress upon him the advisability of selecting the older and less beautiful ladies as partners. You can easily convince him that they are much better for him in every way.

May He Send a Christmas Card?

"C. T. S."—There is no rule as to how long you must have known anyone before sending them a Christmas card. You say you met a certain lady three weeks ago, and want to send her a card. Well, if your acquaintance was simply a very slight one, and did not develop into any kind of cordial friendship—or, perhaps, a deeper sentiment—I think it would be going rather far to send a Christmas card. But if you and she struck up anything like an intimate acquaintance then you are at liberty to send her what you like.

"Mabel."—As the young man has told mutual friends he has lost his heart to you, why not convey to those same friends the fact that you are similiarly affected towards him. As the pleasant news has reached you through them, the equally pleasant news to him of your own feelings might filter through in the same way.

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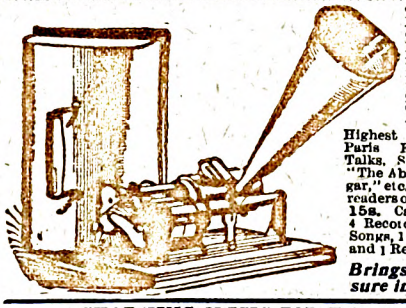

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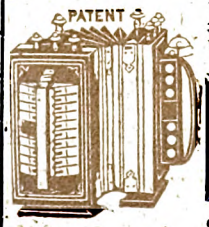

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